

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 2 February 2005.

PRESENT

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

Mr. B. Chapman AE, CC  
Mr. P. A. Hyde CC  
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC  
Prof. M. E. Preston CC  
Mrs. M. L. Sherwin CC

Mr. S. J. Galton CC  
Mr. Mike Jones CC  
Mr. M. B. Page CC  
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC  
Mr. R. M. Wilson CC

By Invitation

Mr. D.R. Parsons CC – Leader of the Council.

151. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January, 2004 having been previously circulated were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

152. Question Time.

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

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

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

154. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

155. Declarations of interest.

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no declarations of the Party Whip.

157. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that there were no petitions to be presented.

158. Revenue Budget 2005/06 and Capital Programme 2005/06 and 2007/08.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Resources to the Cabinet on 13 January setting out the overall position on the Revenue Budget 2005/06 and Capital Programme 2005/06 to 2007/08. A copy of the report is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered a report setting out the comments of the Scrutiny Committees on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme relating to their respective service areas. A copy of that report is also filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting, Mr. D.R. Parsons CC Leader of the Council who had kindly agreed to attend the meeting to answer questions.

Members of the Commission welcomed the detailed reports that had been provided to scrutiny committees. In the ensuing discussion the following points were made.

(a) Overview of the Budget

- (i) The expectation was that all public bodies should aim to achieve year on year savings of 2½% of which at least half should be cashable.
- (ii) The achievement of efficiency savings in excess of £6million over two years was welcomed by members of all Groups. The Leader paid tribute to officers in achieving a level of efficiency savings in excess of that required by the Gershon report. [The Commission was advised that Government guidance on achievement of efficiency savings had now been received. Members asked that this information be circulated to them.](#)
- (iii) Officers would continue to look critically at all areas of the Council's budget to identify efficiency savings. In this regard £500,000 had been set aside to provide resources to enable a review of business processes and systems, including the development of e-procurement. It was anticipated that this review would generate savings over a number of years.
- (iv) After taking into account the final figures in relation to Revenue Support Grant Settlement and the Collection Fund there was approximately £385,000 within the budget not yet allocated. The Leader indicated that he would welcome comments on possible areas of the budget which the Cabinet should consider.

In relation to the discussion on the comments of the various scrutiny committees the Commission agreed to note these and forward them to the Cabinet. In response to further comments made by the members, the Leader advised the Commission as follows:

(a) Community Services Scrutiny

The views now expressed in relation to the Shire Grants Scheme were noted and a review of the eligibility criteria would be undertaken.

(b) Social Care Scrutiny

- (i) As stated at the meeting of the Social Care Scrutiny Committee, the decision to raise the level of homecare charges had been a difficult one. The proposed level of charges would still leave Leicestershire in the bottom quartile in 2005/06. The request for a staged increase was one that could not be supported.
- (ii) The investment in the four elderly persons homes was to ensure the facilities were upgraded. The homes were a valued resource and occupancy levels of the homes were currently very high.
- (iii) The concerns expressed in relation to the Supporting People budget were noted and any further views from the Chairman and Spokesmen of the Social Care Scrutiny Committee would be welcomed.

(c) Highways Transportation and Waste Management

The concerns about the level of resources in future years for highway maintenance were noted. A cash standstill in 2006/07 was proposed by the Government. The Cabinet had yet to make a decision on the level of resources that would be available in 2006/07. With regard to Highway Maintenance, the successful introduction of Roadline and the proposed investment in Highways Patrol Units would help to identify and deal with immediate issues.

(d) Education

- (i) The view of all parties for growth provision to be made so as to remove double-decker buses from routes used by primary-age pupils attending high schools was noted and would be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet.
- (ii) The concerns expressed at the Education Scrutiny Committee about the impact of the Community Plus proposals were noted and in particular the concern expressed that, although the intention behind the proposals for 2004/5 was to focus service delivery on areas of particular importance, it had not in practice proved easy to disaggregate budgets for administrative and other support with the consequence that a range of community activities had been affected. Whilst the force of these comments was noted, the Commission was advised that it should be borne in mind that the Government's view was that the 'Extended Schools' policy was considered to be cost neutral. The County Council, despite being the lowest funded LEA, was in the top quartile of local authorities providing support for community education. The current proposals to utilise one off

funding of £400,000 for extended schools as well as savings arising from the Adult Community Learning Review would address some of the concerns raised and the position would be reviewed in the coming year following further discussion with the new Director of Education.

- (iii) The decision to reduce funding for the Key Stage 4 Strategy on Modern Foreign Languages and Design and Technology was on the basis that the Strategy was intended to be time-limited and that the improvements that made were now embedded. The intention now was to work with the new Director of Education to identify areas of the curriculum that would benefit from similar investment.

(e) Resources Scrutiny Committee

- (i) Replies from some District Councils about the Council Tax on second homes and the use of receipts for community safety purposes were awaited. There was some difficulty about making such changes and adjusting the tax base at this stage of the budgetary process and it might be the case that the proposals would come into effect fully in the next financial year.
- (ii) The current position was that the Constabulary and some District Councils/District Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships were part funding additional Community Support Officer posts. It was envisaged that this would continue and that the major part of the proposed £290,000 and any additional income from a reduction in Council Tax on second homes would be utilised to part fund further Community Support Officers and to fund other County initiatives being promoted by the Community Safety Programme Board.
- (iii) The concerns about the £15,000 reduction on ICT Community Support was noted and would be brought to the attention of the Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

That the comments now made, together with those made by the other Scrutiny Committees, be forwarded to the Cabinet and County Council for consideration.

159. Date of Next Meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting be held at 2.00 p.m. on Wednesday 2 March 2005.

CHAIRMAN

2 February 2005  
2.00 p.m. – 3.40 p.m.



