



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 1 SEPTEMBER 2009

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSIONERS ON 24TH AUGUST 2009

OPERATION OF THE NEW OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to set out the views of the Scrutiny Commissioners on potential issues which would merit scrutiny by a Review Panel or by way of a 'light touch' investigation by nominated Deputy Commissioners. It also sets out those issues which the Commissioners wish to consider further and their further thoughts on the operation of the Budget and Performance Monitoring Panel.

Background

2. Following the approval of a new scrutiny structure by the County Council, members were invited through their Scrutiny Commission Spokesmen to identify an initial list of potential topics which they considered merited investigation. These suggestions were considered by the Commissioners in the context of the scrutiny reviews undertaken in the previous Council and current priorities facing the Council including implementation of the findings of a number of reviews. All members will be encouraged to submit further ideas for potential topics to the Scrutiny Commissioners for consideration in due course.

Conclusions of the Commissioners

Review Panels

3. The Commissioners have concluded that the following areas would merit scrutiny by a Review Panel. The Commissioners were mindful that the initial review topics chosen related to the activities of the Highways Transportation and Waste Management Department. As such the Commissioners are of the view that the review of Bus Services should follow the completion of the review of Concessionary Travel.

a) Road Safety Measures

The previous review of road safety measures was undertaken in 2004. The Commissioners were of the view that it would be timely to undertake a review which focussed on the following:-

- Evaluation of some of the County Council's measures to reduce road casualties and suggestions of more cost-effective ways of doing so which would also produce better results. Three examples of the measures identified, include Vehicle Activated (VA) signs, street signage, and speed limits.
- Comparison of the County Council's use of and types of VA signs, street signage and speed limits with those of other authorities, and comparison of outcomes.
- Exploration of how emerging technologies may enable greater compliance with speed limits.
- Evaluation of how the provision of information can change behaviour, especially that of the age range 17 -24 years.
- Investigation of how far "greener" driving can improve safety.

The breadth of the proposed review led the Commissioners to conclude that the Review Panel may wish to further refine the scope into themed areas and to submit interim reports at the conclusion of each theme review prior to commencing work on the next theme.

b) Concessionary Travel

The Commissioners considered it would be timely to review the operation of the current scheme for concessionary travel for the over 60s and disabled people in order to better understand the problems and implications that the County Council would need to address when responsibility and funding for concessionary travel is transferred from District Councils to the County Council.

The Commissioners were of the view that work on this Panel should commence as soon as possible so the implications were known before decisions on the budget needed to be made.

c) Bus Services

This review would consider the current policy of the County Council to provide an hourly service to 95% of the population in rural areas. The aim would be to consider the impact and effectiveness (including cost effectiveness) of the policy and how the policy compares to that of other authorities. As part of the review consideration would also be given to the implications of developing Quality Bus Partnerships.

d) Flooding

This review would consider how the County Council proposes to respond to the findings of the Pitt Review and the implications of the new arrangements for communities prone to flooding.

'Light Touch' Review

4. The Commissioners have identified the following topic for a 'light touch review' i.e. where two or more Deputy Commissioners should meet with the relevant Chief Officers and partner organisations to obtain a greater understanding of the service area and report back to the Commissioners on whether a review panel should be established:-

e) The Council's Arts Collections

Two or more Deputy Commissioners to liaise with the relevant officers to get an overview of the County Council's Fine Art and 'Artworks' collections. This will include how the collections are currently managed, the cost of maintaining the collections, any covenants in place and the costs involved in obtaining market valuations of the collections.

Arising from their investigations the Deputy Commissioners will be asked to advise on whether it would be appropriate to invest resources in valuing the collections with a view to a policy of disposal of some of the collections. As part of their deliberations the Deputy Commissioners should consider the costs to the Council of maintaining those parts of the collections which had been donated and are covered by covenants and the implications of returning the art pieces back to the original donors or their families.

Topic deferred to later

f) Binge Drinking

The Commissioners noted that the Total Place Project pilot in Leicester and Leicestershire was focusing on drugs / alcohol as one of its key themes. The Total Place Project will:-

- examine opportunities for cross-organisational solutions to service improvements and efficiency savings;
- involve counting/mapping all public expenditure flowing through the place;
- enable understanding the relationship between centrally/locally directed resources and the impact on outcomes;
- enable the way joint working helps or hinders achieving improved outcomes to be examined;
- focus on a theme of particular local importance;

The final findings and recommendations of the Total Place project are expected by 19th February 2010. In view of this the Commissioners were of the view that it would be more appropriate for Scrutiny to await the outcome of this work before undertaking a review on this issue. This will avoid duplication of effort.

Issues to be considered further by the Commissioners

5. The Commissioners have also decided to explore further a number of other issues which may require the establishment of review panels or reports made direct to the Commission. These include a) how the Council is exploring opportunities for efficiencies through the shared services agenda; b) the role and timing of scrutiny involvement in the current exercise to procure a waste treatment facility; and c) recognising that officer time and resources are currently being employed to implement the office accommodation strategy, identify the appropriate time to undertake a review of the portfolio comprising Beaumanor Hall, Quorn Hall and the outdoor residential centre at Aberglaslyn.

Budget and Performance Monitoring Panel

6. The Commissioners also discussed further the role of the standing panel on Budget and Performance Monitoring Panel. The Commissioners noted that the initial focus of the Panel would be to consider quarterly data to obtain a better understanding of overall performance of the Council's activities and in particular, by use of comparative data, check whether the targets set are sufficiently challenging.
7. The Panel should also, over time, develop its own criteria for determining the basis on which it would receive detailed 'exception reports' (i.e. where performance or the risk of underperformance varies significantly) and delve into the reason for such underperformance. In addition, given the increasing likelihood that the County Council, along with all other public bodies, will be facing a period of financial restraint the Panel should play a key role in helping to identify potential efficiencies.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert procedure

None

Officer to contact

Mr M. Seedat



0116 305 6037



mo.seedat@leics.gov.uk