

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 1 September 2004.

PRESENT

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

Mr. B. Chapman AE, CC
Mr. P. A. Hyde CC
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC
Prof. M. E. Preston CC
Mrs. M. L. Sherwin CC

Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. Mike Jones CC
Mr. M. B. Page CC
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC
Mr. R. M. Wilson CC

108. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held on 23 June 2004, were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

109. Question Time.

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

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

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

111. Urgent Items.

The Chairman advised that he had agreed to consider the following report as an urgent item:

- Integrated Regional Strategy Framework.

112. Declarations of interest.

Professor Preston declared a personal non prejudicial interest in the item concerning the Rural Strategy as a member of the Leicestershire Local Partnership.

Mr. Wilson declared a personal non prejudicial interest in the item concerning the Local Public Service Agreement insofar as it related to improving the employment prospects of disabled people.

113. 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.

114. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

115. Progress on Implementing Leicestershire's Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA)

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Resources concerning the background to and progress against the targets included in the Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA). A copy of the report marked 'B' is filed with these minutes.

In response to questions the Director of Resources advised the Committee as follows:-

- (i) although it was doubtful that the Authority would meet Targets 1 and 2 it had been known at the outset that these would be particularly challenging as the Authority was already one of the best performing being in the top quartile of authorities.
- (ii) the results of the June 2004 GCSE examinations were being analysed and details would be circulated to members in due course.
- (iii) the PSA target figure relating to the employment rate for people with disabilities was a cumulative figure.
- (iv) the recurring problems with the accuracy of the data for the number of repeat victims of domestic violence (Target 8) was being looked at.
- (v) target 10 had been identified as a high risk as a number of Districts were in the process of changing or introducing new recycling arrangements.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress and arrangements for monitoring and improving performance on the LPSA targets be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Social Services be asked to submit a report to the Social Care Scrutiny Committee on steps being taken to improve the school attendance of children aged 11 to 16 who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months.

116. Scrutiny of the Welland and Leicester Shire Economic Partnerships

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the outcome of scrutiny of the Welland and Leicester Shire Economic Partnerships, the two strategic sub-regional partnerships (SSPs) operating in Leicestershire. A copy of the report marked 'C' is filed with these minutes.

The Chief Executive advised the Commission of the following information that had been brought to his attention since the report had been considered by the Scrutiny Reference Group:-

Scrutiny Panel of the East Midlands Regional Assembly

The Scrutiny Panel of the East Midlands Regional Assembly established to review the effectiveness of SSPs had recently produced a draft report which was presently confidential. That report made a number of recommendations including the need for emda to review the current SSP model, the geographic coverage of SSPs and clarify their roles and responsibilities with a view to devolving greater strategic freedoms to SSPs;

Informal views from officers of Lincolnshire County Council

From a Lincolnshire County Council perspective the issue of the Welland partnership was not one which caused great practical concern. Lincolnshire however shared the Council's view that the geographical logic of the area was not easy to understand.

Officers from Lincolnshire had indicated that they found the partnership to be somewhat introspective and not too willing to engage proactively with them. A "rule of thumb" had been agreed by the Welland Partnership with emda and Lincolnshire Enterprise (the other SSP in Lincolnshire) that its focus would be in the Stamford area with Grantham as the principal focus of Lincolnshire Enterprise. However, nothing formal had been established to this effect.

On the broader issue of SSP boundaries, the view from Lincolnshire was that there would be merit in reviewing them now as the SSP's had been in existence long enough for a meaningful evaluation of impact to be undertaken. Arguments could be advanced in favour of either administrative boundaries or economic boundaries. At the moment there is a mixture of both across the East Midlands which was potentially confusing and unhelpful.

RESOLVED:-

- a) That the issues identified by the Scrutiny Reference Group set out in paragraph 11 of the report and its conclusions set out in paragraph 12 thereon be endorsed and drawn to the attention of the Cabinet.
- b) That a report from the Commission be presented to the next meeting of the County Council proposing that the views of the Authority be referred to the following bodies-
 - the Government Office for the East Midlands;
 - the East Midlands Regional Assembly;
 - the East Midlands Development Agency.
- c) That the support of Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire be sought on the conclusions set out in the report.

117. Partnership Mapping.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning progress regarding the partnership mapping exercise. A copy of the report marked 'D' is filed with these minutes.

In reply to questions, members were advised that:

- (i) whilst mechanisms exist to monitor the establishment and involvement of the County Council in new partnerships the County Council was not entirely in control of the process as a number of partnerships were established as a result of Government initiatives.
- (ii) the outcome of the current review and any proposals for rationalisation would be reported to the Corporate Management Team and the Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress regarding the partnership mapping exercise be noted.
- (b) That a report on the outcome of the current exercise be reported to a future meeting of the Commission.

118. Leicestershire Rural Partnership - Rural Strategy Action Plans for 2004/05 and 2005/08.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP) – Rural Strategy Action Plans For 2004/05 and 2005/08. A copy of the report marked ‘E’ is filed with these minutes.

Members were advised that as a result of changes arising from the Government’s recently published Rural Strategy the role of the Countryside Agency in relation to distributing grants was to be transferred to regional bodies including Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) and the East Midlands Development Agency (emda). The development of the Strategy and Action Plans for 2004/05 and 2005/08 would assist the LRP in bidding to these regional bodies for grants for undertaking further work on parish plans and developing rural transport services.

RESOLVED:-

- a) That the Cabinet be advised that the Commission supports the Rural Strategy Action Plan for 2004/05 subject to the inclusion of a commitment therein that LRP activities to support the development and implementation of parish plans will encourage the adoption by district councils of the land use planning elements of parish plans as supplementary guidance;
- b) That a further report be submitted to a future meeting on the revised arrangements for funding for rural activities following the implementation of the changes arising from the Government’s Rural Strategy.

119. Integrated Regional Strategy Framework - Consultation Draft

The Commission considered this matter, the Chairman having decided it was of an urgent nature in view of the need to submit comments to the Cabinet for consideration and inclusion, if appropriate, in the County Council’s response to the Regional Assembly.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning a revised draft of the Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) Framework which had been issued by the East Midlands Regional Assembly. A copy of the report marked 'F' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:-

That the Cabinet be advised that the Commission supports the comments outlined in paragraphs 13, 15, 16 and 18 to 22 of the report, wishes to emphasise concerns that the document is not easily readable and recommends that consideration be given to the inclusion of the following additional comments:-

- i) that the Assembly be asked to indicate how it considers the IRS should be used by local and sub-regional bodies, what resources the Assembly will be making available to assist in the delivery of the Strategy and how progress on delivering the Strategy will be monitored;
- ii) that in addition to the points made in paragraph 21 the Assembly be advised that the document would benefit from improved presentation including pictures and graphics.

120. Additional Meeting of the Commission.

It was noted that there would be an additional meeting of the Commission on 8 September 2004 at 2.00 p.m. to consider a report on how the efficiency savings agreed as part of the 2004/05 budget were intended to be achieved.

It was further noted that there would be an informal meeting of the Commission on 8 September (commencing immediately after the formal meeting) to enable Members of the Commission to consider and comment on the draft Self Assessment required to be submitted to the Audit Commission.

2.00 p.m. – 3.25 p.m.
1 September 2004.

CHAIRMAN

