

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 5 June 2013.

PRESENT

(in the Chair)

Mrs. R. Camamile CC
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. S. J. Hampson CC
Dr. S. Hill CC
Mr. D. Jennings CC

Mr. P. G. Lewis CC
Mr. K. W. P. Lynch CC
Ms. Betty Newton CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC
Mr. L. Spence CC

1. Appointment of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that Mr. S. J. Galton CC has been appointed Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2014 in accordance with Article 6.05 of the Constitution.

2. Election of Deputy Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC be elected Deputy Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2014.

3. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2013 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

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

5. Questions asked by members.

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

6. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. Declarations of Interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

Mr. L. Spence CC declared a personal interest that might lead to bias in respect of Item 11 – Transport for Students at Faith and Voluntary Aided Schools as he had children who accessed transport to a faith school.

The following members each declared a personal interest in respect of Item 11, entitled Consultation on Proposed Changes to Transport for Students at Faith and Voluntary Aided Schools and Students aged 16+, Home to School Transport for Students who Change Address During their Final Year of Study and Concessionary Travel, as members of district/borough councils:

Mrs. R. Camamile CC
 Mr. S. J. Galton CC
 Mr. S. J. Hampson CC
 Dr. S. Hill CC
 Mr. D. Jennings CC
 Mr. K. W. P. Lynch CC
 Ms. M. E. Newton CC
 Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC
 Mr. L. Spence CC

The following members each declared a personal interest in respect of Item 11 as concessionary bus pass holders:

Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC
 Mr. D. Jennings CC
 Mr. P. G. Lewis CC
 Mr. K. W. P. Lynch CC
 Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

Mr. P. G. Lewis CC and Ms. M. E. Newton CC each declared a personal interest in respect of Item 12, entitled Equality Strategy 2013-2016, as Company Secretary and Member respectively of Human Rights & Equalities, Charnwood.

8. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

9. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

10. Leicestershire Supporting Families Programme - Update.

The Commission considered a report and presentation of the Chief Executive concerning an update on the progress of the Supporting Leicestershire Families (SLF) Programme. A copy of the report, marked 'Item 10', together with the slides forming the presentation, is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman explained that, prior to approval for the new Overview and Scrutiny structure being gained at full County Council later in June, the matter of the SLF Programme was being reported to the Commission as part of an interim arrangement. It was noted that the Scrutiny Commissioners would need to address the issue of where the SLF Programme would be considered in future.

Arising from the presentation, the following comments were noted:

- It would be possible to get an indication of what was being achieved through the Programme in approximately six months' time, particularly in respect of early intervention work. A new Performance Framework of key performance indicators had been developed for the SLF which would aid understanding of how successful the Programme was proving. Measurement of such a complex Programme was not easy and it was felt that, ultimately, the best measurement of success would be the extent to which families were being empowered to be less dependent upon public services because they were functioning successfully as family units;
- As a result of the Programme, a number of "hard" and "soft" outcomes were expected. Hard outcomes would be identified through statistical data, such as ASB incidents, use of GP services, reduced crimes, child protection plans and poor school attendance. Soft outcomes would be more difficult to measure, but would be indicated, for instance, through reduced service call-outs and children with up-to-date immunisations. It was pleasing that, thus far, only one family had refused the help offered;
- Family Support Workers, who would be working directly with troubled families, were required to have Level 3 NVQ as a minimum. Workers would have specialties in different areas, such as children and youth justice. Those who would be engaged in social work were required to have Level 5 qualifications as a minimum. In recognising the complexity of the work to be carried out, staff would work on a flexible basis to ensure that they were well placed to respond to issues outside of office hours;
- Staff would be allocated a small amount of funds to purchase bus fares and other low cost items as were deemed essential to contribute to improved outcomes for families. Staff would also seek to access available funds from charities and other funding sources known to them;
- The trigger point for families to enter the SLF Programme would be multiple issues in the family such as unemployment, drug and alcohol problems, poor school attendance, poor parenting and anti-social behaviour. Regular "hub" meetings were held in each district locality to bring together a number of agencies and discuss amongst officers which services such a family would benefit from. If more than one service was likely to be required, it was expected that the SLF would take ownership of that family's needs. It was noted that a family presenting with safeguarding issues would be dealt with by social workers within the Council's Children and Young People's Service;
- The SLF had a partnership-pooled budget for three years. Beyond this point, it was for the SLF to prove its success and then engage all partners in a commitment to continue the work to ensure it obtained the necessary funding to continue operations.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the approach taken to provide holistic support to troubled families via the SLF Programme be commended and that the update provided be noted;
- (b) That a further update on the performance of the SLF Programme be submitted to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny body in six months' time;
- (c) That a copy of the new SLF Performance Framework be circulated to all members of the Commission for information.

11. Consultation on Proposed Changes to Transport for (i) Students at Faith and Voluntary Aided Schools (ii) Students aged 16+ Schools and (iii) Home to School Transport for Students who Change Address During their Final Year of Study and (iv) Concessionary Travel.

The Commission considered a consultation exercise in relation to proposed changes to transport for students at faith and voluntary aided schools and students aged 16+, home to school transport for students who change address during their final year of study and concessionary travel. A copy of the consultation documents, marked 'Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

Mr. L. Spence CC, having declared a personal interest that may lead to bias on the issue of school transport to faith and voluntary aided schools left the room during the discussion on this matter.

Arising from the debate, the following points were noted:

Home to School Transport

- Clarification of the effect the Government's academies programme would have on home to school transport was awaited. For this reason, transport to academies had been omitted from this stage of the consultation process and would be dealt with at a later date when the consultation options were available in relation to the transport to faith schools, for students aged 16+ and those who change schools in the final year of studies. The outcome of the current consultation exercise would be reported to the Commission at its next meeting;

Concessionary Travel

- The basis for reimbursing operators who participated in the statutory Concessionary Travel scheme was an average fare for each route. "Smart Ticketing" would enable a greater understanding of how people were using services, however this would not impact on reimbursement rates, as these were embodied in the statutory scheme. Smart Ticketing was available on all major operators' buses in the County, though the communication of the data to back offices was not expected to be in place until 2014.

Consultation Methods

- A number of general concerns were raised in relation to the way in which the County Council conducted consultation with its residents. These concerns were

raised, not only within the context of the current consultation on transport, but also the Council's requirement to identify an additional £20million of savings and the associated consultation that would need to be carried out in the near future.

These concerns were expressed as follows:

- At present, the response rates for many County Council consultations were very low and it was questioned whether the results were sufficiently representative and therefore what weighting should be given to the response. It was important that local residents were aware that consultation did not mean a referendum. The text included in consultation exercises needed better to reflect the fact that people were being asked for their views and that these would inform rather than decide any outcome. It was also felt that this should be reflected in the feedback from consultation exercises that was passed on to respondents. The importance of meaningful consultation was stressed;
- It was felt that consultation should not be handled merely as an online exercise, as a number of local residents did not have access to the internet. By excluding this group of people, the number of potential responses was unnecessarily being limited by default. Whilst it was noted that those without access to the internet could request a paper copy of a consultation survey, there remained concerns as to how those without internet access were expected to be aware that any consultation was taking place;
- A clear case should be made for why demography information should be requested in surveys. It was felt this could be off-putting and add to the time commitment required to fill out a survey, hence possibly reducing response rates. The sentence stating that people did not have to include demography information should, in any case, be given more prominence.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That it be noted that the outcome of the consultation on transport to faith schools, for students aged 16+, students who changed schools in their final year and concessionary travel would be reported to the Commission's meeting on 5 July;
- (b) That the concerns outlined above in relation to the way in which the Council conducts consultation exercises be brought to the attention of the Cabinet as part of its discussion on the proposed consultation on the Medium Term Financial Strategy, at its meeting on 12 June.

12. Equality Strategy 2013-2016

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the Equality Strategy 2013-2016. A copy of the report, marked 'Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the debate, the following points were noted:

- There was a general recognition for the good work carried out in producing a robust Equality Strategy for the County Council and support for strengthening community cohesion and human rights within the Equalities agenda;

- If the Council did not adequately consider equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights in its service planning, it could face challenge. The importance of carrying out a rigorous Equalities Impact Assessments was stressed in this regard;
- It was suggested that the following amendments be made to the Strategy to ensure that it was realistic:
 - Page 4, paragraph 2: First sentence to be amended to read, *“We believe promoting equality, diversity, human rights and community cohesion is right because it contributes to ensuring fairness.”*
 - Page 5, paragraph 7: First sentence to be amended to read, *“Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that should be available to every person in the world.”*
 - Page 37, Case Study 12: It was felt that this should be amended to give greater recognition to the fact that, at present, not all of the Community Forums were an effective mechanism through which all geographic communities across Leicestershire were being engaged. It was noted that a review of the Community Forums and their role was due to be undertaken shortly.
- It was acknowledged that equality and diversity training for Councillors was integral to the implementation of the Strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the Equality Strategy 2013-2016 be commended to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 9 July, subject to amendment in the light of the comments now made.

13. Date of next meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 5 July 2013 at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 4.15 pm
05 June 2013

CHAIRMAN