

MINUTES of a meeting of the **IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – RESOURCES** held at County Hall, Matlock on 24 September 2015.

PRESENT

Councillor Mrs K D Lauro (in the Chair)

Councillors Mrs M Booth, S Bull, S Freeborn and T A Kemp.

Also in attendance - Councillor C Bisknell (in respect of Item 6) and Councillor A Western.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Lomax, S Marshall-Clarke and C R Moesby.

17/15 **MINUTES** **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee – Resources held on 23 July 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

18/15 **5 YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN** A presentation was received from P Handford, Director of Finance, on the five year financial plan for the County Council. This was prepared annually for the four years after the current budget year, and took into account funding, known pressures, inflation and reserves projections.

It was assumed that the RSG would be reduced by 10% per annum from 2016/17, there would be a 2% increase in business rates and Council Tax increases. Further demographic growth was predicted which would be a big challenge to the Authority, along with pressures on waste land fill tax and an increase in National Insurance Contributions. The Council was facing unprecedented budget cuts and by 2020 it would have reduced its 2010 budget by over a third, cutting services by over £270m. Savings of £146m were required over the five years to 2019/20, with £45m in 2015/16.

Mr Handford and his team were thanked for the work that had been undertaken.

19/15 **DISCUSSION WITH CABINET MEMBER** Councillor A Western attended the meeting and spoke of the financial pressures the Council faced with less resources being available. She referred to the 4 stranded plan – devolution, innovation, new income streams and building community initiatives, and the need to look beyond the short and medium term and show ambition for the future of Derbyshire.

Members were given the opportunity to make comment and ask questions, which were duly noted or answered.

The Chair thanked Councillor Western for attending the meeting.

**20/15 PROPOSED CLOSURE OF BUXTON COURTS –
CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) had recently published consultation documents on their proposals to close a number of Court service locations across the country. In Derbyshire, the affected Courts were the Buxton Magistrates' and County Courts which were located in Peak Buildings, Terrace Road, Buxton. The Committee had been requested to develop the formal response from the Council, which was to be submitted before the consultation deadline of 8 October.

The Committee had been invited to consider the proposals set out in the consultation document, gather evidence from the Council's departments where appropriate, invite the opinions of the Members representing the High Peak area. A working group had considered responses from officers and local Members. The information and evidence on issues such as the inconvenient and costly implications for people travelling to the alternative Courts at Chesterfield were summarised in the report.

Members had also received a copy of an initial response to the consultation by local Magistrates, which challenged some of the evidence put forward by HMCTS as being flawed and potentially misleading, in particular in respect of disabled access to the courts at Buxton and maintaining 'Access to Justice'.

Councillor Bisknell reported that the proposed closure of Buxton Courts had been discussed at the recent meeting of the High Peak Local Area Committee and that there had been strong opposition to the proposal.

Discussion took place about the proposal and travelling to Chesterfield was a major concern. Using public transport from some areas of the High Peak required the public to initially travel in to Stockport and Manchester and it was queried whether Stockport had been considered as the alternative court. Other issues of concerns raised included potential difficulty with the appointment and retention of JPs with the change in court location, increase in solicitors' costs, whether any suitable alternative accommodation in Buxton had been investigated, and travelling difficulty during the winter months.

Whilst supporting the draft responses to the 5 consultation questions detailed in the report, it was agreed that the following areas should be strengthened/included in the response; to be approved by the Chair of the Committee before being submitted –

- JP appointment/recruitment and retention
- Inaccuracies in the consultation documents and misleading information
- The Police and Crime Commissioner's response
- Alternative accommodation
- Impact of winter travel

RESOLVED agree to the formal response to be submitted on behalf of the County Council to the HMCTS proposal to close the Magistrates' and County Courts at Buxton, as detailed in the report and the changes discussed at the meeting, and that this response be submitted to HMCTS by the Director of Legal Services before the consultation deadline of 8 October 2015.

21/15 REVIEW OF SPONSORSHIP - SCOPING REPORT A
scoping report on the potential for external sponsorship of County Council services was presented.

The main objectives of the review would be to:

- Explore the potential of sponsorship, a suggestion which had been raised by the employee Budget Reduction Task and Finish Groups
- Identify the approach adopted in other local authorities to sponsorship and assessing how effective this has been
- Investigate the potential for generating income for the Council and assessing the cost associated with this
- Identify the risks associated with the development of a sponsorship policy and develop recommendations to limit risk

The review would contribute to the Council Plan priority of An Ambitious and Dynamic Council and it was anticipated that the review would be completed by January 2016.

It was suggested that the review be extended to include other areas of income generation as well as sponsorship.

RESOLVED (1) to agree the scope of the review of sponsorship of Derbyshire County Council services;

(2) to confirm the appointment of Councillors Booth, Lauro, Freeborn, Lomax and Bull to the review working group; and

(3) to note that other strands of income generation potential would be considered as part of the review.

22/15 WORK PROGRAMME RESOLVED to note progress on the committee's work programme.