

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 23 June 2004.

PRESENT

Mr. N. J. Brown CC (in the Chair)

Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. R. Jenkins CC
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC
Prof. M. E. Preston CC
Mrs. M. L. Sherwin CC

Mr. P. A. Hyde CC
Mr. Mike Jones CC
Mr. M. B. Page CC
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC
Mr. R. M. Wilson CC

By Invitation

Mr. R. Fraser CC – Cabinet Lead Member – Equalities.
Mrs. L.A.S. Pendleton CC – Cabinet Lead Member for Rural Affairs and Communications.

93. Appointment of Deputy Chairman

It was moved, seconded and carried:-

That Mr. Mike Jones CC be appointed Deputy Chairman for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2005.

94. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held on 28 April 2004, were taken as read, confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of the name of Mr. Hyde CC in the list of members present.

95. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been asked under Standing Order 35.

96. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been asked under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

97. Any other items the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no other items of urgent business.

98. Declarations of interest in respect of items on this agenda.

Professor Preston declared a non prejudicial personal interests in the item concerning the Rural Strategy as a member of the Leicestershire Local Partnership.

There were no other declarations of interest.

99. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations made under Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

100. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

101. Leicestershire Rural Partnership - Rural Strategy 2004-09.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the second draft of the Leicestershire Rural Strategy which had been revised following public consultation. A copy of the report marked 'B' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mrs. L.A.S. Pendleton CC, the Cabinet Lead Member for Rural Affairs who had kindly agreed to attend the meeting.

Mrs. Pendleton CC introduced the report and advised the Commission that the Leicestershire Rural Partnership had considered the responses received during the consultation process. The document had been amended to address the issues raised in the consultation and in particular the comments made by the Commission. With regard to the Implementation Plan, it was hoped that this would be available for consideration by the Commission at its next meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the changes made to the Rural Strategy 2004-2009 be welcomed;
- (b) That the Cabinet and Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP) be advised that the Commission supports the revised Rural Strategy but is of the view that LRP member organisations including the District Councils, as partners to the Strategy, should be encouraged to:
 - (i) support efforts being made by the Partnership to develop affordable housing in rural areas;
 - (ii) have greater regard to emerging Parish Plans and in the case of District Councils where such land use planning elements of the Plan are consistent with the Local Development Plan be encouraged to adopt Parish Plans as supplementary planning guidance.

- (c) That the Rural Strategy Implementation Plan be submitted to the next meeting of the Commission.

102. Equalities Standard of Local Government.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive and Director of Social Services concerning the requirements of the Equality Standard for Local Government and the decision of the Cabinet to adopt the Standard and an Action Plan to work towards the achievement of the Standard. A copy of the report marked 'C' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting, Mr. R. Fraser CC, the Cabinet Lead Member for Equalities, who had kindly agreed to attend the meeting.

Mr. Fraser CC introduced the report and emphasised the target of the Administration to reach Level 5 of the Equality Standard by 2007.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

- (i) the existing Policy Statement set out in Appendix B to the report was still relevant and should be retained as far as possible;
- (ii) the commitment of all Departments to the Equalities Board was to be welcomed and it was hoped that this commitment at a senior level would be disseminated to front line staff and to partners and contractors who delivered services on behalf of the Council;
- (iii) the commitment to ensure equality in service delivery and customer care (i.e. mainstreaming) was commended.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Equality Standard of Local Government and the Action Plan prepared towards the achievement of the Standard be noted and welcomed;
- (b) That the Corporate Equalities Plan including details of how the Council aims to progress through the five levels of the Equality Standard, be submitted to a future meeting of the Commission.

103. Best Value Performance Plan 2004-05.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive and Director of Resources concerning the draft Best Value Performance Plan for 2004/05. A copy of the report marked 'D' is filed with these minutes.

In reply to questions, the Commission was advised of the role of the District Auditor in relation to the Plan which was primarily to ensure that the Plan complied with legislative requirements rather than comment on the Council's priorities. It was suggested therefore that it might be appropriate for the Commission to consider the District Auditors Annual Management Letter which would set out any significant issues arising out of its audit and inspection programme and comments on other current issues. The Commission was also advised that a more "user friendly" statement outlining progress against the

commitments in the Medium Term Corporate Strategy would shortly be circulated to all members of the County Council.

With regard to monitoring progress on priority issues the Commission was advised that quarterly reports were now submitted to the Cabinet. This was in addition to the regular meetings between Chief Officers and Lead Members to discuss current issues.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Best Value Performance Plan for 2004/05 be supported;
- (b) That with regard to Appendix 4 – ‘Explanations for Variations of Actuals from targets for 2003/04’ the information be broken down in relation to each Scrutiny Committee area of responsibility and that:
 - (i) the Chairman and Spokesmen of each Committee be asked to meet with the appropriate Chief Officer(s) to discuss in detail the reasons for the underperformance and to satisfy themselves that appropriate measures were being taken or planned to address the underperformance.
 - (ii) the outcome of the discussion in (b)(ii) above to be reported to the Scrutiny Reference Group.

104. Annual Report on behalf of Overview and Scrutiny Bodies.

The Commission considered the Annual Report to the Council on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny bodies. A copy of the report marked ‘E’ is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Annual Report to the Council be noted;
- (b) That the Scrutiny Reference Group be asked to consider further how to involve external stakeholders and experts in scrutiny activity.

105. Working with Town and Parish Councils.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the terms of reference for the five member panel to review the County Councils relationship with Parish and Town Councils. A copy of the report marked ‘F’ is filed with these minutes.

The Commission was advised that the Liberal Democrat nominee would be Mr. Wilson CC and that Conservative nominee as Chairman would be Professor Preston.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed terms of reference for the Panel and timetable for undertaking the review as outlined in the report, be approved.

106. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on Wednesday 1 September 2004 at 2.00 p.m.

107. Any other business.

There was no urgent business.

23 June 2004
2.30 – 4.10 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

