

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 31 January 2007.

PRESENT

Dr. M. O'Callaghan CC (Chairman)

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

Mr. D. W. Houseman CC
Mr. John Legrys CC
Mr. J. T. Orson JP CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC
Mr. R. M. Wilson CC

Attendance under the Sensitive Issues Procedure.

Mr. D. C. Bill CC and Mr D. O. Wright for Item 14 - Application for Grant for Transit and Stopping provision for Gypsies and other Travellers.

By Invitation.

Mr. D.R. Parsons CC – Leader of the Council.
Dr. R.K.A. Feltham CC – Cabinet Lead Member for Resources, including Finance and Performance Management.
Mr J. B. Rhodes CC – Cabinet Lead for Community Safety.
Mrs L. A. S. Pendleton CC – Cabinet Lead Member for Rural Affairs, Tourism and Equal Opportunities
Mr. M.B. Page CC – Cabinet Support Member for Efficiency Gains and Capital Programme Monitoring.

83. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2006 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

84. Question Time.

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

85. 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).

86. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items.

87. Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.

Mr Legrys declared a personal non prejudicial interest in relation to the Integrated Transport Unit as his son was in receipt of SEN transport.

Messrs Galton, Orson, Houseman, Jones, Shepherd, Snartt and Wilson declared personal non prejudicial interests as members of District Councils

88. 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.

89. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

90. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2007/08 to 2009/10 - Chief Executive's Department Budget.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive and Director of Resources concerning the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the implications for the Chief Executive's departmental budget. A copy of the report, marked 'B', is filed with these minutes.

In response to questions the Commission was advised as follows:-

Growth

- Discussions had been held with the Leicestershire Constabulary, Primary Care Trust and the seven district councils concerning a contribution towards the cost of servicing the Community Forums. Given their respective financial positions it was unlikely that financial support would be forthcoming from the PCT and the Constabulary. The picture from the District Councils was mixed with some indicating a willingness to consider contributing and others indicating that they would not be able to contribute. The proposals outlined would result in the employment of 3 staff in 2007/08 (comprising one Team Leader (Policy), one Policy Officer and one Committee Officer) with the total staff complement of six officers in 2009/10 (comprising one Team Leader (Policy), two Policy Officers and three Committee officers);
- Reports on the progress being made on implementing the Community Engagement strategy would be made to the relevant scrutiny committee;
- The additional £150,000 to reflect the anticipated requirements of the Local Government White Paper would result in the appointment of 2 project managers and a clerical support officer on an on-going basis: initial discussions with district council representatives on achieving

service improvements and efficiency savings through shared services had taken place in a constructive manner and it was hoped that specific projects/proposals would be identified soon;

- The £90,000 for member support was to fund:-
 - an anticipated increase in scrutiny activity to deal with issues relating to Community Call for Action, Community Safety and scrutiny of partnership/external bodies (£50,000);
 - the appointment of a Personal Administrative Assistant to the Leader, the role having been undertaken up to now by staff from Democratic Services, whose Section workload meant they could no longer undertake this role;
- There would be no redundancies as a result of the rationalisation of staffing;
- The saving on advertising costs through greater use of Leicestershire Matters was a net figure: the additional costs of producing six rather than four editions had been offset against the total savings;
- Work was in hand to investigate ways in which the costs of public notices could be reduced.

Service Reductions

- The concerns now expressed by members regarding the discontinuation of the grant from the Youth Crime Prevention budget to the Youth Service and in particular the potential loss of influence and leverage were noted: the Leader indicated he would reconsider this proposal.

Capital Programme

- The additional investment in a colour print press would be offset by additional income: the anticipated payback period was five years. This investment would also provide greater flexibility and enable the service to take on more work currently done externally. It was anticipated that this investment and the work being undertaken through the Change Programme (Organisation Efficiency Stream) would yield savings in departmental budgets.

Other Matters

- The increase in the subscription budget was to reinstate the subscription paid to Local Government East Midlands which had been taken out of the budget in 2006/7;
- An Audit fee of approximately £60,000 would be charged for the Corporate Assessment;

- The budget line for Tourism related to the grant paid to LeicesterShire Promotions;
- The sum of £26,976 in the budget for the 'Political Administration Office' covered the cost of a secretary who provided support to the Leader and other Cabinet members;
- It would be difficult to disaggregate the budget for Public Relations and Design given the integrated structure of the service: efforts would be made to provide further information to members

RESOLVED

That the report and information now provided on the implications of the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the Chief Executive's Department be noted and the comments now made be forwarded to the Cabinet.

91. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2007/08 to 2009/10 - Resources Department Budget.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Resources concerning the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the implications for his department's budget. A copy of the report, marked 'C', is filed with these minutes.

In response to questions the Commission was advised as follows:-

Growth

- The additional £234,000 to meet the revenue consequences of the ICT Capital programme would be used to fund the following major items:-
 - Oracle Support and Maintenance (£44,000);
 - Disaster Recovery including line rental and hardware support (£97,000)
 - Networking Equipment Maintenance and support (£27,000)
 - Storage Equipment Maintenance and support (£31,000)
- The additional £190,000 for energy costs at County Hall reflected the new contract price and not additional use of energy: the findings of the Energy Review panel would be implemented in the coming years and this should reduce the usage and produce savings;

Savings

- The proposed savings in building maintenance were to be achieved as a result of a corporate review of property holdings and looking critically at those buildings which perform poorly.

RESOLVED

That the report and information now provided on the implications of the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the Resources Department be noted and the comments now made be forwarded to the Cabinet.

92. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2007/08 to 2009/10 - Overall Position.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive and Director of Resources which had been considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 11th January setting out the overall position on the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2007/08 to 2009/10. A copy of the report marked 'D' is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered a supplementary report setting out the comments of the Scrutiny Committees on the Medium Term Financial Strategy relating to their respective service areas. A copy of the supplementary report, marked 'DD', is also filed with these minutes.

The Director of Resources advised the Commission of the following changes that had taken place since the Cabinet report had been written:-

- A higher tax base which would result in an additional on-going income of £377,000;
- A higher Collection Fund resulting in a one-off income of £119,000;
- An additional requirement in relation to CRB checks for staff which would cost £36,000.

The Director went on to say that after taking into account the above and other minor changes to central budgets an additional amount of £475,000 was now available.

In response to questions the Commission was advised as follows:-

- There had been 567 responses to the on line questionnaire. Detailed information would be provided to members about the statistical validity of this sample size;
- No allowance had been made for the recent increase in interest rates given the volatility of rates and the need for sustainable budgets;
- The inflation allowance was 2.5%. Where inflation exceeded this general inflation assumption it was shown as a growth bid as in the case of energy and highway costs;

With regard to the views of the scrutiny committees the following points were highlighted by members but not necessarily supported by all members of Commission:-

- The proposed level of homecare and meals charges were a matter of concern;
- The proposed discontinuation of Sports Grants should be reconsidered in view of the likely impact this would have on individuals and groups;

- The ability to achieve the saving of £650,000 as a result of reconfiguring two elderly persons' homes as extra care homes might be optimistic as the savings were reliant on the receipt of housing association funding;
- Whilst recognising the need to consider the level of charges for post 16 and denominational transport there was a risk of disadvantaging people in rural areas;
- The budget did not appear to address in a clear and explicit way the major concerns of climate change and rural isolation.

The Leader indicated that the increase in available resources referred to earlier by the Director of Resources would allow the Cabinet to have regard to the points raised by the Commission and respective scrutiny committees during their deliberations on the budget and any other issues the opposition groups wished to put forward.

The Leader commented that whilst every effort had been made to produce budget plans over a three year period; much would depend on the proposals in the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

The Leader also welcomed the comments made about the poor LTP settlement which had resulted in loss of grant in the region of £2million in 2007/08 and hoped for cross party support in lobbying for additional resources in the next and subsequent years.

RESOLVED:

That the report and information now provided on the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted and that the comments of the Scrutiny Committees made be forwarded to the Cabinet.

93. Revenue Budget 2006/07 - Monitoring Report.

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

RESOLVED:-

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

94. Third Review of the 2006/07 Capital Programme.

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 'F', is filed with these minutes.

Concern was expressed regarding the level of underspend in the Adult Social Care and Community Services Capital programmes and the Director of Resources was requested to consider the whether the level of design and other resources available to these Departments were adequate to support their capital programmes.

RESOLVED:-

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

95. Gender Equality Scheme.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the draft Gender Equality Scheme and inviting comments thereon. A copy of the report, marked 'G', is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered a supplementary report setting out a summary of the responses received to the consultation on the draft scheme. A copy of the supplementary report, marked 'GG', is also filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:-

- a) That the Cabinet and County Council be advised that the Scrutiny Commission supports the draft Gender Equality Scheme;
- b) That the Commission's appreciation be conveyed to the officers responsible for drafting and consulting on the Scheme.

96. Application for Grant for Transition and Stopping Places provision for Gypsies and Travellers.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the decision of the Cabinet to apply for a grant to develop up to two transit sites for Gypsies and other Travellers in Leicestershire. The Cabinet was inviting comments before it made a final decision on this matter at its meeting on 27th February 2007. A copy of the report, marked 'H', is filed with these minutes.

The Chief Executive advised the Committee that following the completion of the technical studies by the Director of Resources, a specific site could be identified. It was likely that this would then be referred to the County Council's Development Control and Regulatory Board for a decision. Members of the Committee who were also members of the Board were asked to bear this in mind in making comments in relation to specific sites as they might be put in position where they could be regarded as having 'fettered their discretion' at a later stage. At this point Messrs Orson, Houseman and Legrys withdrew from the meeting and were not present during the discussion on this matter.

Messrs Bill and Wright attended the meeting under the sensitive issues procedure and expressed concern at not being informed of the proposals prior to the Cabinet coming to a view and of recent developments in relation to investigating particular sites in the Hinckley and Bosworth area as potential sites. The Chief Executive noted and acknowledged the concerns now expressed.

In reply to questions the Director of Resources and Chief Executive advised as follows:-

- The City Council had recently advised the Leader that they would be withdrawing the planning application for the site adjoining Leicester Forest East . The City Council would be submitting a bid to the Regional Assembly but would not identify a site until after a grant had been secured;
- The discussions with the Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council had not resulted in any suitable site being identified by them. The County Council had advised the Borough Council of its intention to work jointly on a bid: the identification of a suitable site was a matter for that Council.
- Consultations were taking place with the traveller community and local parish councils in relation to the proposed sites in Lockington and Hemington;
- The outcome of the research being undertaken on behalf of the County City and District Councils would be available in Spring 2007.

RESOLVED:-

That the decision of the Cabinet to submit a bid for grant for the development of a transit site for travellers in North West Leicestershire and to join with Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council in their bid for a grant to develop a site in the Borough be noted.

97. Report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Energy.

The Commission considered a report of the Scrutiny Review Panel established to consider the current strategy on energy and water usage in the County Council. A copy of the report, marked 'I', is filed with these minutes.

Mr D. Snartt CC the Chairman of the Panel introduced the report and commended the recommendations which would assist the County Council to reduce its energy usage and its carbon emissions.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Resources advised the Commission that he welcomed the report.

RESOLVED:-

- a) That the findings of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Energy and Water be supported and the Cabinet be asked to adopt and implement the recommendations therein;
- b) That a report outlining progress in implementing the findings be submitted in six months' time.

98. Dates of Future Meetings.

RESOLVED:

That the following meeting dates be agreed for the period up to the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2008:-

- Wednesday 28 February 2007 at 2pm
- Wednesday 28 March 2007 at 2pm
- Wednesday 25 April 2007 at 2pm
- Wednesday 20th June 2007 at 2pm
- Wednesday 18th July 2007 at 2pm
- Wednesday 5th September 2007 at 2pm
- Wednesday 7th November 2007 at 2pm
- Wednesday 19th December 2007 at 2pm
- Wednesday 30th January 2008 at 2pm
- Wednesday 27th February 2008 at 2pm
- Wednesday 2nd April 2008 at 2pm

2.00pm – 4.48pm
31st January 2007

CHAIRMAN

