

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall,
Glenfield on Wednesday, 27 January 2003.

PRESENT

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

Mrs. V. P. Bill CC	Mr. B. Chapman AE, CC
Mr P D Boulton TD;CC	Mr. D.R. Bown CC
Dr. R.K.A. Feltham CC	Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. D. Jennings CC	Mr. Mike Jones CC
Mr. D. J. Knaggs CC	Mr. P. C. Osborne CC
Dr. D. Pollard CC	Mr. J. B. Rhodes CC
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC	

By Invitation:

Mr. H. Barber CC – Leader of the Council
Professor M.E. Preston CC – Deputy Leader of the Council
Mr. R. Miller CC – Cabinet Lead Member – Job Evaluation and Property.

44. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 6 November 2002 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

45. Question Time

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

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

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

47. Any other items the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda

There were no urgent items for consideration.

48. Declarations of interests in respect of items on this agenda.

There were no declarations of interests.

49. 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.

50. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that there were no petitions to be presented.

51. Revised Estimates 2002/03 and Revenue Budget 2003/04

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Resources concerning the Revised Estimates for 2002/03 and the proposed Revenue Budget for 2003/04. A copy of the report marked 'A' is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered a supplementary report of the Chief Executive setting out the decisions and comments of all the Scrutiny Committees which had met in the previous week to consider the Revised Estimates for 2002/03 and the proposed Revenue Budget for 2003/04. A copy of the supplementary report, marked 'AA', is filed with these minutes.

Revenue Budget – Recent Developments

The Committee was advised:-

- (a) of the representations made to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister about the adverse implications of the new funding formula on Leicestershire, particularly in relation to education;
- (b) of the recent decision of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) concerning the treatment of post-16 support grant, the effect of which was to amend the baseline for calculating the 'passporting' figure and reducing the amount the County Council was obliged to 'passport' by a sum of £1.8million;
- (c) that the net surplus on the District Council collection funds which was now estimated at £1.19 million (an increase of £0.19 million);
- (d) that the final Revenue Support Grant figures would not be known until Monday 3rd February.

In the light of these factors, the Leader indicated that Cabinet would need to reconsider the proposed budget, which it intended to do on 11th February.

In the discussion on the issue of 'passporting', a number of members expressed the view, that, whilst acknowledging the pressures elsewhere in the budget and the effects on future budgets, the considerable pressures faced by schools should also be recognised and the amount included in the current budget proposals for the Schools Block should not be significantly altered. An alternative view expressed was that consideration should be given to utilising some, if not all, of the £1.8 million freed up by a lower 'passporting' requirement to reduce the level of Council Tax increase,

The Chairman indicated that at the Leaders' Meeting held earlier in the day it had been suggested that the Commission should meet again on Thursday 13th February 2003 to consider the Cabinet's final budget proposals.

Revenue Budget proposals

The Leader reported that the Cabinet, in formulating its budget proposals, had been mindful of the need to balance the requirement to maintain high quality services for the people of Leicestershire whilst keeping any increase in Council Tax to an acceptable level. He indicated that the Cabinet would consider the views expressed by members during the Scrutiny process.

In the discussion on other aspects of the Revenue Budget proposals the following comments/concerns were expressed by members:-

- a) the absence of any provision for the Common Admission Policy, one of the stated priorities in the Council's Medium Term Corporate Strategy, was regretted;
- b) whilst noting the rationale for the proposed increases in the payments to independent sector residential care providers, it was considered that all or part of the increase should have been linked to achievement of some quality thresholds/targets;
- c) the absence in the budget of any savings which had been identified in the Highway Network Review, in particular savings that were to be achieved from the rationalisation of salting routes and the introduction of thermal mapping;
- d) the proposed reductions in the Sports Grants and Hedge Laying budgets were regretted and these should be reconsidered.
- e) the absence of any growth for implementing the Cultural Strategy. In response, the Leader indicated that there were a range of cultural activities currently undertaken by various Departments of the Council. These would contribute to, and fall within the ambit of

the Strategy. Details of these could be provided to the relevant scrutiny committee if required;

- f) no provision had been made for undertaking Health Scrutiny. The Leader and Chief Executive advised the Commission that detailed guidance was awaited and that discussions were on going with Leicester City Council and other partners as to the best way to proceed. Once agreed, support for Health Scrutiny would be provided in the first instance from within existing resources. That level of support would be monitored and, if thought necessary, additional resources would then be sought.
- g) the cost of the introduction of a job evaluation scheme. The Leader advised that the need to introduce the scheme in order to address the anomalies of the previous wage structure and issues of Equal Pay had been recognised by all these political groups on the Council. He recognised the impact this would have on the budget.

Scrutiny of the Budget

The Chairman advised the Commission that it was his view, having observed the proceedings, that the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee had not fully considered the implications of the budget proposals. Mr Rushton, the Chairman of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee disagreed.

Outstanding Issues

The Director of Resources undertook to write to Mr Knaggs CC on the issue of delegation targets and in particular the proposals to delegated the SEN Statementing budget.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments made by the Scrutiny Committees in respect of Revised Estimates for 2003/04 be noted and drawn to the attention of the Cabinet.
- b) That the comments made by the Scrutiny Committees in respect of the Revenue Budget 2003/04 be noted and drawn to the attention of the Cabinet.
- c) That the views now expressed in relation to the Revenue Budget 2003/04 be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet.
- d) That the Cabinet be advised that the Commission proposes to meet again on Thursday 13th January 2003 at 10.30am to consider the Cabinet's final budget proposals.

52. Capital Programme 2003/04 – 2005/06

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Resources concerning the Capital Programme for 2003/04 and 2005/06. A copy of the report marked 'B' is filed with these minutes.

The Commission also considered a supplementary report of the Chief Executive setting out the decisions and comments of all the Scrutiny Committees, which had met in the previous week to consider the Capital Programme for 2003/04 and subsequent years. A copy of the report marked 'BB' is filed with these minutes.

In response to questions the Commission was advised as follows:-

- a) the Cabinet had yet to consider the schemes to be progressed in the second phase of the Better Access to Better Services Initiative;
- b) the actual spend on the 2002/03 capital programme was 93%, with the slippage primarily in the Education Capital programme;
- c) the focus of design work was on delivering the priority schemes included in the expanded programme. An increase in the minor works programme was likely to be the option that would be pursued in the event of significant slippage;
- d) consideration would be given providing more details about the highways capital programme at an earlier stage.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the comments made by the Scrutiny Committees in respect of the Capital Programme for 2003/04 and subsequent years be noted and drawn to the attention of the Cabinet.
- b) That the views now expressed in relation to the Capital Programme for 2003/04 and subsequent years be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet.

53. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held at 2.30 p.m. on Monday 3 February 2003.

CHAIRMAN

2.00 p.m. – 3.54 p.m.
27/1/03