

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 7 January 2004.

PRESENT

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

Mr. B. Chapman AE, CC
Mr. P. A. Hyde CC
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC

Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. Mike Jones CC
Prof. M. E. Preston CC
Mr. R. M. Wilson CC

By Invitation

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

41. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November having been previously circulated were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

42. Question Time.

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

43. 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).

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

The Chairman reported that he had agreed to take as an urgent item an oral report on arrangements for scrutiny of the budget.

45. Declarations of interest.

There were no declarations of interests by members.

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

There were no declarations of the Party Whip

47. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

48. Change in order of business.

The Chairman sought and obtained the Committee's consent to change the order of business from the circulated agenda.

49. Arrangements for scrutiny of the 2004/05 budget proposals.

The Commission considered this matter, the Chairman having decided it was of an urgent nature, in view of the need to agree arrangements for scrutiny of the budget proposals for 2004/05.

The Director of Resources reported that as a result of the recent announcement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding extra funding for local authorities, coupled with the Government's expectation of low, single-figure Council Tax rises, the Cabinet had had to reconsider its medium term budget strategy. In addition, the late announcement of the capital expenditure guidelines and the lack of a clear response from the DfES to the request for a supplementary capital allocation in relation to the Integrid schools had made it extremely difficult for the Cabinet to determine its final budget proposals. The Cabinet had indicated that it hoped to agree budget proposals at its meeting on 27th January.

The Chairman of the Commission reported that at a meeting involving himself the Leader of the Council and the Commission Spokesmen the following process had been suggested for scrutiny of the budget:

- Presentation of the Cabinet's draft budget to all members of the County Council - Wednesday 28 January (after the County Council meeting)
- Meeting of the Scrutiny Chairmen and Spokespersons - Wednesday 28 January (after the budget presentation)
- Informal meetings involving the Chairman and Spokesmen of each Scrutiny Committee and the appropriate Cabinet Lead Member(s) and Chief Officer(s). - To be held during the week commencing 2 February

[The purpose of these meetings would be to brief Chairmen and Spokesmen of the budget relating to the Committee's service area. Chairmen and Spokesmen would then seek to identify the key issues which they considered would merit public scrutiny and draw these to the attention of the Commission. A note of the key issues identified by Scrutiny members would be produced and submitted to the Commission].

- Meeting of the Scrutiny Commission - Monday 9 February 2003 at 2.00 p.m.

[The Chairmen and Spokesmen of each Scrutiny Committee would be given the opportunity to attend the meeting and discuss the key issues they had identified during their discussions with the Cabinet Lead Members/Chief Officers. There would also be an opportunity for other members to submit written or make oral representation to the Commission].

- Cabinet - Monday 16 February

[The Cabinet would be asked to determine its final recommendations to be put to the County Council, having regard to any comments received].

- County Council Meeting - Wednesday 25 February

The Chairman reported that he had concerns about the process, because Scrutiny Committees were not meeting formally to consider the budget proposals. He had been assured that this process was necessary because of the particular circumstances outlined by the Director of Resources and that it was not envisaged that these circumstances would arise in future years.

Members of the Commission echoed the Chairman's concerns and in particular raised concerns that the members were being sidelined by the process. Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Spokesmen were urged to discuss the proposals with their colleagues so as to ascertain their views/concerns which they could then raise at the informal meetings with Cabinet Lead Members and Chief Officers.

RESOLVED:

That the arrangements for scrutiny of the 2004/05 budget as now outlined be noted.

50. Youth Crime Prevention and Reduction.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the spending decisions made to date from the additional revenue budget and capital programme provision for youth crime prevention and reduction initiatives and proposals for spending in 2004/05. A copy of the report marked 'C' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mr. J.B. Rhodes CC, 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.

Mr. Rhodes introduced the report and advised the Commission that additional revenue resources of £250,000 and capital resources of £100,000 had been made available in the 2003/04 budget. Given the late start on the programme and the difficulties in recruiting it had not been possible to commit all of these funds. The capital provision had not been required in the current financial year.

In the ensuing discussion the following comments/concerns were made:

- (i) doubts were expressed as to whether Community Groups and Parish Councils were aware of the existence of funds to purchase one-off equipment. There was concern that there appeared to be no clear criteria for the allocation of funds. Mr. Rhodes advised the Commission that the availability of funding for equipment and other projects had been made known to all District based Crime Reduction Partnerships and that he accepted that over time it would be appropriate to develop criteria.
- (ii) whilst welcoming the additional funding for extending Youth Work Service in the summer holiday period, members were concerned to ensure that the use of such funding was carefully monitored and not used to support services which should normally be funded from the mainstream Youth budget.
- (iii) given the current position on the 2003/04 budget which had been reported as being overspent and the pressures on the 2004/05 budget there was concern at the assumption being made in the paper that the underspends would be carried forward into 2004/05.
- (iv) whilst welcoming the commitment to undertake monitoring and evaluation of projects funded (paragraph 22 of the report) concerns remained that there appeared to be no clear aims, objectives and performance measures against which the projects would be evaluated. Mr. Rhodes agreed that there was a need for effective monitoring and evaluation process to be developed over time.
- (v) the view was expressed by some members that the resources allocated to the projects outlined in the report should have been used to fund additional Community Support Officers. Mr. Rhodes emphasised the need for a locally based approach to the appointment and work of CSO's and to the availability of funding from district and parish councils.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That a further report be submitted to the Commission in six months time setting out:
 - (i) details of the schemes/projects funded;
 - (ii) the aims and objectives of each project/scheme and their perceived impact at the time of funding;
 - (iii) an initial analysis of the impact and effectiveness of each project/scheme.

51. District Audit Study of the Overview and Scrutiny Function in Leicestershire - Action Plan.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive setting out a draft Action Plan prepared in response to the District Audit findings in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny Function in Leicestershire. A copy of the report marked

'B' is filed with these minutes.

The Chief Executive reported that some minor changes would need to be made to the Action Plan to reflect actions that had already been taken on certain matters.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the draft Action Plan set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved and that the Chief Executive be authorised to amend the Action Plan in relation to those areas where action has already been taken.
- b) That the actions set out in paragraph 6 and 7 of the report which set out the proposed actions in response to the key themes emerging in the Audit report be noted.

52. Half Year Progress against commitments in the Medium Term Corporate Strategy and County Strategy.

The Commission considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Resources concerning progress to the end of September against the commitments made in the Medium Term Corporate Strategy and Community Strategy. A copy of the report marked 'D' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

53. Date of Next Meeting.

RESOLVED

That the next meeting of Commission be held at 2.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 9th February, 2003 to consider the Cabinet's proposals on the Revenue Budget 2004/05 and Capital Programme 2004/07.

2.00 p.m. – 3.55 p.m.
7th January 2004.

CHAIRMAN

