

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 23 SEPTEMBER 2009

POSITION STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Following the approval of the new Scrutiny Structure by the County Council at its last meeting, the three Scrutiny Commissioners have held several meetings to develop a work programme and consider the detailed arrangements for the effective operation of the Commission and Review Panels. The Commissioners are also monitoring the two standing committees, Children and Young People's Service and Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committees, to ensure that they have an overview of the whole structure. The first meetings of the Commission and the two standing Committees have taken place. The first meeting of the Standing Panel on Budget and Performance Review Panel is scheduled for 27 October. The next priority is to get the Review Panels up and running.

In July, Members were invited through their Scrutiny Commission Spokesmen to identify a list of potential topics for review panels which they considered merit investigation. I am pleased to inform Council that we had a good response and a large number of suggestions were put forward. It has been necessary for the Commissioners to prioritise the list and recommend an initial range of topics. These were formally endorsed by the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 1 September and terms of reference are currently being prepared. Deputy Commissioners have been allocated to Chair each panel and membership of the panels are expected to be agreed shortly.

The agreed topics to be investigated by Review Panels and topics identified for 'Light Touch' Reviews are appended to this position statement.

An indicative work programme has also been identified for the Scrutiny Commission and a number of presentations are planned at the start of the meetings, which will be open to all members. Issues to be considered between now and next April include the Leicestershire Place Survey, the new joint sub regional Economic Development Arrangements, the County Council's formal advice as Section 4{4} Authority on the Partial Review of the Regional Plan and of course the Medium Term Financial Strategy, which will influence everything the Council does over the next few years.

In conclusion, whilst I would have liked a speedier start to the new arrangements, the Structure of Scrutiny in Leicestershire has undergone significant change since the elections in June. Since Council approved the principles of the new system it has taken time to work out the details of how the Committees and panels are going to operate and develop a work plan. I believe we now have the necessary arrangements in place and can get on with the job of providing effective Scrutiny on behalf of the residents of Leicestershire.

Simon Galton

Review Panels

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

a) Road Safety Measures (Chairman Designate – Mr Shepherd CC)

The previous review of road safety measures was undertaken in 2004. The view was 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 Commission 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 (Chairman Designate – Mr Boulter CC)

The Commission 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 was transferred from District Councils to the County Council.

The work of 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 (Chairman Designate – Mrs Posnett CC)

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 (Chairman Designate – Mrs Page CC)

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.

f) Sex and Relationship Education

A Panel proposed by the Children and Young People Service Scrutiny Committee to look at the teaching of sex and relationship education, its effectiveness and impact on reducing teenage pregnancies.

‘Light Touch’ Reviews

The Commission also identified the following topics for a ‘light touch review’ i.e. where one 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 Scrutiny Commissioners on whether a review panel should be established:-

e) The Council’s Arts Collections

Messrs Hunt and Lewis were nominated 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.

f) Binge Drinking

Mr Hunt CC was requested to consider this issue and the focus of any such review in the context of the Total Place Project pilot in Leicester and Leicestershire which was focusing on drugs/alcohol as one of its key themes.

Note - 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.