



Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday 31 January 2002.

PRESENT

Mr. N. J. Brown CC (in the Chair)

Mrs. V. P. Bill CC	Mr. P. D. Boulton TD, CC	
Mrs. C. E. Brock CC	Mr. B. Chapman AE, CC	
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC	Mr. S. J. Galton CC	
Mr. P. A. Hyde CC	Mr. Mike Jones CC	
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC	Mr. J. B. Rhodes CC	Lt.
Col. P. A. Roffey DL, CC	Mr. N. J. Rushton CC	
Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC	Mr. R. M. Wilson CC	

By Invitation

Mr. H. Barber CC – Leader of the Council.
Prof. M.E. Preston CC – Deputy Leader of the Council.

70. Minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 16th January, 2002.

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th January, 2002 were taken as read, confirmed and signed, subject to the inclusion of Mrs. Bill CC in the list of members present at the meeting.

71. Questions asked by electors under Standing Order 35.

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

72. 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).

73. Any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

74. Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in respect of items on this agenda.

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no declarations made under Overview and Scrutiny Procedure.

76. Presentations of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that there were no petitions to be presented under Standing Order 36.

77. Capital Programme 2002/03 to 2004/5.

The Commission considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and County Treasurer concerning the proposed capital programme for 2002/03 to 2004/05. A copy of the report marked 'B' is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered the decisions/comments made by Scrutiny Committees in respect of the proposed capital programme. A supplementary report, marked 'BB', setting out the comments/decisions of the Scrutiny Committees is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mr. H. Barber CC and Professor M.E. Preston CC, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, who had kindly agreed to attend the meeting to answer questions on this and the next item of business.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the proposed Capital Programmes for 2002/03 to 2004/05 be welcomed and that the views expressed by the Scrutiny Committees thereon be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet.
- (b) That the development of a list of reserve schemes which could be brought forward in case of slippage in the main programme be particularly welcomed and it be noted that the system would enable planning and design work to be carried out in advance during the current year, subject to the availability of staff time and resources.

78. Revised Estimates 2001/2 Revenue Budget 2002/3.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive and County Treasurer concerning the Revised Estimate for 2001/02 and the proposed revenue budget for 2002/03. A copy of the report marked 'C' is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered the comments/decisions of the Health and Social Care, Education and Heritage. Planning and Environment and Finance Scrutiny Committees in respect of the revised estimate and proposed revenue budget. A copy of the supplementary report, marked 'CC', (Annexes 1 – 5) is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered additional information that had been provided and the request of Scrutiny Committees (Annexe 6) and the following two letters that had recently been reviewed:-

- (i) Letter from The Rt.Hon. Estelle Morris MP – Secretary of State at the Department for Education and Skills concerning the ‘passporting’ of education funding and the level of delegation to schools (copy attached Annexe 7).
- (ii) Letter from Mr. F. Straw – Leader of North West Leicestershire District Council setting out that Council’s position in respect of Concessionary Travel for disabled people (Copy attached Annexe 8).

Copies of these two letters and the additional information requested by Scrutiny Committees are filed with these minutes.

General Matters

During the discussion on the general issues relating to the budget the following points were made:-

Final Revenue Support Grant (RSG) Settlement

There had been some minor changes arising from the finalised RSG settlement, the effect of which was an increase in the RSG received by the Council by approximately £60,000. There would also be some other changes in funding and expenditure since the proposed budget had been compiled.

Consultation on the Budget

In response to criticisms from some members regarding the contents of the budget leaflet and the consultation process in relation to the budget proposals, the Leader reminded members of the consultation process undertaken when developing the Medium Term Corporate Strategy. The development of the Medium Term Corporate Strategy, including the consultation undertaken thereon, satisfied the requirements of the Constitution to consult on a budget strategy, because it established the priorities of the Administration and, therefore, of the budget process. The Leader reminded the Commission of other consultations that had taken place, particularly with schools and of the publicity in the local press.

The budget leaflet sought to provide information in broad terms on how the County Council was funded, the pressures on services due to increased cost and demands, the priorities in the Medium Term Plan on which additional expenditure was being proposed and the impact of these on the Council Tax. The Leader acknowledged the need to ensure that the leaflet sent out with Council Tax bills should seek to explain the reasons for the proposed increase in Council Tax as was always the case and the main reason why such leaflets were produced.

Comments/Decisions of Scrutiny Committees

During the discussion on the comments made by Scrutiny Committees relating to the budget the following new or additional points were made:-

Health and Social Care (Annexe 1)

Payments to Independent Sector Providers

The proposed increase in payments to independent sector providers of residential and nursing care at the different bands ranged from 4% to 5.3%. The increased payments were being made to reflect the additional cost being incurred by the care sector arising from the introduction of the minimum wage, working time directive, labour market competition and increased operational costs. The Commission was also reminded of the proposed new care standards for residential and nursing care to be introduced shortly, which would have an impact on the costs of care provision.

Direct Payments

The Commission noted an issue raised about the level of Direct Payments to disabled people and their carers. The Commission was of the view that this might be a matter for the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee to consider.

Education and Heritage (Annexe 2)

Snibston Discovery Park

The Commission was advised that a significant portion of the £167,000 growth in the Museums budget was to cover the shortfall in income at Snibston Discovery Park. The two main areas of concern regarding Snibston were the need to improve income and the need for substantial capital investment. The Cabinet was planning to carry out a review of the future of Snibston, which would seek to address relevant issues and consider options for the future management of Snibston. The additional provision in the budget was to ensure the continuing viability of Snibston, pending the review.

Leicester Theatre Trust (Haymarket)

The Commission was advised that whilst a Service Level agreement had been agreed with the Leicester Theatre Trust there was no commitment given to on-going funding.

The Commission was advised that the Leicester Theatre Trust had recently been awarded an additional grant of £450,000 from Central Government. Members were also advised of the current proposals by Leicester City Council regarding the development of a 'cultural quarter' in the City which could affect the future location and possible operation of the Haymarket.

It was proposed that a Cultural Strategy would be prepared. That Strategy would guide the development of theatre provision to communities in Leicestershire and the use to be made of services provided by the Leicester Theatre Trust would be reviewed at that stage.

Donington le Heath Manor House

Concern was expressed by some members about site security if the proposals to close the establishment during weekdays were approved and about the loss of a valuable educational facility.

The Leader advised that he had received representations from members of the public about the proposals and indicated that he would draw these and the comments made by Scrutiny to the attention of the Cabinet.

Planning and Environment (Annexe 4)

Environmental Management Scheme

The Commission was advised that the proposed implementation of this reduction in the budget would mean that existing schemes would not be abandoned but would be phased over a longer period of time.

The view was expressed by some members of the Commission that these schemes provided an opportunity for the County Council to take the lead in devising environmental improvement schemes with the possibility of some matched funding. The Cabinet was therefore asked to consider a relaxation of the rules governing the Shire Grants Scheme to enable the Planning and Transportation Department to adopt a more proactive approach, should the provision for Environmental Management Schemes be reduced.

Concessionary Travel

The Commission expressed its regret and concern at the decision of North West Leicestershire District Council not to agree to changes in the scheme so as to enable disabled people to take advantage of concessionary rate travel before 9.30am. and was of the view that the Cabinet should continue to seek agreement on this matter.

Combined Fire Authority Budget

The Commission noted that further discussions had now taken place with representatives of the Combined Fire Authority (CFA). The Authority would be considering a revised proposal at its meeting on 6th February and it was hoped that the proposed CFA budget would be one that the Cabinet could commend to the County Council.

Conclusion

It was moved by Mr. Rhodes and seconded:

- a) That the Cabinet be advised that the Commission supports the proposed Revenue Budget for 2002/03;
- b) That the views now expressed, together with the comments/decisions of the four Scrutiny Committees be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet and County Council

An amendment was moved by Mr. Wilson and seconded:

“That part (a) of the motion be amended to read as follows:-

‘(a) That the Cabinet be advised that the Commission notes the proposed Revenue Budget for 2002/03.’ ”

The amendment was put and not carried, 7 members voting for the amendment and 8 against.

The motion was put and carried, 8 members voting for the motion and 7 against.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Cabinet be advised that the Commission supports the proposed Revenue Budget for 2002/03;
- b) That the views now expressed, together with the comments/decisions of the four Scrutiny Committees be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet and County Council.

79. Date of Next and Future Meetings.

RESOLVED:

That the following meetings programme proposed for the period up to the end of June 2002 be approved:

Wednesday, 27th February, 2002 at 2.00 p.m.
Wednesday, 13th March, 2002 at 10.30 a.m.
Wednesday, 17th April, 2002 at 2.30 p.m.
Wednesday, 8th May, 2002 at 10.30 a.m.
Wednesday, 26th June, 2002 at 2.30 p.m.

31.01.02.
9.30 a.m. – 12.35 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

