

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Friday, 5 May 2006.

PRESENT

Dr. M. O'Callaghan CC (Chairman)

Mrs. J.A. Dickinson CC
Dr. S. Hill CC
Mr. Max Hunt CC
Mr. P.G. Lewis CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. D. W. Houseman CC
Mr. Mike Jones CC
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC
Mr. E. D. Snartt CC

68. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2006 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

69. Question Time.

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

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

Mr Hunt CC asked the following questions of the Chairman of the Commission:-

- (a) Would the Chairman ask for a report on the progress of the County Hall Travel Plan to the relevant Scrutiny Committee, and request that annual reports are available to members?
- (b) Would the Chairman tell the Commission what training events in the practice of scrutiny have been organised for members over the last five years and how many members have taken part in each, which have been open to all members, which for the executive, which for spokespersons and which for individual party groups?

The Chairman replied as follows:-

- (a) I have asked for a report on progress to be submitted to the next meeting of the Commission on 21 June and also asked for an annual update on progress against the commitments and targets to be reported to members via the Members' Information Service.
- (b) Details of the training events organised for members are set out in the table attached to these minutes.

71. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

72. Declarations of interest.

There were no declarations of interests.

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

Mr Osborne CC on behalf of the Conservative Group declared the Party Whip in respect of the item – Future of Scrutiny (minute 76 refers).

74. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

75. Performance of the Executive - May 2005 - April 2006.

The Chairman reported that he had written to the Leader of the Council inviting him to attend the meeting to provide an update on the work of the Executive and the key challenges ahead. The Leader had indicated that whilst he was pleased to do so he was unable to provide such an update at this meeting.

In the discussion that followed, members concluded that it would be useful for the members of the Scrutiny Reference Group to meet beforehand and identify key issues/questions they considered the Leader should address as this would allow for a structured debate.

76. Future Structure of Scrutiny.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which outlined the background and process to be followed in relation to any proposals to change the existing structure of scrutiny bodies. The report appended a copy of the Green Paper – ‘Getting the Best out of Scrutiny’ and a copy of the Green Paper as amended by the Chairman of the Committee to reflect the outcome of discussions at the meeting of the Scrutiny Reference Group and Chairman of Scrutiny Committees held on 24 March. A copy of the report marked ‘A’ is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered a paper produced by the Chairman of the Commission following the meeting of the Scrutiny Reference Group and Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees on 3rd May entitled ‘The Structure of Scrutiny’. A copy of this paper is also filed with these minutes.

It was moved and seconded:-

“a) That in addition to the Scrutiny Commission the following Scrutiny Committees be appointed:

- Children’s Services

[to scrutinise the Children and Young People's Service }

- Community Services
{to scrutinise the activities of the Community Services Department including grant aid for community organisations but excluding the following activities:- Environmental Management, Rights of Way and Planning*}
*Regional and Strategic Planning to remain the responsibility of the Commission}
- Environment
To scrutinise the activities of the Highways, Transportation and Waste Management Department and the following activities of the Community Services Department:- Environmental Management, Rights of Way and Planning }
- Adult and Health Services
{to scrutinise the activities of the Adult Social Care Service and the activities of local NHS bodies}

- b) That the Resources Committee be abolished and its existing functions be undertaken by the Scrutiny Commission.
- c) That a panel be appointed to consider issues emerging from proposals by the Executive to ensure that the County Council is more responsive to local communities. Consideration be given at a later date to the need for a standing Scrutiny Committee.
- d) That the County Council could in certain circumstances act as the champion of the public in scrutinising the provision of public services by external organisations e.g. Post Office, Utilities etc.
- e) That a 5 member panel of senior members of the Scrutiny Commission be established to review the support and resources needed for the Scrutiny function of the County Council and the training requirements of Scrutiny members.
- f) That a panel be established at a future date to review the process of consultation by the County Council.
- g) That with regard to the future operation of Scrutiny, the following points outlined on Page 10 of the revised Green Paper be considered further:-

General

- The Leader to include future work in the Position Statement to Council rather than just work done
- At start of Civic Year the Leader to give outline of the forthcoming year's programme akin to the 'Queen's Speech'
- The Leader be invited to review past year's work with Scrutiny Commission
- The Commission and Leader (or SRG and appropriate Cabinet members) to discuss the Commission's programme
- The Cabinet Lead Members, Chairmen and Spokesmen to discuss year's programme for each committee

- Cabinet and Scrutiny to suggest topics for debate at Council, in the form of 'Green Papers' on future policy development
- The Cabinet Forward Plan to contain issues and options for each issue

Committees and Commission

- Further work was needed on detail of operations and responsibilities for each body including where activities of the Chief Executive's Department best fit;
- The Commission to be more proactive in monitoring the Executive;
- The Commission to be more engaged in policy formation;
- Committees spokespersons to meet regularly to review agenda and deal with urgent matters, such as urgent consultations;
- County wide Health Scrutiny to consist of only County Councillors: District Councillors may be invited on specific issues, local health could be reviewed by district forums.

Panels

- Work to be done in shorter but intense duration, no more than three months or so;
- Commissioned by relevant committee, approved by the Chairmen and Spokesmen of the Commission via email;
- Continue current arrangements involving waiver of political balance, panels elect new own chairmen and the membership of Panels being open to members who are not on the parent Committee;
- Panels to be able to call expert witnesses and engage service users and general public;
- Findings to be widely circulated, published and where appropriate communicated to press.

Scrutiny Chairman and Spokespersons

- To meet regularly with officers and from time to time with relevant Cabinet Lead Member(s);
- To review Committee agenda and where necessary take action on reports etc
- To be more proactive in the management of their committees and panels

Scrutiny Reference Group

- To meet regularly to review work of Scrutiny, occasionally with Chairmen and spokesmen;
- To meet with Leader and Lead Members, to discuss future work programme and progress.

Policy Development

- Earlier involvement on Scrutiny in development of policy, cross-party approach;
- Joint discussion of work programme with Cabinet, development of Green Papers.

Training and Support

- Develop expertise and knowledge through seminars, skills through training;

- At present no dedicated Scrutiny unit, but this to be kept under review.

Partnership and Local Area Agreements

- Further work needed to be done by Scrutiny Reference Group
- Commission to scrutinise these in interim

Community Engagement

- Service users, general public, community groups (elderly, ethnic minorities etc) and where appropriate geographic areas should be engaged in process of Scrutiny by invitation to relevant discussions on committees or in review by panels.
 - Scrutiny Reference Group to carry out further work on this area

Special Responsibility Allowances

- These to be retained for Scrutiny Chairmen and Spokesmen

h) That the Cabinet be asked to consider the establishment of joint working groups of the Executive and Scrutiny on issues such as waste management, review of secondary education and change management”.

An amendment was moved by Mr Jones CC and seconded:-

“That part (b) of the motion be deleted and an additional bullet point be added to the end of part (a) of the motion as follows:-

- ‘Resources
(to scrutinise the executive functions of the Council in relation to the revenue budget, capital programme, property and ICT)’ “.

The amendment was put and not carried, 3 members voting for the amendment and 6 against.

The motion was put and carried.

77. Youth Justice Plan 2006/07.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the draft Youth Justice Plan for 2006/07 seeking the views of the Commission on the contents of the Plan. A copy of the report marked ‘B’ is filed with these minutes.

In response to questions the Commission was advised as follows:

- i) The YISP sought to strike a balance between dealing with young people at risk of offending and antisocial behaviour as well as helping with parents improve their parenting skills.
- ii) There was a close working relationship with the Children and Young People’s Service. This included working with Head teachers about support available to schools to avoid exclusions.

- iii) The Management Board recognised the need to broaden its composition to include a minority ethnic representative. To that end arrangements were being made to co-opted the Chief Executive of the YMCA.
- iv) The Board recognised the need for additional investment to improve performance by improving support to young people engaged in education, training and employment, and had recently submitted a successful bid for ESF funding for a basic skills and qualification training programme.

Members commented that there would be merit in providing, through the Members' Information Service, a brief summary setting out the key objectives of the Plan including examples of proposed actions to deliver these objectives.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet and County Council be advised that the Scrutiny Commission welcomes and supports the Youth Justice Plan 2006/07.

78. Date of Next Meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting of the Commission be held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday 21 June 2006.

5 May 2006

CHAIRMAN

