

SCRUTINY COMMISSION : 15 NOVEMBER 2006

**ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to give members the opportunity of discussing the establishment and terms of reference of a Community Engagement Scrutiny Committee. It is intended that this issue will be further discussed at a meeting of the Constitution Committee and then at the County Council meeting on 6 December.

Background

2. At the meeting of the County Council on 24 May 2006 in the course of considering re-structuring of scrutiny committees in the Authority, members expressed support for setting up a new committee to consider the emerging proposals for community engagement and community forums.

Current Position

3. A draft Neighbourhood Engagement Policy proposing the creation of Community Forums and prepared by the County Council has been the subject of consultation via Leicestershire Together with the main stakeholders in the county. The responses have been generally supportive of the principles proposed, including the establishment of the forums. It is now proposed that the implementation of the system of forums should be taken forward over the course of the next few months. A report setting out the proposals in more detail has been discussed by the Strategic Senior Officers Group of Leicestershire Together and is to be presented to the Leicestershire Together Board on 16 November. A copy of that paper is attached.
4. The recently published Local Government White Paper, 'Strong and Prosperous Communities', which has been circulated to members through the Members Information Service, contains key themes of working with partners to respond more flexibly to local needs and empowering citizens and communities. The work already undertaken by the County Council with partners in developing the Neighbourhood Engagement Policy and Community Forums should put the authority in a good position to respond to these challenges.

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5. The views of the Scrutiny Commission are sought on the terms of reference for the proposed new scrutiny committee. In drafting these Terms of reference, it is important to bear in mind the role of other County Council scrutiny committees in examining service delivery by particular County Council departments in response to local needs and the role of Leicestershire Together and the District Local Strategic Partnerships, which perform the role of being the “parent” bodies for the forums in the light of the multi-disciplinary membership of those bodies and, as a consequence, have a performance management role.

Proposed Terms of Reference

6. With the above in mind, the following terms of reference are proposed:-
 - “(a) To provide a point of reference for considering the role of the elected member as champion of the local community and make recommendations as to good practice.
 - (b) To review and scrutinise the development of the neighbourhood engagement policy
 - (c) To review and scrutinise the implementation and operation of community forums and other proposals for empowering local communities, including the County Council’s relationship with parish and town councils.
 - (d) To review and scrutinise the development of policies and procedures to ensure a flexible response to local needs of citizens and communities”.
7. The reference within the Terms of Reference above at paragraph (c) relating to the operation of the forums should include some assessment of their effectiveness in producing outcomes of real value to the community. It is not proposed that the scrutiny committee should be involved in a detailed assessment of the performance of individual forums. The role of the scrutiny committee will be to identify any problems of a general nature in the operation of the forums and the response of agencies and any lessons to be learned with a view to improving processes. This would appropriately involve hearing the views of other agencies.
8. In light of the fact that the arrangements for community forums remain at an early stage, precise proposals arising from the White Paper are yet to emerge and the County Council’s response has yet to be considered at Cabinet and/or Group Leaders’ level, it is proposed that the terms of reference of this committee be reviewed in approximately a year’s time.

Recommendation

9. The Commission is asked to comment on the proposed terms of reference with a view to formulating proposals to be presented to the Constitution Committee and to Council.

Equal Opportunities Implications

10. It will be important to ensure that the membership of Community Forums reflect the areas served. This has been recognised and the suggested membership of the Forums outlined in Appendix B to the attachment to this report seeks to reflect this.

Circulation under Sensitive Issues

None

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