

**ORGANISATION IMPROVEMENT & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW &  
SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
HELD ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2007  
(FROM 5.30PM TO 7.10PM)**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Mrs Atkinson in the Chair. Councillors Galloway, Grange, Reg Marsh, Newby, Peter Philips and Willoughby.

**Also in attendance:** Councillor Richard Cooper – (Cabinet Member for Environment), Councillor Don Mackenzie – (Cabinet Member for Planning and Transport).

**Late Arrivals:** None

**Early Departures:** Councillor Willoughby at 7.00pm.

**20/07 - APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATIONS OF**

**SUBSTITUTES:** Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Chris Lewis and Hawke

(5.30pm)

**21/07 – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were no declarations of interest.

(5.30pm)

**22/07 - MINUTES:** The Minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 23 July 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

(Five members voted for the motion and there were two abstentions)

(5.32pm)

**23/07 – EXEMPT INFORMATION:** There were no exempt information items.

(5.32pm)

**24/07 – PUBLIC ARRANGEMENTS – QUESTIONS:** There were no such questions to consider.

(5.33pm)

**MATTERS FOR REPORT**

**25/07 - KEY DECISIONS 1006/DDS98 AND 0906DDS96:** The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member (Planning and Transport), Principal Planner and Planning Policy Manager who had attended the Commission to respond to a request for further information regarding two key decisions relating to the Harrogate District Local Development Framework (LDF) and more specifically the approval of preferred options for the site allocations for homes and jobs in the development plan and for Community Sports Regeneration Area Action Plan Preferred Options. The Planning Policy Manager referred to the LDF

## O I & ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

and provided the Commission with a brief introduction to those areas of the framework in which the Commission had expressed an interest.

It was anticipated that the Cabinet Member for Planning and Transport would, on the 12 December 2007, be invited to consider the preferred options for housing to go out to consultation. This was considered to be a key decision although the Council would take the final decision on this matter in 2008. It was acknowledged that the Planning Policy Team had lost two members of staff recently and as a result there would be some delays to the consultation deadlines set out in the briefing note circulated to members. It was acknowledged that the LDF process itself would when complete have taken just under six years whereas the predecessor document, the Harrogate District Local Plan, had required nine years.

Members of the Commission queried the proposed distribution of dwellings across the district that featured in the core strategy and the likelihood and impact on planning applications should they appear to exceed planned development level for parts of the district. Members were informed that the Council would be monitoring housing completions throughout the plan period, but that it was difficult to predict the impact on individual applications at this stage. It was acknowledged that the planning inspectorate could alter the proposals set out in the LDF if there was considered to be sufficient justification.

The Planning Policy Manager advised that officers were still operating with the Harrogate District Local Plan and that the government would soon determine which of those policies could continue to be used in development control. In response to a question from Councillor Atkinson it was acknowledged that there would be potential for affordable housing to come forward in the District's smaller villages. These would meet the needs of local people. The Commission then discussed the justification for affordable housing development in rural areas, its sustainability and the implications for affordable housing development on the Council's proposed distribution of dwellings across the District.

(6.15pm – 6.45pm)

**26/07 – RACE EQUALITY SCHEME (RES) CURRENT PROGRESS:** The Chair welcomed the Corporate Partnership Development Officer (CPDO) who had attended the meeting to provide information regarding the Council's progress on the Race Equality Scheme. The report provided details of the Council's progress in this regard and, in particular, Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 2b. The report also detailed monitoring arrangements now in place.

The CPDO referred to Appendix 2 and last year's percentage target for BVPI 2b set at 85%. The CPDO had taken into consideration the District's demographic profile as part of the review of the target for 2007/08 and concluded that the Council would struggle to attain such a target. The target had therefore been set to 70% for 2007/08 after the Diversity Framework

## O I & ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

Group reviewed performance against the 19 criteria that had to be met. The Council had now achieved 68.4% as at 31 August 2007. In response to questions regarding the justification for setting the target at 70% it was acknowledged that targets were intended to stretch Council performance so that improvement could be clearly achieved and demonstrated. The target of 70% had been accepted by the Audit Commission and was considered to be legitimate. It was acknowledged that the issue of diversity had not as yet been fully integrated into Council Services and there was still some scope for improvement.

The CPDO advised that in actuality performance had improved since the last meeting of the Commission and there were a number of indicators in relation to the Race Equality Scheme that the Council was now beginning to achieve.

The Commission then discussed what action or behaviour would constitute a racist incident and, as a result, it was acknowledged that there might be a need to examine the relationship between the reporting of racist incidents and complaints received by the Council. The report was noted and received.

(5.50pm – 6.33pm)

**27/07 – FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS:** The Commission was invited to comment upon the current Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

Councillor Marsh queried why papers in relation to these key decisions had not been made available to members in advance of the meeting. The Scrutiny Officer referred to the intensive resource implications and advised that it might be possible for Members to be supplied with such papers in the longer term, however in the meantime this proposal had been taken into account as part of the review of the Forward Plan.

Councillor Willoughby referred to the traffic-calming scheme at Halfpenny Lane Knaresborough and suggested that there might be merit from reprioritising traffic around the rail bridge. It was **agreed** that this comment would be submitted to the Chief Engineer (Traffic). The Scrutiny Officer and Councillor Willoughby would draft a response to the Chief Engineer (Traffic) in due course.

Councillor Marsh referred to the planned decision relating to the Service Level Agreement on Waste Management for York and North Yorkshire Waste Management Partnership and whether papers could be made available to Members on this subject. It was acknowledged that if this matter was due to be considered by Cabinet then the papers would be available on the Council's website; if not then the Scrutiny Officer would circulate them accordingly.

(6.45pm – 6.50pm)

## **O I & ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION**

### **SCRUTINY CONSULTATION**

28/07 – **DRAFT DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2007-2010:** The Corporate Partnership Development Officer (CPDO) submitted a written report to provide an update to the Commission regarding the Council's agreement and delivery of an overall diversity action plan. The report outlined work already carried out, requirements of an Action Plan and how the diversity agenda would be taken forward.

The CPDO advised that there was limited if not any base-line information available regarding the diversity of the Council's customers. This base-line information was required if the Council was to evidence that it was aware of, dealing with, and providing services to the diverse population throughout the District. The CPDO referred to the Diversity Framework Group who would monitor progress against the plan and the need for proportionate action bearing in mind the district's demographics and low numbers of black and minority ethnics (BME) in the District. The CPDO referred the Commission to an example, the Council did not keep information relating to the number of disabled people who used the Hydro Swimming Pool and, therefore, it could be agreed to carry out a period of customer profiling to ascertain this information to ensure that services were inclusive to all. There was no base-line information regarding those Council services accessed by BME groups either and in response to Members questions it was acknowledged that the term 'black and minority ethnics' did not include the District's growing population of Polish migrants who were actually considered to be white Europeans by the Home Office and, therefore, were not covered by existing performance indicators.

In conclusion the Cabinet Member for Environment referred to the need for proportionate action bearing in mind the low numbers of black and minority ethnics in the District and it was unanimously **agreed** that the Commission invite a report from the CPDO in approximately 6 months' time reporting on the progress made against the Corporate Diversity Action Plan.

The CPDO and Cabinet Member then referred to a DVD intended to raise awareness of diversity issues and which was intended for circulation amongst elected Members. A letter would be circulated to Members shortly inviting them to view a copy of the DVD.

(6.03pm – 6.15pm)

### **SCRUTINY MATTERS AND REVIEWS UNDERTAKEN BY THE COMMISSION**

29/07 – **WASTE/RECYCLING ISSUES:** The Chairman welcomed Mr T C Walker, a member of the public, who had attended the meeting to express his concerns with regard to the Council's policy on refuse collection and recycling. A report drafted by the Policy Support Officer had been submitted which summarised Mr Walker's concerns. Following a brief introduction by Mr Walker, Members were invited to ask questions to consider whether this issue should form part of the Commission's work programme and

## O I & ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

the need for a formal response to Mr Walker's concerns. Members referred to existing Council Policy on refuse collection/recycling, the impact on the District's roads from those driving to and from civic amenity sites, landfill taxes and penalties imposed on those Local Authorities not meeting Government targets on waste and refuse collection and recycling.

In terms of a formal response to Mr Walker it was considered that this would be best achieved by obtaining further information from North Yorkshire Council in relation to their policy on refuse collection and recycling and ongoing work on establishing and improving amenity sites in the District and that was unanimously **agreed**.

(5.33pm – 5.50pm)

30/07 – **CAR PARKING POLICY WORKING GROUP:** The Minutes of the last Group held on the 6 August 2007 had been submitted for information. The Chair of the Car Parking Policy Working Group provided a verbal update in relation to the work of the Group and expressed concern with regard to information provided to the general public via a Press release in this regard which had not been made available to the Working Group.

The Commission joined Councillor Marsh in expressing concern in this regard and unanimously **agreed** that the Scrutiny Officer would draft a letter on behalf of the Commission expressing the Commission's concern.

(6.50pm – 7.00pm)

31/07 – **REQUESTS FOR INCLUSION OF ITEMS IN FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME:** Councillor R Marsh referred to a draft scoping document submitted to the Commission regarding the suggested review of the operation of full Council meetings including procedures regarding Members' Question Time and procedures regarding Notices of Motion. It was acknowledged that the Improvement and Involvement Steering Group had recently reviewed such procedures but had not yet assessed the impact of those procedures after the approved trial period. Members expressed concern that Council had increasingly become an unimportant meeting to attend and that attendance was falling. It was also considered that Council should be a debating forum and, therefore, it was unanimously **agreed** that a review of these procedures would take place at a future meeting of the Commission. It was also acknowledged that this review would be carried out with the support of the Council's Improvement and Involvement Steering Group.

(7.00pm – 7.10pm)