

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 11 October 2006.

PRESENT

Dr. M. O'Callaghan CC (Chairman)

Mr. J. G. Coxon CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. D. W. Houseman CC
Mr. John Legrys CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

Mr. R. Fraser CC
Dr. S. Hill CC
Mr. Mike Jones CC
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC
Mr. E. D. Snartt CC

By Invitation

Dr. R.K.A. Feltham CC – Cabinet Lead Member for Resources, including Finance and Performance Management.

Mr. A. Kershaw CC – Cabinet Lead Member for Access to Services, Communications and Consultation.

42. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2006 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

43. Question Time.

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

44. 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).

45. Urgent Items.

The Chairman reported that he had agreed to consider as an urgent item the recent decision taken by officers in relation to Area Youth Advisory Committees.

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

There were no declarations of interests.

47. 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.

48. Presentation of petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

49. Corporate Procurement Strategy to 2009.

The Commission considered a joint report of the Director of Resources and Director of Community Services concerning the draft Corporate Procurement Strategy for the period up to May 2009. A copy of the report, marked 'A', is filed with these minutes.

Dr. R.K.A. Feltham CC, the Cabinet Lead Member for Resources (including Finance and Performance Management) in introducing the report stated that the aim of the Strategy was to engage with a diverse range of suppliers, embed existing good procurement through a corporate approach and thereby achieve significant savings, estimated in the region of £9.7million over the next four years.

In response to questions the Cabinet Lead Member advised the Commission that:

- (i) any proposal to outsource existing in-house services would be the subject of a detailed report to Cabinet which would outline the benefits to the Council of the course of action proposed, including how accountability was to be achieved.
- (ii) the aim was to work closely with the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation and make better use of its expertise to achieve better value for money. However, alongside this it was necessary to strengthen the client side and hence the recruitment of 'Category Managers' was being prepared.
- (iii) he was confident that the level of savings referred to in the report could be achieved through improved contract pricing and reducing transaction costs by entering into partnering arrangements.

In the course of the discussion, members of the Commission raised the following points which they considered would merit consideration for inclusion in the Strategy:

- (i) a reference to the Corporate Asset Management Plan in relation to procurement of capital building projects or land;
- (ii) reference to the County Council's disposal strategy for assets which have come to the end of their useful life.

- (iii) inclusion of an additional procurement principle relating to the environmental impact of any purchasing strategy and the need to work with local suppliers, where appropriate, to reduce 'road miles', as well as stimulating the local economy.
- (iv) recognition within the Strategy that whilst there would be benefits from consolidation of suppliers this carried a risk to business continuity.

RESOLVED:

That the comments now made on the draft Corporate Procurement Strategy be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet.

50. Local Area Agreement - Update.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning:

- (a) progress in implementing the Local Area Agreement (LAA) including the preparation of the delivery plan and the work in priority neighbourhoods;
- (b) the arrangements for the review and refresh of the LAA.

A copy of the report, marked 'B', is filed with these minutes.

Mr. A. Kershaw CC, the Cabinet Lead Member for Access to Services, Communications and Consultation introduced the report and stated that at this stage this was a preliminary report on progress and that a detailed report would be available in six months' time. He also advised the Commission that a performance management system was being put into place which would produce quarterly reports in relation to each outcome, setting out activities being undertaken, who was responsible for delivery and progress against target. He hoped such a system would enable Scrutiny to monitor the LAA.

In response to this, the Chairman of the Commission reported that at a recent meeting of the Scrutiny Reference Group consideration had been given to scrutiny of the LAA, including the involvement of district councils. The Reference Group had concluded:

- (i) That greater use be made of the Members' Information Service to improve awareness of all members.
- (ii) That the most appropriate mechanism for scrutiny of the LAA would be to allocate to scrutiny committees responsibility for scrutiny of the main themes of the LAA on the basis that the Commission would exercise an overview function.
- (iii) That there was no support for a joint committee with District Councils but that consideration would be given to:
 - convening an annual meeting involving scrutiny representatives from all District Councils to be advised on progress in implementing the LAA

- Inviting District Councils to come together and nominate a small number (up to 3) representatives to attend relevant scrutiny committees when performance against LAA targets was considered.

With regard to the Community Engagement agenda the Commission was advised that a report would be made to the Leicestershire Together Board on 16 November and that arrangements would be made for involving appropriate scrutiny members in considering the proposals.

In the ensuing discussion the following comments were made:

- (i) concerns still remained regarding democratic accountability and in particular the lack of engagement of local members in the neighbourhood priority areas. The commitment to include County, District and Parish Councillors on priority neighbourhood forums was welcomed;
- (ii) there was a potential for confusion between the priority neighbourhood forums and the Community Engagement Forums that County and District Councils were committed to developing. Clarity was required as to their respective roles and any inter-relationship between them. Consideration should also be given to referring to priority neighbourhood forums as 'steering groups' to avoid confusion.
- (iii) concern remained about the level of resources, including human resources, being diverted to developing and delivering the LAA.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments now made be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet and Leicestershire Together Board.
- (b) That the Cabinet and Leicestershire Together Board be advised that the Commission shares the concerns about the new mandatory outcomes/indicators that the Government requires to be included in LAAs from 2007/08, particularly as some of the outcomes are not local priorities which, as a consequence, will require the input of additional resources for no discernable benefit to the community.

51. Revenue Budget 2006/07 - Monitoring Report.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Resources providing information on the 2006/07 Revenue Budget based on the pattern of income and expenditure for the first few months of the financial year. A copy of the report, marked 'C', is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the outcome of the latest budget monitoring exercise be noted.

52. Capital Programme 2006/07 - Monitoring Report.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Resources on progress in the delivery of the annual capital programme. A copy of the report, marked 'D', is filed with these minutes.

In response to questions the Director of Resources commented that whilst lessons had been learnt as a result of the findings of the review panel on the management of capital projects further work needed to be done to ensure:

- there was a more rigorous project appraisal system in place for capital projects;
- that there was clear understanding within departments that they should only put forward schemes which had a realistic chance of being delivered in the year in question.

RESOLVED:

That the progress on the delivery of the Annual Capital Programme be noted.

53. Date of Next Meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting be held on Wednesday 15 November 2006 at 2.00 pm

54. Urgent Item - Area Youth Advisory Committees

The Commission considered this matter, the Chairman having decided it was of an urgent nature, in view of the lack of an appropriate formal decision on the future of Area Youth Advisory Committees and of the concerns expressed by members.

Mr. Galton advised the Commission that he had challenged the validity of a letter that had been sent to all members. This had advised them that the Area Youth Advisory Committees, which had been established following the Best Value Review of Youth and Community Services, were to be abolished and in their place a report would be circulated to members advising them about youth activities in their area. This decision was taken by officers and without members approval. Given that the decision to establish the Committees had been taken by the County Council, Mr. Galton had questioned the validity of the decision of officers and had been advised that officers were not authorised to take such a decision, and that a report would be submitted to the Cabinet in the near future.

With regard to the proposal that a report would be sent to members about youth activities in their locality, a number of members expressed concern at the paucity of the information contained in the first such report which they considered to be wholly inadequate.

RESOLVED:

That the concerns now expressed be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet and that the Cabinet be advised that the Children and Young People's Service Scrutiny Committee should be consulted before any decision is taken on the future of these Committees.

2.30 pm – 5.10 pm
11 October 2006.

CHAIRMAN