

PARISH COUNCILS LIAISON GROUP

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 30th January 2013 at Worksop Town Hall

Present:

Councillor H M Brand (Vice in Chair)

Councillors: P Douglas, S Fielding, G Freeman, T Rafferty and K Sutton.

Parish Council Representatives: T Adams, G Brown, H Burton, B Carter, S Chandler, A Cooke, A Haddon, L Jefferies, D Langmead and B Marchant.

Officers in attendance: G Blenkinsop, S Brown, N Cockrell, J Hamilton and K Tarburton (RCAN).

(The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and read out the Fire Alarm/Evacuation Procedure.)

21. SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES FOR 15 MINUTES TO ALLOW QUESTIONS

There were no questions.

22. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from District Councillors D Challinor and F Hart; and Parish Councillors H Holdaway, A Stevenson and M Stokes.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

(a) Members

There were no declarations of interest by Members.

(b) Officers

There were no declarations of interest by officers.

24. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10TH OCTOBER 2012

The Group was advised that feedback from the recently held Rural Conference is now available, either by email or as a hard copy. Contact: Stephen Brown, Senior Manager Support Services, 01909 533767, steve.brown@bassetlaw.gov.uk

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2012 be approved.

25. MINUTES FOR ACTION.

RESOLVED that the Minutes for Action be received.

26. OUTSTANDING MINUTES LIST

There were no Outstanding Minutes.

(Councillor T Rafferty joined the meeting at this point.)

SECTION A - ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION IN PUBLIC

Key Decisions

None.

Other Decisions

27. JOINT DISTRICT/PARISH ITEMS

(a) Review of District and Town/Parish Relationship

The Senior Manager Support Services updated the Group on this review, which is one of the Council's key priorities, and the work of the cross-party working group, which includes NALC representatives.

The working group considered ways in which a positive relationship can be progressed and how parish councils can be supported in their role in the community. These included: the role of the parish council and its clerk; communications between the two organisations; capacity issues; the usefulness of a parish charter; and the outcomes of the Rural Conference to help draft a Rural Action Plan.

Mr G Brown, one of the NALC representatives, added that the working group had held a number of meetings which were open and honest, and allowed a frank exchange of views. The key issues for the parishes are: engagement between the District and parishes, both strategic and tactical; how the outcomes from the Rural Conference can be taken forward; a possible merger of NALC and the Parish Councils Liaison Group (PCLG) to enable debate and dialogue; two-way communications and the use of new technology; the development of a parish council forum for all parish councillors within Bassetlaw and rural District councillors; a formal agenda item for BDC and NCC officers to provide updates; enhancing the role and remit of parish councillors; improving the skills and qualifications of parish clerks and councillors, and possible incentives; and training so that parish councils can take on more responsibilities, e.g. planning issues.

The Chair added that there is one more meeting of this Group (PCLG) and a report will be presented to the March Cabinet Meeting which will propose new processes to come into effect with the new municipal year.

AGREED that the verbal update on the District and Town/Parish relationship be noted.

28. ITEMS SUBMITTED BY BASSETLAW DISTRICT COUNCIL

(a) Localism Act 2011: Code of Conduct New Arrangements

(Apologies were given for the absence of the Director of Corporate Services/Monitoring Officer due to ill health.)

The Senior Manager Support Services advised the Group that concerns had already been received by the Council's Legal Department on the draft new complaints process which had been circulated to all parish council clerks.

Mr G Brown reported that the process was originally biased towards District councillors and not parish councillors, and so the Monitoring Officer had agreed to draft a separate process for parishes, to which amendments had been suggested to make the process clearer. The main issue now is that there is to be a sub-committee of the Council's Audit and Risk Scrutiny Committee which would hear any complaint if deemed necessary. This should be a joint District/parish panel and not comprise solely District councillors hearing complaints about parish councillors. The Localism Act requires a complaints process to be adopted but it does not state that District councillors should be a part of that process in respect of parish councillors. Therefore, unless the new arrangements provide a fair process for parish councillors, why should they be adopted by the parish councils? Indeed, one parish council is looking to write its own process.

AGREED that:

1. The verbal update on the new arrangements for the Code of Conduct be noted.
2. Parish councils send any further comments on the proposed new arrangements to the Council via their Ward Member.

(b) Neighbourhood Planning and Funding for the Plans

N Cockrell, Planner, tabled information on Neighbourhood Plans and updated the Group on the concept of Neighbourhood Plans, which is a tool provided by the Localism Act for parish councils and community forums to enhance planning powers. They cannot be used to stop development but can be used to enhance existing development.

For each approved Neighbourhood Plan, the District Council can access Government funding of £30,000 which is available to the District Council to pay for the examination and referendum of Neighbourhood Plans. Sturton and Elkesley Parishes have each received £10,000 from the Awards for All funding to assist with their Plans; and Shireoaks is currently awaiting its decision from the National Lottery. From March 2013, further Government funding of up to £7,000 will be available to help parish councils with things like printing costs.

Information on potential Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) revenue was also tabled. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge that local authorities in England and Wales can require of most types of new development in their area (based on £x per sq m), in order to pay for the infrastructure needed to support development. CIL charges will be based on the size, type and location of the development proposed. 25% of the CIL charge will be given to the parish/community if a Neighbourhood Plan is in place and only 15% if no neighbourhood plan is in place. The money can be spent on community facilities within the village. CIL is non-negotiable and does not apply to developments which have already commenced. For unparished areas, i.e. Retford and Worksop, any CIL will be kept separately for projects which will arise through consultation with the communities. The Council's CIL will come into force in Spring 2013.

AGREED that:

1. The verbal update on Neighbourhood Plans be noted.
2. Any parish council who has questions or who would like a presentation on Neighbourhood Planning should contact Natalie Cockrell, Planner, 01909 535151, natalie.cockrell@basetlaw.gov.uk

(c) Community Right to Bid: Assets of Community Value

Further to her presentation at the last meeting on the process for the Community Right to Bid, the Corporate Development and Policy Manager tabled information on Assets of Community Value.

Under the Localism Act, voluntary and community organisations can nominate any land or building to be included on a List of Assets of Community Value which will be managed by the District Council. A building or land in any ownership may be considered an asset of community value if its current principal use or recent use has been to further the social well-being or social interest of the local community and is likely to do so in the future. If a land/property owner wants to sell a registered property, they must tell the District Council. If a group wants to buy the asset, this will trigger a six-month moratorium period which gives the community group some time to develop a proposal and raise the required capital to bid for the property when it comes onto the open market at the end of the moratorium period.

There are some assets that are excluded from listing, an appeals process at both the listing and compensation stages of the process, enforcement measures in place, and compensation available to owners of assets if the process results in a loss of income or sale of an asset. Any compensation will have to be met through the New Burdens funding to local authorities or through an agreed "top up" payment that the Government have committed to pay for claims received in excess of £20k in any calendar year up to March 2015.

Information on both the Community Right to Bid and the Community Right to Challenge can be found on the Council's website: www.bassetlaw.gov.uk. Simply type the words "Community Right to Bid" or "Community Right to Challenge" in the search facility. There is also information on some external funds that can be accessed to help communities use these new powers.

A nomination form for land or a buildings to be considered as an Asset of Community Value is also available on the Council's website under the Planning pages and the contact for parishes will be Natalie Cockrell, 01909 535151, natalie.cockrell@bassetlaw.gov.uk

AGREED that:

1. The verbal update on Assets of Community Value be noted.
2. The information pack be circulated to all parish council clerks with the Minutes.

(d) Dog Control Orders: Information about Consultation Proposals

(Apologies were given for the absence of the Principal Environmental Health Manager.)

The Senior Manager Support Services advised the Group that the consultation for the proposed Dog Control Orders, which will control dog fouling, dogs on leads, the number of dogs being walked by one person, etc., will commence on 4th March until 26th April 2013. Details are on the Council's website and details will be sent to all parish councils clerks. Contact Julian Proudman, 01909 533171, julian.proudman@bassetlaw.gov.uk

AGREED that the verbal update on consultation regarding Dog Control Orders be noted.

(e) Civic Pride Scrutiny Review

The Senior Manager Support Services advised the Group that the Scrutiny Panel which was held last year cited evidence that "sustainable communities" which have high levels of community pride and involvement tend to have less problems and therefore require less public spending. Overall, it identified that there is a low level of identity with the District of Bassetlaw

but residents have a strong identity with their parish/community. All the parish councils were invited to submit information to the Scrutiny Panel, and some representatives gave evidence. Some of the issues will be incorporated into the Rural Action Plan. The report is available on the Council's website.

AGREED that the verbal update on 'Civic Pride' be noted.

- (f) Medium Term Financial Plan 2013/14 to 2015/16 and Value For Money Strategy – Cabinet Report 8.1.13

(Apologies were given from the Director of Resources and the Head of Finance and Property, who both had prior engagements.)

The Group was presented with the Cabinet Report from its 8th January 2013 meeting which made projections about the long-term financial sustainability of the Council in conjunction with current issues, and the financial support required for Bassetlaw's priorities in the Corporate Plan.

The report outlined: the Chancellor's Autumn Statement; the Formula Grant; the New Homes Bonus; Council Tax; Reserves and Balances; the Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit; staffing and downsizing costs; inflation; Service Improvements; Value For Money; and preparing for the future. Other influencing factors include: the new National Non-Domestic Rates; the new Council Tax Reduction Scheme; the "bedroom tax"; "second home taxation"; the introduction of Universal Credit; the New Homes Bonus; and insurance liability for which the Council's share is £340,000.

Local government has taken the biggest cut in public services and Bassetlaw's reduction in funding of 33% equates to £3.8m. A referendum is needed for Council Tax to be raised above 2% so many local authorities are imposing a 1.9% increase. Decreased income due to the economic downturn has also had an effect, e.g. planning fees, land charges and car parking. Bassetlaw District Council has made £7.3m savings since 2005/6 by reducing service budgets and achieving efficiencies. Staffing is now at 373 ftes, from 486, excluding the transfer of leisure staff to Barnsley Premier Leisure.

Most local authorities are making compulsory redundancies, some are only receiving funding for one year at a time, some are now considered "unviable", and others are in danger of being taken over. The report outlined three strategic choices for the future of Bassetlaw, i.e. either by going "up", "sideways" or "down"; such organisation change will take time to plan and deliver.

Mr D Langmead asked if "the Council provides value for money to all its taxpayers" particularly rural taxpayers who are "double-taxed" through the parish precept. The Senior Manager Support Services replied that the District Auditor applies specific criteria and that he would look into this and get back to Mr Langmead.

AGREED that the contents of the Cabinet Report be noted.

29. ITEMS FROM PARISH COUNCILS

None.

30. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

As there was no other business to be discussed the Chairman closed the meeting, after reminding all parish councils to forward any items in readiness for the next meeting scheduled for 17th April 2013.