

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 13 February 2003.

PRESENT

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

Mrs. C. E. Brock CC	Mr. B. Chapman AE, CC
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC	Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. Mike Jones CC	Mr. C. H. G. MacLeod CC
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC	Mr. M. B. Page CC
Mr. G. H. Perkins JP, CC	Dr. D. Pollard CC
Mr. J. B. Rhodes CC	Lt. Col. P. A. Roffey DL, CC
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC	Mr. R. M. Wilson CC

By Invitation

Mr. H. Barber CC – Leader of the Council.
Mr. I.D. Ould – Cabinet Lead Member – Statutory Education, Early Years and Education Property.

62. Minutes.

The minutes of the meetings of the Commission held on 27 January and 3 February 2003 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

63. Question Time.

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

64. 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).

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

There were no urgent items for consideration.

66. Declarations of interests in respect of items on this agenda.

There were no declarations of interests.

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

There were no declarations made under Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules 16.

68. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

69. Revenue Budget 2003/04.

The Scrutiny Commission was advised that the purpose of the meeting to consider changes made by the Cabinet at its meeting on 11th February to the proposed revenue budget for 2003/04. The changes now made, compared with the budget previously considered in the Scrutiny process, were summarised on pages 26 to 28 and in Appendix B of the Booklet containing the report of the Cabinet to the County Council on 19th February 2003..

Mr. H. Barber CC, the Leader of the Council, Mr. I. D. Ould CC the Cabinet Lead Member for Statutory Education, Early Years and Education Property attended the meeting to respond to questions by the Commission.

The Leader of the Council advised the Commission that the Cabinet had agreed, at the outset of the budget process, that it would follow the government guidelines to “passport” the increase in resources for the schools block. The revised budget was in line with the government guidelines. He added that recognising the pressures on school budgets, owing to the very low increase in government funding in 2003/04, the Cabinet had decided to reduce the centrally controlled repairs and maintenance budget by £1million and to use this money to increase, for one year only, the budget delegated to schools. This decision had been discussed at the Schools Forum. The Forum had been advised that no commitments could be given to continue this funding beyond one year. In addition to this £1million, the Cabinet had deleted a saving of £100,000 to be made by education service units from trading with schools. The effect of this would be a lower increase in the cost of services bought in by schools, thereby benefiting the schools’ delegated budgets.

In the ensuing discussion the following comments were made:

- a) The proposed budget would cause some difficulties in schools. The Cabinet’s decision to delegate £1million, for one year only, was an attempt to mitigate the impact of the poor Government settlement for schools, which the Authority had received despite the extensive lobbying by the Cabinet and the F40 Group.
- b) The Cabinet recognised the need to ensure that school buildings were properly maintained. Whilst the transfer referred to in (a) above, would result in a reduction, for one year, in the repairs and maintenance budget this should be seen in the context of the increase in New Deal for Schools Condition Capital and the increase in schools delegated capital. Discussions had commenced with schools to develop a process whereby schools could contribute towards the costs of major repairs, taking into account the significant increases in the Delegated Formula Capital.
- c) The Cabinet had noted the concerns expressed during the consultation process regarding the proposals to delegate the SEN Statementing budget. The Cabinet was therefore proposing to retain centrally provision for high cost/low incident statements. The proposed scheme of

delegation of the SEN Statementing budget would be revisited during the coming year and the views of headteachers would be sought. Mr. Ould acknowledged that the County Council would not be able to instruct schools about use of the delegated SEN Statementing budget, that being a matter for individual governing bodies. However, through the advice and inspection process, the Authority would check that the needs of SEN children were being met.

- d) The Cabinet had taken into account the views expressed by Scrutiny Committees and the Commission in formulating its revised budget proposals for funding of schools and other matters and had agreed to delete the proposed saving of £30,000 on sports grants.
- e) With regard to the contingency of £125,000 for pre-9.30am concessionary travel for people over 60, the Leader acknowledged that the late notification to District Councils might cause some difficulties but he had advised District Leaders that earlier notification had not been possible. Whilst he hoped that all Districts would be able to participate in the proposed expansion of the concessionary travel scheme, he indicated that if this was not possible, he would consider whether it was feasible for it to be introduced in those areas where District Councils had agreed to contribute their share (50%) of the costs. In response to questions as to the proportion of costs to be borne by the County Council and the District Councils, the Leader explained that legislation placed responsibility for such schemes with District Councils, but that the Administration was committed to a concessionary travel scheme across the County.
- f) The level of Council tax increase at 9.3% was necessary to ensure essential services were maintained. The level of increase, which was above the national rate of inflation, was due to a number of factors including:-
 - i) The significant loss of grant to Leicestershire from the introduction by the Government of the new system of 'resource equalisation'.
 - ii) The higher inflation levels being experienced for services provided by Council across the country.
 - iii) The impact of the national pay settlement and the introduction of the job evaluation scheme.
- g) The issue of extending 4+ education, a priority in the Medium Term Corporate Strategy, had been discussed with the Schools Forum. The view of the Forum was that given the tight financial position facing schools and the additional resources included in the budget to fulfil the Governments' commitment of providing a universal nursery education for 3 year olds, an expansion of 4+ provision should not be undertaken at this stage.
- h) The saving of £15,000 in funding of Business Link represented the end of a planned one-year initiative to support rural businesses.

- i) The saving of £70,000 for the Leicestershire Development Agency (LDA) was in relation to the work which it currently carries out in relation to inward investment but for which funding from some partners could not be maintained. This work was now likely be undertaken under the auspices of the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP) and the County Council's contribution for support to the LSEP had been included in the base budget.

RESOLVED:

That the comments now made be drawn to the attention of the County Council.

70. Date of Next Meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting be held at 10.30am on Wednesday 12th March 2003.

