

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (LOCAL PLAN) held at ZOOM -
HTTPS://ZOOM.US/, on TUESDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER 2020 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors A Coote, C Criscione, G Driscoll, R Jones, P Lavelle,
G LeCount, G Sell and J de Vries

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), B Ferguson
(Democratic Services Manager), G Glenday (Assistant Director –
Planning), R Harborough (Director – Public Services) and
S Miles (Local Plans and New Communities Manager)

Also in attendance: J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local Plan)

SC19 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair welcomed those present to the first Scrutiny Committee meeting dedicated solely to Local Plan matters. He said effective scrutiny was non-political and it was the Committee's role to play the "critical friend" to the Executive. He added that the details regarding prospective training from the Centre of Public Scrutiny would be circulated with Members in due course.

SC20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors Dean and Storah.

Councillor de Vries was substituting for Councillor Storah who would not sit as a Scrutiny Committee member in relation to Local Plan matters due to his role as the Chair of the Local Plan Leadership Group. He would, however, attend future meetings in order to answer the Committee's questions.

SC21 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 16 June and 6 July 2020 were approved as correct records.

SC22 THE LOCAL PLAN

The Chair thanked Councillor Evans, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local Plan, for attending the meeting to answer questions in relation to the Local Plan process.

In response to a question regarding the cancellation of the Local Plan Leadership Group (LPLG) and Scrutiny Local Plan meetings, Councillor Evans said this proposal had originated with the Peer Review Group following the announcement of the Government's White Paper on planning issues. However,

Members should have been consulted and the proposal to cancel the meetings had been overruled by the Administration. He confirmed he was content that the governance arrangements surrounding the Local Plan process were understood by Members.

The Assistant Director – Planning said he had shared the view with the advisors and the Chief Executive that the meeting should be cancelled in light of the White Paper announcement and he had moved quickly and in good faith to cancel the meetings.

In response to three questions relating to the lack of progress made so far on the Local Plan, Councillor Evans said progress had been hindered by the announcement of the Government's White Paper and, for instance, the LPLG had decided not to review a number of documents in light of the announcement. He said it was a demanding timetable and the Council had a statutory duty to prepare a Local Plan; it would not be possible "to wait and see" what the outcome of the White Paper would be. The project would carry on as planned although there was a need to anticipate the content of the White Paper to avoid duplicating work streams and spending money unnecessarily.

Members discussed the requirement for more detail and specificity in the documents presented to the Committee. There was a need for a detailed risk analysis and the Chair highlighted the impact statement, which had not included any implications for sustainability. He said this stretched credulity and the Committee expected more detail.

In response to a question relating to the need for a Local Plan Project Manager, Councillor Evans said an external consultant had been appointed to the role. There was agreement amongst Members that an independent Project Manager, responsible for keeping the Local Plan on track, was vital to ensure the timetable did not slip.

The Director – Public Services said a project manager had been appointed and was already "mapping the course" ahead. His role was to identify issues that could occur throughout the process and put mitigating measures in place pre-emptively.

Councillor Driscoll entered the meeting at 8.10pm.

Councillor Coote said the Project Manager's credentials should have been brought before the Committee. He said new personnel were required to form a new local plan.

Councillor Sell said the Project Manager needed to be independent and not someone who had previously worked for the Council. He said the Local Plan was vitally important and the Council could not afford to see this Plan fail.

The discussion returned to the lack of progress made on the Local Plan. The Chair said he was unimpressed with the management of the process and the lack of progress made. He said this was not a criticism of officers but rather the Administration.

In response, Councillor Evans said the White Paper had led to a delay as Local Plan documentation had to go through the LPLG. He said the Administration were not using the White Paper as an excuse but it was an unforeseen “spanner in the works” as the LPLG required an opportunity to consider its implications. Furthermore, he said the failure of the previous two Local Plans could not be placed on the current Administration. He said this Administration was ambitious and would secure the best Plan possible.

Councillor Criscione said there was a need to look at which groups would be formally consulted over the Local Plan.

Councillor Jones said the process could have been quicker but he appreciated the reality of the last 8 months and it was important that sound foundations for the Plan were now in place. He concluded by saying that important work had been carried out by officers and Members and both needed to work together to prepare an effective Local Plan.

The Chair summarised the discussion on Item 3; he said the Committee were in agreement regarding the need for greater specificity and detail in the tabled documentation, that it was important to continue to progress work streams that could be progressed and that the White Paper should not delay the agreed timetable.

Councillor Evans said he had listened to the Committee and would take on board their constructive input.

The meeting was adjourned at 8.30pm for a comfort break.

The meeting was reconvened at 8.40pm

SC23 **REPORTS PRESENTED TO THE LOCAL PLAN LEADERSHIP GROUP**

The Chair made the point, as stated in the report at paragraph 9, that the Scrutiny Committee’s role in this process was to ensure that the Local Plan was robust and moving at the appropriate pace, and that it should avoid duplicating the policy development role of the LPLG. He asked Councillor Evans to introduce the report to the Committee.

Councillor Evans said the suite of documents before Members were to be considered by the LPLG but the White Paper had delayed such consideration. It was for the LPLG to provide comment on the reports before the Group’s recommendations were forwarded to Cabinet for determination.

The Chair opened the item for debate and asked Members to comment on whether the Local Plan was robust and moving at the appropriate pace.

Councillor Criscione said the documentation showed the Administration’s commitment to securing a Local Plan, although the progress made did not match

the timetable in the reports. He asked what plans were in place to ensure such documentation was kept up to date.

In response, Councillor Evans said the Project Initiation Document should be a “living” document and updated to reflect reality.

Members discussed the governance arrangements surrounding the Local Plan process and the Chair highlighted the importance of the Organogram that set out the decision making process. He said it was this Committee’s role to hold such arrangements to account and to ensure that the structure was working as published.

Councillor Evans said he would report back at the next meeting to update Members on how the structure was working in practice.

In response to a question from Councillor Driscoll, Councillor Evans said he was unsure if Transport for London was a statutory consultee but he felt that a wider consultation would make for a better process.

Councillor Sell said he would like to see Councillor Storah at future meetings to allow greater collaboration between the LPLG and the Local Plan Scrutiny Committee. In general terms, each group should work together on the Local Plan to add value to the process.

Councillor Criscione praised the Statement of Community Involvement document but noted there had only been minor changes to the way in which planning applications were carried out. He asked whether this was an opportunity to modify the process moving forward, for instance in relation to digital consultations. He added that if the LPLG was looking at this document, they needed to be aware that some of its content fell outside of Local Plan processes.

Councillor Evans concluded by thanking officers of their work on this document. He reminded Members that the Planning Policy Team Leader was present and whether the Committee had any questions for him.

The Chair thanked the Planning Policy Team Leader for his attendance but said the issue of housing numbers had now moved on so no statement was required.

The Chair thanked Councillor Evans for attending the meeting and answering the Committee’s questions. He said it reflected well on both Councillor Evans and the Administration that they had readily made themselves available for scrutiny.

The meeting ended at 9.00pm.