

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 19TH MARCH 2008

POSITION STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Scrutiny Reference Group Meeting

We held a very positive meeting of this Group with the participation of the spokespersons on the Scrutiny Commission and the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees.

The meeting reviewed the work programmes of Scrutiny Committees and of the Commission as well as looking at the Current Forward Plan. (attached).

Of major importance for each committee will be work on the long term savings arising from the MTFS. It was suggested that each committee would have a workshop type approach to look at some of these blue sky issues and decide how it proposes to tackle these and what policy review panels it wishes to establish.

Review of Scrutiny

It is hoped to finalise the Review of Scrutiny being conducted by Steve Nicklen of Davidson, Nicklen and Associates and Jessica Crowe of the Centre for Public Scrutiny sometime next month. A workshop has been arranged.

It appears that for more than two years now Scrutiny has been under constant review. It is hoped that once this exercise is over some stability will be given to allow it to carry out its work for the Council. Prior to the Review considerable progress was already underway, particularly in developing the role of the spokespersons and on examining the work programmes of individual committees. One of the pleasures of working with the current Chairs and Spokespersons is their willingness to discuss openly and to adopt examples of good practice from each other.

The Review findings to date are that O&S has added value to the Council's work, but there is a general agreement that it needs to be developed further, focussing on what it has done best in the past and good practice elsewhere.

They concluded that this focus should be on process, behaviours and skills, not on structure and that changes may be needed in the Administration and officers as well as in Members involved in O&S. There was also a need to develop a shared understanding of the role of O&S, to involve O&S at earlier stages in policy formulation and to improve the coordination of the O&S work programme.

These observations are being in the process of being implemented.

Members of Scrutiny had examined various organisations, including visits, with a view to looking at best practice elsewhere. In Wiltshire the role of the Chair was to lead the discussion rather than 'chair' the meeting which allowed a more forensic examination of the policy under discussion.

South Somerset District Council was cited as a beacon council for community engagement. They had good examples of partnership working which could be accessed. It was felt that Leicestershire County Council needed a mechanism to link Community Forums to corporate processes

Nottingham devoted significant resources to an independent team of officers dedicated to scrutiny. The CfPS reported that the Democratic Services model of support for scrutiny at Leicestershire County Council was not the norm in Shire Counties. Last year's CfPS survey showed that 75% of Shire Counties had a dedicated scrutiny model. However, there was no evidence to show which model worked best.

Worcestershire run a model in which the themed committees had been abolished and Scrutiny was run by a committee which commissioned work to be done by task and finish panels. Members were not impressed with this model in which officers dominated the proceedings and which left non-executive members isolated from the work of the Council.

One of the most valuable visits was to the House of Commons to see a select committee at work and to discuss the arrangements for its meetings. Some of the lessons learnt from this visit will be fed into the scrutiny process.

Two key themes have emerged from the review as regards training, the first is the Chairing/Leading of meetings and the second is on 'Forensic Questioning'. Arrangements are in hand for both of these.

Performance Management

It was recommended that in future the scrutiny of Performance Management would be through a bottom up approach from the spokespersons/committees with items of overall concern being reported to the Commission.

Scrutiny Spokespersons

It was felt that the spokespersons have now developed their full role as envisaged in the structural review of Scrutiny agreed at the AGM in 2006. Spokespersons meet on a regular basis to discuss and refine the work programme of their committee, where possible agreeing items so as to enable the committee itself to focus on the more important issues.

Accountability

The job descriptions of the Chair and Spokespersons of the committees and Commission have been circulated for update. A discussion has been held on how to improve the accountability (whether targets, performance management etc) of those

responsible for scrutiny and the CfPS has been asked to assist in this. The next meeting of the Scrutiny Reference Group will be considering this issue and the advice from the CfPS. Unlike the Cabinet where the Leader 'hires and fires' its members, Scrutiny chairs and spokespersons are appointed by their political groups so their performance management by members of a different political party raises issues which no council has yet resolved satisfactorily. If done at all, most councils opt for performance management within their group.

Press

The Scrutiny Reference Group feels that more effort is needed on behalf of the Council to publicise the work of Scrutiny in the press. This is now underway.

Scrutiny Review Panels

Finally I would like to draw attention the work of two Scrutiny Review Panels which are currently looking at what I consider to be two of the key issues facing the Council and people of Leicestershire.

The first of these is the Panel chaired by Mrs Sherwin CC which is looking at the County Council's current response to the environment agenda and particularly the challenges of climate change. The Panel has identified as its work programme the following priority areas:-

- Environmental Procurement
- Environmental Leadership
- Climate Change – Issue for the County Council
- County Hall Waste Action Plan
- Biodiversity and Water

The Panel has reported on the first of these, Environmental Procurement and that report together with an Action Plan was well received and approved by the Cabinet.

The Panel is about to conclude the second part of its investigation, Environmental Leadership and I look forward to receiving their report at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Commission.

The second Panel was set up to 'consider the procurement of long term waste facilities'. This Panel chaired by Mr Jennings CC has:-

- looked critically at the decision making process used to inform the preparation and development of the Expression of Interest documentation submitted to DEFRA;
- considered the range of technologies that might be available to meet the Council's requirements for the treatment of waste;
- identified key issues which would need to be included in the next stage of the procurement process, preparing the Outline Business Case.

The Panel will be meeting again later in the year to consider the next stage of the procurement process.

What has been particularly pleasing about the work of these Panels has been the way members of all parties have worked together to address difficult issues and that the conclusions reached have been supported by all.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

Set out below is the current work programme for each overview and scrutiny committee up to the summer recess. Arrangements are now in place for each scrutiny committee to have meetings involving the Chairman and Spokesmen of Committees to plan the work programme. These meetings are attended by the relevant Cabinet Lead Member and Chief Officer.

Adult Social Care and Health

May

- Review of Charging policy
- Community Meals Review
- Departmental Service Plan
- Benefits take up by Older People

July

- Inspection of Older People's Service
- Personalising Adult Social Care
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Community Hospitals Consultation

Review Panel – Practice Based Commissioning

Briefing Notes requested on:

- Direct payments to Young People
- How transition issues are managed

Children and Young People

April (16th)

- Outcome of the Joint Area Review and Action Plan
- Purpose of the Youth Service/Youth Offer
- Secondary School Provision

April (30th)

- Children and Young People's Plan
- Progress on Implementing the findings of the Looked after Children Review

July

- Outcome of Review Panel on Attendance at KS4

Review Panel – Attendance and Achievement at KS4.

Briefing Papers requested on:-

- Development of a Children's Trust;
- Role of Local Authority in relation to Schools/Governing Bodies;
- Planning and Provision of secondary education in Leicestershire;
- Trust Status – criteria for applying and advantages/disadvantages for schools;
- List of internal reviews being undertaken within CYPS.

Environment

April

- M1 Junction 20 -21A Improvements (including possibility of Active traffic management) *{Highways Agency to be invited}*
- Performance of the new Planning system
- Waste Framework Core Strategy
- Highways Efficiency Review – Progress (report to include the issues on the operation of the Customer Service Centre)

June

- Diversion from Landfill – Progress
- Monitoring the grass cutting contract (incl issues of joint working)
- Contract monitoring and efficiencies
- Congestion – Transport Innovation Fund – Update
- Workplace Transport Plans
- Red Zones

Review Panel – Procurement of Waste Treatment Facilities

Community Engagement

April

- Neighbourhood Engagement Strategy – Update on Community Forums
- County Council Volunteering arrangements

June

- Stronger Communities – Consideration of this block of the LAA

Note:- The Committee has indicated its wish to review the operation of forums after twelve months with a view to considering best practice from within

Leicestershire and lessons to be learnt from elsewhere. Such review would also incorporate the issue of delegated funding.

Community Services

April

- Sustainable Community Strategy – further consideration
- Enforcement Programme for underage sales of tobacco products and aerosol paints 2008/09
- Feedback on the mobile library consultation exercise
- Review of key 2007/08 successes and priorities for 2008/09

July

- Update on the Review of Environment and Heritage Service
- Access and Storage at the Record Office for Leicestershire
- 2012 Olympics
- Linking the Departments activities to the SCS and LAA2
- Progress on Efficiency Savings

[The Chairman and Spokesmen of the Committee will be meeting to consider establishing a Panel to consider Country Parks and Green Spaces managed by the County Council and other partners and opportunities for collaboration. The focus would be in a particular part of the County, possibly the Charnwood Forest area.]

SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

Current Issues identified for the work programme

2nd April

- Sustainable Community Strategy
- CPA Action Plan
- Climate Change Review Panel – Environmental Leadership
- Capital Programme Monitoring Report

18th June

- Youth Justice Plan
- Draft Youth Crime Prevention Strategy
- Corporate Equality Plan
- Race Equality Scheme
- Q4 Performance

The following issues have been identified by the Scrutiny Commission which required further consideration.

**Scrutiny of the LeicesterShire Economic Partnership
Meeting with the Police**

Review Panels

Environmental Policies and Programmes

Office Accommodation Strategy