Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 28 April 2004.

PRESENT

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

Mr. B. Chapman AE, CC
Mr. Mike Jones CC
Mr. M. B. Page CC
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC
Mr. R. M. Wilson CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC
Prof. M. E. Preston CC
Mrs. M. L. Sherwin CC

By Invitation

Mr. R. Miller CC – Deputy Leader of the Council.

83. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held on 5 April 2004, were taken as read, confirmed and signed as a correct record.

84. Question Time.

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

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

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

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

There were no other items of urgent business.

87. Declarations of interest.

The following members declared a non prejudicial personal interests in the item concerning – 'Working with Town and Parish Councils' as Members of Parish or Town Councils:-

Mr. Brown, Mr. Hyde, Mr. Osborne, Professor Preston, Mrs. Sherwin, Mr. Rushton and Mr Wilson.

There were no other declarations of interest.

88. 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.

89. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

90. The Welland Partnership

At the invitation of the Commission, Mr. Chris Farmer outlined the role of the Welland Partnership, the progress made by it and its achievements to date. He advised the Commission that:

- the Welland SSP was a Partnership covering 5 districts across 4 Counties. It was the only East Midlands SSP with a solely rural and market town focus.

- the Partnership was created in 2000 to cater for the needs of the rural areas of the 5 Districts as there was a view that the County SSP's were not able to focus on the needs of these areas and as a result they were not receiving their fair share of funding. Another key driver for the establishment of the Partnership was to address the particular needs of Rutland District Council following that Council obtaining unitary status.

- the characteristic of the area was one in which over 35% of the population worked outside the area, in high paid jobs. This gave the impression that the area was affluent but masked large pockets of rural deprivation.

- the key aims of the Partnership's economic strategy for the area were to.

    - develop and attract high quality jobs;
    - raise the skills level of the local population;
    - promote the future of agriculture and the countryside
    - highlight and address rural deprivation and isolation;
    - invest in sustainable development;
    - provide support for rural businesses;
    - enhance marketing for food and tourism in the ara.

- the Partnership worked co-operatively with the neighbouring SSP's and County Councils particularly in relation to attracting funding (e.g. SRB Building Bridges) and in delivering services (e.g. co-operating with Leicestershire County Council on improving Broadband access to rural areas).

- the Partnership, given the resources available to it, had concluded that it would not take a leading role in dealing with inward investment and tourism.

In the discussion and questions that followed a number of concerns were expressed including:

- the duplication with the LSEP particularly in the Melton and Harborough areas and the potential for those areas to bid to two SSP's for funding;

- the decision taken by the Partnership not to take a leading role in inward investment and the decision of emda that the LSEP should take the lead role in relation to tourism in its area limited the ability of the Partnership to make an impact in these areas.

- the Partnership's role and remit could be undertaken by the LSPs for each district and there were doubts as to whether the Partnership brought added value.

- the economic aims of the Partnership of seeking to create high value jobs whilst laudable was somewhat unrealistic as it failed to appreciate that the area attracted people to it who would commute to London or Cambridge where such high quality jobs were available. The actions of the Partnership in supporting the development of high quality food production and of the Broadband initiative wee noted;

- Although arrangements were in place through emda to ensure that the overlap between the Welland Partnership and the LSEP were managed, concern was expressed about the resulting bureaucracy and additional costs;

- It was acknowledged that it could be in the interests of the five constituent district council authorities (including Rutland) within the area of the Welland to co-operate and share ideas and as a group advocate the needs of local people. The view was expressed that this did not mean that the Partnership should operate as a SSP and that do so weakened the impact and influence of County based SSP's.

RESOLVED:

a) That Mr Farmer be thanked for attending the meeting and his presentation.

b) That the Scrutiny Reference Group be asked to have regard to the information provided by the Welland and Leicester Shire Economic Partnership and submit a report to the next meeting of the Commission on issues the Commission should draw to the attention of the Cabinet and others.

91. Working with Parish and Town Councils

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the current arrangements in place for working with Parish and Town Councils. A copy of the report marked 'C' is filed with these minutes.

In reply to questions, the Deputy Leader indicated that whilst the issue had not been discussed by the Cabinet, he was sure that the Cabinet would welcome the views of scrutiny on how the County Council could improve its relationship with Town and Parish Councils.

RESOLVED:

a) That a five member panel be established to consider ways of improving the relationship between the County Council and Town and Parish Councils.

b) That the Scrutiny Reference Group be asked to determine the terms of reference and scope of the five member panel.

92. Meetings Programme.

RESOLVED:

The following meetings programme be agreed for the remainder of the calendar year:-

- Wednesday 23 June at 2.30 p.m.
- Wednesday 1 September at 2.00 p.m.
- Wednesday 17 November at 2.00 p.m.

2.00 p.m.- 4.10 p.m. CHAIRMAN
28 April 2004