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Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 3 February 2003.

PRESENT

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

Mr. D. C. Bill CC	Mr. P. D. Boulton TD, CC
Mrs. C. E. Brock CC	Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC	Mr. Mike Jones CC
Mr. A. M. Kershaw CC	Mr. D. J. Knaggs CC
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC	Mr. M. B. Page CC
Dr. D. Pollard CC	Lt. Col. P. A. Roffey DL, CC
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC	

In Attendance

Mr H Barber CC – Leader of the Council.

54. Question Time.

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

55. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

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

56. Any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

57. Declarations of interests.

There were no declarations of interest.

58. 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.

59. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that there were no petitions to be presented.

60. Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the outcome of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

carried out by the Audit Commission on all upper tier authorities in 2002. A copy of the report marked 'A', is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Chief Executive referred to:

- The background to CPA
- Changes in the process of assessment which had been introduced during the course of the inspection and lack of clarity about the scoring system.
- Concerns about some of the methodology used by the Audit Commission. For example, although the Social Services Department had recently been awarded three stars by the Social Services Inspectorate, it had only been scored three out of (a maximum) four for CPA purposes.
- His concern that the inspection had been too concerned with process at the expense of outcomes.
- His concern that insufficient credit had been given for work in hand, eg. on the Community Strategy, within the corporate block, whereas "refreshment" of scores had been allowed within the services block.
- The self – assessment produced by the Council as part of the CPA inspection process that had identified areas where further action was needed. This compared closely with the issues identified by the CPA inspection for further action.
- The process of refreshment referred to at paragraph 8 of the report had failed to take into account significant progress which had been made on a number of key issues, such as the development of the Community Strategy during the period of the inspection.
- A meeting scheduled for the following week with a range of Inspectors to discuss an action plan arising from the findings of the CPA inspection.
- The cost to the Council of preparing for and managing the CPA inspection and process.

During the ensuing discussion the following points emerged from questions and comments:

- Dr. Pollard expressed disappointment that the Council had not addressed its community leadership role as referred to in the CPA report. He suggested the Council's approach to developing a Cultural Strategy and lack of progress in developing arrangements for scrutinising NHS bodies as evidence. Dr. Pollard also said that the Council had never had a corporate strategy and that this was further evidence. In response, the Chief Executive reminded members that the Council had approved a Medium Term Corporate Strategy in November 2001, in part as a pre-requisite to developing with partners a Leicestershire Community Strategy. The Cultural Strategy was another

initiative which was being developed through the partnership approach. The matter had recently been debated by the County Council and, whilst he shared many of the reservations expressed by members about the Cultural Strategy, it had nevertheless been prepared in accordance with Government guidelines and was not something for which the County Council had sole responsibility. The Chief Executive also advised that Government guidelines on scrutiny of the NHS by local authorities were still awaited in final form but, in the meantime, preparatory work was being undertaken with the City Council and NHS bodies. District Council Leaders had been informed and they had given their agreement to the County Council's approach. The matter had also been discussed and the approach agreed between the Group Leaders in the County Council and at the Scrutiny Reference Group.

- Reference was made by Mr. Bill to weaknesses identified in the CPA report with regard to prioritisation, ambition, performance management and investment. The Chief Executive said that it was important to recognise that definitions used by the Audit Commission did not necessarily reflect everyday understanding of words such as 'ambition'. A common criticism of the Council in the report was in respect of an inability to concentrate on priorities. He said that this in large part reflected the political history of the Council and the realistic progress that had only been possible in developing medium term planning arrangements since the single party administration was elected in 2001. This led to discussion about the political history of the Council and the Chief Executive read out the paragraph from the (CPA) self assessment produced by the Council which he felt was a fair reflection of the position. He pointed out that the wording had been agreed at a meeting involving the Group Leaders and members of the Scrutiny Reference Group. The Chief Executive also stressed that the absence of political direction over a long period of time had led to an acceptance by the then Group Leaders and Chief Officers that the only practical way forward for the Council had been to concentrate on service delivery at the expense of corporate processes. In that respect he confirmed that the CPA score for corporate assessment and the overall CPA score were not unexpected. He instanced a number of corporate initiatives put forward informally and formally prior to 2001 which had not been able to command political support across all groups.
- Reference was made by Mr. Jones, Mr. Galton and Colonel Roffey to the importance of the CPA action plan or improvement plan. This would reflect service issues as well as corporate issues. The Chief Executive again referred to the action plan produced as part of the Council's self assessment and summarised current progress against the three main headings therein
- Mr. Barber, the Leader of the Council, believed that the Council could learn from the outcome of the CPA, although he felt that the process was flawed and that the timing of the inspection had been unfortunate in that a lot of progress had been made in the last six months, work that had been advised to the inspectors but which had not been taken into account in their scores. The Leader did not consider that it was appropriate to distinguish between corporate processes and service

delivery as these were inextricably linked.

- Mr. Galton raised the importance of community leadership and he believed that it was important that the Council exercised this role more fully. In response, the Chief Executive said that there were still major questions about how 'community leadership' was appropriately defined, but it nevertheless included as one key element the increasing involvement of the Council in a range of partnerships, a development which in itself raised major questions about democratic accountability and the role of locally elected councillors and the political process. It was important therefore that progress in these areas was not rushed and that there was a greater member understanding of what was happening at the present time.
- Reference had been made in the CPA report to the role and effectiveness of scrutiny in the Council. Members felt that by and large the references were fair. It was suggested that the relationship between the Executive and Scrutiny would be an important part of taking forward the CPA Action Plan/Improvement Plan.

Dr Pollard asked for it to be recorded that he disagreed with the accuracy of the paragraph read out verbatim earlier in the meeting by the Chief Executive from the Council's self-assessment.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (b) That it be noted that meetings are being held with representatives of the Audit Commission and various other Inspectorates to discuss the Council's Improvement Plan and the future areas of audit and inspection work; and
- (c) That the Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Commission looks forward to being informed of the content of the Action Plan in due course.

61. Date of next and subsequent meeting.

The Commission noted that:-

- a) The next meeting would be held at 10.30 a.m. on Thursday 13th February 2003 to consider the Cabinet's final revenue budget proposals;
- b) The subsequent meeting of the Commission would be held at 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday 5th March 2003.

2.30 p.m. – 4.04 p.m.
3rd February 2003

CHAIRMAN

