

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 19 December 2007.

PRESENT

Dr. M. O'Callaghan CC (in the Chair)

Mr. D. R. Bown CC
Mrs. J. A. Dickinson CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. G. A. Hart CC
Mr. P. G. Lewis CC

Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC
Mrs. M. L. Sherwin CC
Mr. E. D. Snartt CC
Mr. R. M. Wilson CC

In Attendance

Mr. P. Herrington – for the item concerning Consultation on the Post Office Network Change Programme.

51. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2007 were taken as read, confirmed and signed as a correct record.

52. Question Time.

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

53. 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).

54. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items of business.

55. Declarations of interest.

The following members declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in the items concerning the MORI Survey and Consultation on the Post Office Network Change Programme, as members of Leicestershire District Councils:

Mrs J A Dickinson CC
Mr S J Galton CC
Mr G A Hart CC

Mr P G Lewis CC
Dr M O'Callaghan CC
Mr R J Shepherd CC
Mrs M L Sherwin CC
Mr E D Snartt CC
Mr R M Wilson CC

56. 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.

57. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

58. Report of the Review Panel considering the County Council's Environment Policies and Programme - "Procurement and the Environment."

Mrs M L Sherwin CC, Chairman of the Panel, presented the report and recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Panel on the Council's Environment Policies and Programmes in respect of Procurement and the Environment. A copy of the report, marked 'A', is filed with these minutes.

Procurement and the Environment was the first of 5 priority areas which the Panel proposed to review, the other 4 being:

Environmental Leadership;
Climate Change Issues for the County Council;
County Hall Waste Audit Action Plan;
Biodiversity and Water

In her presentation, Mrs Sherwin referred to:

- The tension between the need to make savings through improved procurement against the potentially higher initial costs of products that have lower carbon impacts;
- Examples of existing good practice, eg using suppliers in the construction industry who were accredited with ISO 14001;
- The Panel's support for any new construction projects by the County Council to incorporate efficiency and environmental procurement issues;
- The need for all targets to reduce carbon emissions to be credible and underpinned with action plans and strategies that are sustainable

A number of issues arose from the ensuing discussion and questions. These included the following:

1. The potential advantages of local purchasing both in environmental terms and in terms of enhancing the local economy; this had to be set against the context of EU procurement directives requiring an open competitive tendering process.

2. Fair Trade was included in the Corporate Procurement Strategy action in future years; the Panel had asked for a report on the Council's current position and what action would be needed to achieve Fair Trade County status.
3. It was noted that the Director of Community Services acted as Procurement Champion for the Council.
4. A system was needed to establish the Council's current position on environmental procurement to give members a baseline against which to measure progress in the future; this would be in place at the end of the next financial year when new national performance indicators on carbon targets were introduced.
5. It was important for members to have information about the potential environmental implications of proposed policies and strategies.
6. It was noted that 16 Procurement Category Managers were now in post. Their remit was to challenge the need for purchasing, to ensure good and consistent procurement practice and to work together on related procurement issues. £4.4 million worth of cashable savings had been achieved since the procurement strategy had been implemented and savings of £9.7 million were anticipated by 2009/10.
7. It was noted that ESPO was the first organisation of its type to produce a Sustainable Products and Services Catalogue, which was launched during Autumn 2007 and would provide a good starting point for further progress.
8. The introduction of a new electronic purchase ordering system enabled the Council to ensure that sustainable contracts were entered into.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report of the Review Panel be welcomed;
- (b) That the Action Plan contained in the Review Panel's report be approved for submission to the Cabinet as the appropriate way forward for the Authority to address Environmental Purchasing priorities;
- (c) That, for a twelve month trial period, all reports to Scrutiny Committees should, include reference to any environmental implications of the proposals they contain.

59. Change in the Order of Business

The Committee agreed to change the order of business shown on the agenda papers.

60. Post Office Network Change Programme - Proposals for Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive that outlined proposed changes to the Post Office network in Leicestershire contained in the Post Office Network Change Programme for Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland, which were the subject of a 12 week consultation closing on 10th January 2008. A copy of the report, marked 'C', is filed with these minutes. A supplementary paper summarising the alternative post offices available to customers for those post offices recommended for closure is also filed with the minutes.

The Committee also received a presentation that looked in more detail at the extent to which the Post Office's closure proposals matched up to their criteria. The Committee was informed that representations from local County Councillors had been received against the proposed closure of:

Bagworth Post Office
 Birstall Kingsgate Post Office
 Connaught Road Post Office, Market Harborough
 Tilton on the Hill Post Office (to be replaced by an outreach service)

With the consent of the Chairman, Mr Paul Herrington, Chairman of the 'Save the Post Office at Tilton on the Hill Campaign addressed the Committee. He referred to a range of concerns about the proposal to close the Post Office and to replace it with an outreach service of 10 hours per week:

- The outreach service of 10 hours per week would be inadequate compared to the 46 hours per week currently provided;
- The outreach service would not meet the needs of local businesses;
- The outreach service was unlikely to be viable commercially and, if this turned out to be the case, Tilton would eventually have no local service;
- The alternative Post Office at Billesdon was over 3 miles away and was not easily accessible on foot; people living in Tilton who did not work did not necessarily have access to a car.

The Committee raised a number of concerns about the consultation process, the proposed closures and alternative provision and the potential impact of the closures on local communities. These included the following:

1. There appeared to be no recognition of the value placed on Post Offices by local communities to achieve key priorities, including tackling rural deprivation, developing sustainable communities and promoting equal opportunity and access issues; if the Government accepted that Post Offices were a valued community resource then it should be prepared to subsidise the service;
2. It was difficult for the Council to offer objective comments as part of the consultative process without being aware of how the decisions had been taken on proposed closures; the consultation process needed greater transparency; The Committee expressed particular concern that post office managers had been given to understand that if a post office in one place was not closed as a consequence of representations received, this would result in the closure of another post office to be identified;
3. Proposed closures should be considered on an area basis rather than in terms of country-wide;
4. There appeared to be flaws in the criteria that had been used by the Post Office, for example it was unclear whether the number of visits or the scale of transactions had been taken into account; whether the impact of seasonal variations in custom had been considered or the impact of closures on local businesses and shops. It appeared that mistakes had been made by the post office, for example in proposing the closure of profitable post offices and post offices that had recently been refurbished;
5. There were doubts about the capacity of some post offices proposed as

alternatives to post offices to be closed to handle the increased business that would result;

6. The Council should consider what action it could take to ameliorate the impact on local communities that lost their local post office.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet be recommended :

- (a) To forward to Post Office Ltd all representations received from local County Councillors about proposed closures of post offices;
- (b) To consider the comments now made by the Commission.

61. Ipsos MORI Report on Resident Satisfaction in Leicestershire and County Council Action Plan

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive on the results of a review by Ipsos MORI of resident satisfaction in Leicestershire and the contents of an action plan agreed by the Cabinet in response. A copy of the report, marked 'B', is filed with these minutes.

In the ensuing discussion the following issues were raised:-

- Further research should be done to find out why residents' satisfaction with the Council is not higher in view of its good performance in the CPA and in individual service areas;
- Contacts should be made with other county councils that had higher resident satisfaction scores than Leicestershire to see if any lessons could be learned;
- Further thought needed to be given to how the Council communicated with the public, particularly in relation to explaining how it worked in partnership with other organisations;
- The Council needed to consider how best to respond to issues that were identified by residents as most in need of improvement, eg Activities for Teenagers and Traffic Congestion (reference page 6 of the Action Plan).

RESOLVED:

That the results and key messages arising from the review of resident satisfaction in Leicestershire attached as Appendix 1 be noted, subject to the comments now made.

62. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 30th January 2008 at 2pm.

rbk10.00 am - 12.13 pm
19 December 2007

CHAIRMAN