

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee
held on Monday 21 June 2010 at 6.00pm
in the Committee Suite, King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn.**

PRESENT:

Councillors A Tyler (Chairman), I Mack (Vice-Chairman),
P Burall, D Collis, C Crofts, M Pitcher, D J Pope and G Sandell

Other Member Present: Councillor N Daubney

CSC1: APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor A Tyler be appointed Chairman of the Committee for the following year.

CSC2: APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor I Mack be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the following year.

CSC3: MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2010 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CSC4: URGENT BUSINESS UNDER STANDING ORDER 7

There was none.

CSC5: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There was none.

CSC6: MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34

There was none.

CSC7: CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE

There was none.

CSC8: RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

There was none.

CSC9: **MATTERS CALLED-IN PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 12**

There was none.

CSC10: **DUTY TO RESPOND TO PETITIONS**

The Chairman invited questions from Members in respect of this Cabinet decision.

Councillor Burall made reference to the number of signatures required for a petition to trigger a debate at full Council. He considered that the proposed figure of 5000 was very high and was almost the maximum number possible under the legislation. In view of the focus by the new coalition government on public participation and involvement in decision-making, he considered that it would be more appropriate for the level to be 2500 – 3000.

The Vice-Chairman supported this view and asked what evidence had been taken into account when considering the levels which would be set. He made reference to the County Council, which had also set its level at 5000 for a Council debate, which represented a much smaller proportion of their population. He also stated that the County Council and some of the neighbouring District Councils had set significantly lower minimum numbers required.

In response the Leader stated that the Council was required to have a scheme in place and historically the number of petitions received was not great. With the increased use of social networking sites, it was likely that an on line petition could quickly gain a high number of signatures. He reminded the Committee that the report had been debated by the Resources and Performance Panel who had recommended an increase to the minimum number of signatures required for a petition to meet the requirements of the scheme, which had been accepted by Cabinet.

Councillor Collis stated that he had attended the Panel meeting when the matter was considered. He advised that no comparisons had been made with other authorities and discussion had focussed on the minimum number of signatures required as set out in the original proposal. He suggested that Cabinet should be invited to reconsider the numbers required, as the Council had a duty to respond to the views of residents. He suggested that appropriate levels might be set at 3000 (to trigger a debate at Council), 1500 (for a senior officer to attend a Scrutiny Panel meeting to give evidence) and 100 (minimum number required).

Councillor Crofts stated that addresses provided by petitioners were often incomplete or vague and asked what information would be acceptable. The Democratic Services Manager explained that it would be difficult to require petitioners to provide their full address and to check it, although a postcode would be acceptable, and information provided would have to be accepted at face value. With regard to e-petitions, petitioners were required to provide email and postal addresses.

The Leader added that it would not be possible for every address to be checked, particularly when a large petition was received. He stated that he wanted this to be a constructive process and suggested that the scheme could be reviewed in 6 months or the Committee may wish to propose lower figures which could then be debated at Council.

Councillor Burall considered that a recommendation should be put forward from this meeting of the Committee and proposed that the levels should be 2500, 1000 and 100. Councillor Collis stated that he supported these levels, with a review after 6 months, and seconded the proposal. Councillor Pope advised that as he had supported the original recommendation to Cabinet, subject to the increase of the minimum requirement, at the Resources and Performance Panel meeting, he did not support the amendments now proposed.

Members were invited to vote on the proposal which was agreed, on the casting vote of the Chairman.

RECOMMENDED: That Council be recommended to approve amendments to the Council's Petition Scheme, as follows:

- Minimum of 100 signatures required for scheme to apply.
- Threshold of 1000 signatures required for a senior officer to attend a meeting of an Overview and Scrutiny committee to give evidence.
- Threshold of 2500 signatures required to trigger a debate at Council.
- Scheme to be reviewed after 6 months of operation.

CSC11: **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

RESOLVED: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

CSC12: **TOURISM MINI SERVICE REVIEW**

In introducing this item, the Chairman stated that he welcomed the report on the review and was relieved that the wholesale closure of venues was not being proposed and awaited the outcome of the further review which was now proposed.

The Chairman referred to the reduction in opening days of the Gaol House and the proposed closure on Tuesday, which was market day, and asked whether statistics on visitor numbers indicated that this was likely to deny access to a large potential audience on that day.

The Leader explained that it was the responsibility of the Council to ensure that it could deliver a balanced budget. All the Council's services were subject to review and not every decision would be popular. He explained that, in undertaking the reviews the aim was to maintain high levels of service and deliver them more effectively and efficiently. This

review had been quite challenging and the Leader expressed his thanks to the officers involved.

The Tourism Manager explained that a key consideration for 4 day opening was that these should run consecutively to provide clarity for the public, and that at least one of these days should be at the weekend. Visitor levels were higher on Saturday, while Sunday opening had been ruled out based on evidence from previous unsuccessful trials. Based on 2009 statistics, visitor numbers on Tuesdays were slightly higher than Thursdays or Fridays, but lower than on Wednesdays.

In response to a question from Councillor Burall with regard to responsibility for maintenance of the archive, it was confirmed that maintenance of the building, security and air conditioning were the responsibility of the Borough Council. Curatorial duties and access were managed by Norfolk Records Office.

Councillor Burall commented that in the medium to long term, consideration should be given to alternative methods of delivering Tourist Information services eg electronic web-based services, mobile phone apps etc.

Councillor Pitcher made reference to visits by school parties and expressed concern that the proposal to only open the Gaol House on 1 day a week from November to March would restrict this access. In response, the Tourism Manager advised that 1 day opening would allow casual access. However, the importance of school visits was acknowledged and it would be possible for these to be accommodated by prior arrangement, particularly in conjunction with visits to the Town Hall and Regalia, although there would be staffing implications.

The Vice-Chairman asked whether Cabinet had looked at all the implications and considered alternative means of delivery of Heritage Services eg Heritage Trust or bringing in other individual and greater use of volunteers. In response, the Leader stated that Cabinet had and would continue to look at the whole scope of service delivery. However, it was important to make savings as soon as possible and these proposals formed part of a larger picture, especially involving the way in which the Town Hall was used. He acknowledged the valuable role that volunteers played in heritage promotion and advised that meetings had already taken place with volunteers who already worked with the Council and some interesting ideas had been forthcoming. He gave an assurance that he wanted to deliver the Borough's heritage more effectively and take advantage of every available opportunity to do so.

The Chief Executive added that the Council was moving into an era of mixed menu of provision and needed to be innovative in the way services were delivered. The support of good volunteers in delivering the heritage product was recognised, but it was important not to place too great a burden on them. He considered that the current proposal was a good way forward, but further work was under way, as indicated and would be

reviewed in due course. He highlighted that the Council was also looking at the wider delivery of Leisure Services.

Councillor Crofts asked whether consideration had been given to the sale of gift vouchers which could be used to purchase tickets for the theatre or leisure facilities. He considered these would be popular, particularly at Christmas, and could enhance the Council's income. This suggestion was welcomed by the Leader, who advised that it would be taken on board in the discussions.

Councillor Collis advised that he had attended the meeting of the Community and Culture Panel when a comprehensive presentation had been given on the proposals by the Tourism Manager. He stated he was pleased that there would be sufficient flexibility to allow access during the winter months and asked whether full advantage had been taken to make the attractions as attractive as possible to encourage more visitors. Reference was made to the proposal to charge for the Maritime Display, which was currently free of charge. He stated that, in his view, the display should be reviewed to ensure it represented value for money, as he would not wish visitors to be disappointed.

The Leader acknowledged that there was always more which could be done to improve the offering. The Council was keen to promote the heritage of the area and to provide more events and attractions eg the Heritage Trail, Open Days, and worked closely with local volunteer groups. Any suggestions would be discussed constructively, charging would be considered on a case by case basis and continually reviewed. He emphasised that the local heritage played an important role in attracting businesses into the area.

In response to a question from Councillor Pitcher with regard to bookings at the Town Hall for weddings, the Tourism Manager advised that currently there was only limited advertising, but this would be part of the work being undertaken over the next few months. In response to a further question relating to income from the bar at the Town Hall, the Leader clarified that the Council received an income stream from hirers through a concession on the bar.

The Vice-Chairman sought an assurance that Cabinet would be reviewing what the core functions of a local authority were and what it should be doing in terms of service delivery. The Leader confirmed that this was being done as part of the review process.

CSC13: ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND HOUSING MANAGEMENT REVIEW

The Committee discussed issues relating to the service improvements and proposed changes to the management structure within Environmental Health and Housing, as set out in the report to Cabinet. The Leader and Executive Director, Environmental Health and Housing responded to questions from Members.

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

CSC14: **PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' DECISIONS MADE UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

The list of Portfolio Holders' Decisions made under Delegated Powers was noted.

CSC15: **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting was scheduled to be held on **Monday 19 July 2010** at 6.00pm.

Meeting closed at 7.10pm