

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 5 November 2003.

PRESENT

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

Mr. B. Chapman AE, CC
Mr. B. Garner, CC
Mr. D. Jennings CC
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC
Prof. M. E. Preston CC
Mr. R. M. Wilson CC

Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. P. A. Hyde CC
Mr. Mike Jones CC
Dr. D. Pollard CC
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC
Mr. P. G. Winkless CC

By Invitation

Mr. J.B. Rhodes – Cabinet Lead Member for Community Safety.

27. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th June having been previously circulated were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

28. Question Time.

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

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

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

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

There were no urgent items for consideration.

31. Declarations of interest.

There were no declarations of interests by members.

32. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the Party Whip.

33. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

34. Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements in Leicestershire(b.

The Commission considered a report of the District Audit Services on their recent review of the overview and scrutiny function. A copy of the report marked 'B' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr. S. Wheldon, a Senior Specialist in the District Audit Service who had carried out a review of overview and scrutiny arrangements.

Mr. Wheldon introduced the report by stating that the findings of the study painted a generally positive picture of scrutiny in Leicestershire. The County Council had done a great deal of thinking on the role of scrutiny within the new political structure and had established appropriate structures and systems to undertake this function. The introduction of five member panels to conduct in depth scrutiny of particular topics was a positive development. The officer/member working relationships were also good.

The report identified a number of areas for improvement principally in relation to members taking a more proactive role in setting work programmes and placing greater emphasis on the scrutiny of external bodies and the involvement of external stakeholders and experts in scrutiny activity.

In the discussion that followed members of the Commission:

- noted the need to undertake scrutiny of some key external bodies which have a bearing on the lives of the people of Leicestershire. Elsewhere on the agenda was a report on regional and sub-regional economic bodies. This aspect of scrutiny had proved to be difficult and frustrating as (a) most members did not have a sufficient understanding of regional and sub-regional structures; (b) scrutiny could not compel the organisations to attend; (c) many external bodies had elected members serving on them and there were issues about the role of scrutiny in these circumstances.
- endorsed comments made about the need to get the views of external stakeholders and considered that there may be a role for the voluntary sector and others in assisting in this.
- were of the view that the existing officer support appeared adequate particularly as the staff involved could commission research from elsewhere within the organisation to assist the scrutiny process. [A minority view was expressed that future consideration should be given to the creation of a post of a separate dedicated research officer].
- considered that the call-in procedure had not been used as most, if not all, major proposals put forward by the Cabinet had been the subject or prior comment/consultation. In addition there were other more appropriate means for opposition groups to register their concern for example by way of a notice of motion.
- noted and endorsed the need to develop a more selective approach to the scrutiny of plans and strategies in the Policy Framework.

- noted the need to involve the Leader, at an appropriate stage, in the preparation of the Action Plan in response to the recommendation in the Audit report.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report of the District Audit on the operation of the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements in Leicestershire, be noted.
- (b) That the Scrutiny Reference Group be asked to consider and develop an Action Plan in response to the findings of the Audit Report.
- (c) That a draft Action Plan be submitted to the next meeting of the Commission.

35. Draft Job Description for Chairman and Spokesmen of Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning a draft job description for Chairmen and Spokesmen of overview and scrutiny bodies. A copy of the report marked 'C' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the draft job description for Chairmen and Spokesmen of Overview and Scrutiny bodies be approved.
- (b) That the agreed job description be drawn to the attention of the Independent Panel on Members' Allowances.

36. Partnership Mapping.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning progress regarding the partnership mapping exercise. A copy of the report marked 'D' is filed with these minutes.

Members were advised that the analysis would seek to identify gaps in provision as well as areas of duplication.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress regarding the partnership mapping exercise be noted.
- (b) That the concern of the Commission be drawn to the attention of those partnership bodies who have failed to return the questionnaire.

37. Regional Institutions and Policy in the East Midlands.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which set out recent developments at regional level and summarised the roles and responsibilities of regional institutions and agencies in the East Midlands. A copy of the report marked 'E' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted and circulated to all members via the Members' Information Service.
- (b) That the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership and the Welland Partnership be invited to make a presentation to a future meeting of the Commission on their role and processes for allocating funding.
- (c) That following his appointment as Chairman of the Regional Assembly the Leader of the Council be invited to attend a future meeting of the Commission to talk about the role of the Assembly and in particular arrangements for scrutiny of Sub-Regional Strategic Partnerships (SSPs).

38. Community Safety Best Value Review

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the outcome of the Best Value Review of Community Safety. A copy of the report marked 'F' and supplementary report marked 'F1' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mr. J.B. Rhodes the Cabinet Lead Member for Community Safety, who had kindly agreed to attend the meeting to assist the Commission in its deliberations on this item and on the following item – The Community Safety Plan.

In reply to questions and comments the Cabinet Lead Member advised that the delay in completing the Best Value Review was in part due to the overly ambitious nature of the review and the need to ensure all the partners were fully involved in the process.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet be advised that the Commission endorses the findings of the Community Safety Best Value Review and notes the actions taken and those currently on-going in response to the Review.

39. Community Safety Plan.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the Community Safety Plan. A copy of the report marked 'G' and supplementary report marked 'G1' is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member in introducing the report referred to the findings of various surveys that indicated that Leicestershire people had identified feeling safe at home and safe within their local communities as a key priority. The Medium Term Corporate Strategy had attached a high priority to partnership working to reduce the fear of crime in local communities and the Community Safety Plan provided the strategy through which the Authority would seek to address this issue.

In reply to questions and comments the Cabinet Lead Member advised that the:

- introduction of Community Service Officers to work alongside the Police had been successful in trials. The Home Office funding for these posts would cease in approximately 2 years' time. The position of the County Council was that, given its own financial difficulties, it would not be able to assist the Police in the on-going funding of these posts. It was likely that the cost of introducing a sufficiently large number of Community Service Officers to have a major impact would have to be borne by the Council tax payer;
- 2003/04 budget had included revenue growth of £250,000 and £100,000 capital. A report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Commission on how this growth had been utilised;
- composition of the proposed Community Safety Board and the level of representation from the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs). He assured the Commission that the Board was intended to add value to the work of CDRPs by bringing together the criminal justice and crime and disorder agendas and priorities so that common concerns could be tackled more effectively.

It was moved by Mr. Rushton and seconded by Mr. Jennings:

“That the Cabinet be advised that the Commission supports the approval of the Community Safety Plan.”

An amendment was moved by Mr. Jones and seconded by Mr. Brown:

“That the following be added to the motion:

- (b) believes that the structures to be put in place must facilitate genuine partnership working across the County and with the District based Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships;
- (c) believes that the membership of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland community Safety Board should include a directly appointed representative from each District Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.’ ”

The amendment was put and not carried 5 members voting for the amendment and 8 against.

An amendment was moved by Mr. Osborne and seconded:-

“That the following be added to the motion:

- (b) believes that the structures to be put in place must facilitate genuine partnership working across the County and with the District based Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.”

The mover of the motion with the concurrence of his seconder and consent of the Commission accepted the amendment.

The motion as amended was put and carried 8 members voting for and none

against.

40. Date of Next Meeting

The Commission noted:

- a) That the next meeting would be held at 2.00 p.m. on Wednesday 7th January, 2003.
- b) That subject to responses received from the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership and the Welland Partnership (see Minute 37(b) above) a special meeting of the Commission may need to be convened.

CHAIRMAN

2.00 p.m. – 4.17 p.m.
5th November, 2003

