

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall,  
Glenfield on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2003.

PRESENT

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

Mr D C Bill CC	Mr P D Boulton TD CC
Mrs C E Brock CC	Dr R K A Feltham CC
Mr S J Galton CC	Mr Mike Jones CC
Mr A M Kershaw CC	Mr D J Knaggs CC
Mr P C Osborne CC	Mr M B Page CC
Dr D Pollard CC	Lt Col P A Roffey DL CC

Mr N J Rushton CC

In Attendance

Mr H Barber CC – Leader of the Council

54. Question Time

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

55. 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).

56. Any other items the Chairman has decided to take as urgent

There were no urgent items for consideration.

57. Declarations of interests.

There were no declarations of interests.

58. 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.

59. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

60. Comprehensive Performance Assessment

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the outcome of the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) carried out by the Audit Commission on all upper tier authorities in 2002. A copy of the report marked 'A', is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Chief Executive referred to:

- Concerns about some of the methodology used by the Inspectors. For example, although the Social Services Department had recently been awarded three stars by the Social Services Inspectorate, it had only been scored three out of four by the CPA.
- His concern that the inspection was too concerned with process
- His concern that insufficient recognition had been given to the progress made by the current political administration after a long period during which there had been a hung council followed by a joint administration.
- The self – assessment produced by the Council as part of the CPA inspection process that had identified areas where further action was needed. This compared closely with the issues identified by the CPA inspection for further action
- A meeting next week with the Inspectors to discuss the action plan arising from the findings of the CPA inspection.

During the ensuing discussion the following points emerged from questions and comments:

- Some members expressed disappointment that the Council had not addressed weaknesses identified in the report. For example, it was suggested that the Council's failure to address its Community Leadership role had been demonstrated by its approach to developing a Cultural Strategy and the lack of progress in developing arrangements for scrutinising the National Health Service. In response, the Chief Executive commented that the County Council was developing its role in Community Leadership through the Leicestershire Community Partnership and the adoption of the Medium Term Corporate Strategy. The Cultural Strategy was a partnership issue and not one in which the County Council had sole responsibility. Progress with Scrutiny of the NHS had necessarily been delayed by the wait for further national guidance and the need to work in partnership with other authorities such as Leicester City Council.

- Reference was made to the weaknesses identified with regard to prioritisation, ambition, performance management and investment. The Chief Executive acknowledged that work needed to be done on performance management but felt that real progress was being made on the other issues. He read out a paragraph from the self-assessment that he felt was a fair reflection of the difficulties that had faced the Council in making progress on corporate governance before the present administration was elected in June 2001. These difficulties had forced the Council to concentrate on service delivery and service issues.
- Whilst it was acknowledged that the Council had scored highly on service delivery, work still had to be done to raise standards of service delivery higher. Work had to be done on addressing weaknesses identified by the Inspectors in corporate governance. Some of these weaknesses might be perceived rather than real and might require the Council to re-examine how it explained its actions to the public. It was recognised that the adoption of the Medium Term Corporate Strategy, Re-structuring of departments and the introduction of the Job Evaluation Scheme were signs that encouraging progress was being made.
- Mr Barber, the Leader of the Council, hoped that the Council could learn from the outcomes of the CPA inspection, although he felt that the process had been flawed and that the timing of the inspection had been unfortunate in that a lot of progress had been made since June 2001. He did not consider that it was appropriate to distinguish between the corporate processes and service delivery as these were inextricably linked.
- It was suggested that the inspection had shown that the Council delivered good services where these followed Government guidelines and where there was adequate funding, but that the Council needed to go beyond this to address community leadership and to be willing to learn from best practice in other local authorities. There were also issues to address about the role and effectiveness of scrutiny.
- It was suggested that work had to be done to determine the political processes required to create an effective relationship between the Executive and Scrutiny in the development of policy and to address the issues identified by the CPA inspection.

Dr Pollard asked for it to be recorded that he disagreed with the accuracy of the statement read out earlier in the meeting by the Chief Executive from the Council's self-assessment.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted;

- (b) That it be noted that meetings are being held with representatives of the Audit Commission and various other Inspectorates to discuss the Council's Improvement Plan and the future areas of audit and inspection work; and
- (c) That the Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Commission looks forward to being informed of the content of the Action Plan in due course.

61. Date of next and subsequent meeting

The Commission noted that:-

- a) The next meeting would be held at 10.30 a.m. on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2003 to consider the Cabinet's final revenue budget proposals;
- b) The subsequent meeting of the Commission would be held at 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2003.

2.30 p.m. – 4.04pm  
3<sup>rd</sup> February 2003

CHAIRMAN