

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on  
Thursday, 15 February 2007

### PRESENT:

Councillor R Hall – Vice-Chairman

Councillors:	RE Barrett	RF Bryant
	Mrs SM Ellington	Mrs EM Heazell
	SGM Kindersley	MJ Mason
	DC McCraith	Mrs CAED Murfitt
	CR Nightingale	Mrs HM Smith
	RT Summerfield	Dr SEK van de Ven

Councillors Dr DR Bard, RMA Manning, Mrs DP Roberts, Mrs DSK Spink MBE and JH Stewart were in attendance, by invitation.

Officers:	Patrick Adams	Senior Democratic Services Officer
	Greg Harlock	Chief Executive
	Simon McIntosh	Corporate Manager (Policy, Performance and Partnerships)
	Tricia Pope	Community Development Manager
	Tim Wetherfield	Head of Policy and Communication

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor AG Orgee.

### 2. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor R Hall nominated and Councillor RF Bryant seconded Councillor Mrs EM Heazell as Chairman of the Committee. There being no other nominations Councillor Mrs Heazell was duly elected as Chairman of the Committee.

Councillor Mrs Heazell thanked Councillor Hall for his generosity of spirit in accepting the principle that the new Chairman should be a member of the Opposition.

Councillor Mrs Heazell declared that in light of the recent Corporate Government Inspection it was clear that significant changes would have to be made to improve the scrutiny function of the Council, in particular the Committee would have to direct its focus on:

- Performance of services and Performance Indicators
- The services to the community and community involvement

Councillor Mrs Heazell stressed that “no change” was not an option and she expressed the hope that all members of the Committee were prepared for the challenges ahead. She suggested that members who were not committed to implementing the necessary changes might consider whether this Committee was the most appropriate place for them to serve the community. Anyone wishing to stand down should do so promptly so that replacements could be ratified at Council next week. It was **agreed** that as not all the Committee members were present, this message should be e-mailed to the entire Committee.

**Training**

The Chief Executive explained that he and the Policy and Performance Review Manager had spoken to a lead officer of IDeA who was willing to arrange training for the Chairman and Committee members, at no cost to this Authority. Provision of additional officer support for an initial period of six months was also being explored with outside partners. It was noted that in addition to this the Committee had a contingency budget of £40,000, which it could spend on arranging trainers and guest speakers.

The Committee **agreed** that the Senior Democratic Services Officer should liaise with the IDeA trainer to arrange a training day before the next meeting of the Committee. The Chairman suggested that training could take place in the morning, with a formal Committee meeting in the afternoon.

**3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

It was confirmed that Councillor R Hall would remain as Vice-Chairman.

**4. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER TO AUDIT PANEL**

On behalf of the independent group Councillor RF Bryant proposed Councillor MJ Mason as a member of Audit Panel. The Committee accepted this nomination.

**5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18 January 2007 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

- The word "not" be removed from the first sentence of the second paragraph of Minute 8.

The Chairman requested that any amendments to the minutes are brought to the attention of the Senior Democratic Services Officer before the start of the meeting.

**Local Government White Paper**

The Committee decided that it was more important to focus on matters of immediate concern, such as the response to the Corporate Governance Inspection, than setting up a task and finish group on the White paper.

**6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors SGM Kindersley and DC McCraith declared personal interests as County Councillors.

Councillor RE Barrett declared a personal interest in item 9, Grants to Voluntary Organisations, as a representative for Age Concern.

On the understanding that CALC could be discussed under item 9 the following Councillors expressed personal interests as members of a parish council: Councillors RE Barrett, Mrs SM Ellington, MJ Mason, Mrs HM Smith and RT Summerfield.

**7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

None.

## 8. DRAFT AGENDA PROGRAMME AND PROGRAMME OF KEY DECISIONS

The Committee agreed that, in the light of the criticisms in the Corporate Government Inspection report, it needed to refocus its commitments by comprehensively amending the draft agenda programme. It was agreed to remove all items from the agenda programme with the exception of the following issues:

- Council's Complaints and Compliments Process
- Member/Officer Contract
- Partnership Working with the County Council
- Community Call to Action
- Corporate Government Inspection (CGI) Report
- Strategic Risk Register
- Sustainable Community Strategy

These matters were seen as too important to remove. The Committee noted that that it should aim to be the "critical friend" of Cabinet. The Committee **agreed** to set up an informal Scrutiny CGI Sub-Group of Councillors Mrs SM Ellington, R Hall and Mrs EM Heazell. The Sub-Group will report back to the Committee with suggested changes required to address the issues raised in the CGI report.

### **Dedicated Scrutiny Officer**

In response to a question whether the scrutiny function would benefit from the £300,000 the Council was setting aside to respond to the challenges highlighted in the CGI report, Councillor RMA Manning, Leader of Council, stated that the appointment of a dedicated scrutiny officer was proposed.

### **Sustainable Community Strategy**

The Corporate Manager (Policy, Performance and Partnerships) responded positively to suggestions that the Committee should examine the Sustainable Communities Strategy and how the Council worked with its partners to deliver it. It was suggested that the IDEa trainer could be asked to focus on this matter.

## 9. GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Councillor JH Stewart declared a personal and prejudicial interest as the President of the Cambridgeshire Rehabilitation Club for the Visually Handicapped. He left the meeting and took no part in the subsequent debate. Councillor Mrs DSK Spink expressed a personal interest as a trustee and the Council's representative on Crossroads Care South and East Cambridgeshire.

Councillor Mrs VG Ford, Community Development portfolio holder, thanked the Committee for agreeing to discuss this matter and hoped that its members would impart their local knowledge regarding the voluntary organisations detailed in the report. It was noted that it was the portfolio holder's hope that it would soon become possible to commit funding to voluntary organisations for up to three years.

Councillor Mrs Ford explained that by working in partnership with voluntary organisations, the District's residents were benefiting in return for a relatively small investment from the Council. The Citizen Advice Bureaux advised residents effectively on debts and the Council benefited in the payment of rent and Council Tax, which would otherwise have to be written off.

It was suggested that the Executive needed to formulate a policy on the payment of grants to voluntary organisations. Councillor Mrs Ford stated that the report detailed the

grants that were proposed under the existing policy and invited the Committee members for their comments.

### **Cambridge Family Mediation Service, CRUSE and the Cogwheel Trust**

It was asserted that as the Grants being offered to the Cambridge Family Mediation Service, the Cambridge CRUSE Bereavement Care and the Cogwheel Trust were very low compared to their annual budgets, the funding should be removed.

It was understood that voluntary organisations were required to have a surplus in their accounts to ensure that staff could be paid. This could explain why the yearly expenditure figures detailed in the report, were less than the income from grants.

### **Cambridgeshire ACRE**

The Community Development Manager explained that Cambridgeshire ACRE worked with parish councils in the production of parish plans. It was stated that a recent presentation given by Cambridgeshire ACRE to parish councils on housing matters gave an inaccurate impression of the housing services offered by them and other organisations. Councillor Mrs Ford replied that ACRE would be contacted regarding this issue.

### **Duplication of effort**

Members of the Committee expressed opposition to funding organisations that carried out the same work as an existing organisation. For example the Disability Information Service Huntingdonshire appeared to be duplicating the efforts of the DWP's Home Visiting Service.

### **Funding activities for young people**

Concern was expressed that organisations for young persons appeared to be under-represented, although it was noted that the Connections Bus continued to receive the Council's support. Councillor Ford explained that voluntary organisations for young people enjoyed funding from other organisations such as DCLG, which allowed the Council to focus on other priorities.

### **Promoting equality**

Members of the Committee expressed concern that no grants appeared to be offered to organisations that supported minority groups. The Community Development Manager explained that funding agreed at officer level had been given to the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum. Councillor Mrs DP Roberts suggested that the Council should consider ways in which immigrants who come into the District from Eastern Europe could be assisted. The Community Development Manager acknowledged the issue and explained that there was Countywide Migrant Workers Forum, which co-ordinated development of services for migrant workers.

It was also suggested that funding could be made available to the Ormiston Children and Families Trust for their work on Traveller issues.

The Community Development Manager explained that organisations applying for funding were asked, via the application form, to give details of arrangements they had in place to promote equal opportunities / race equality.

### **Royston Community Transport Scheme**

The Community Development Manager explained that despite requests the Royston Community Transport Scheme had not yet completed the necessary paperwork, which would enable them to be considered for a grant from this authority. In recognition of the work that this organisation carries out, they have been given until the end of February to

complete the necessary forms.

### **Service Level Agreements**

The Community Development Manager explained that the organisations which had entered into Service Level Agreements with the Council would be expected to compile 6 monthly reports. Those organisations that were receiving smaller amounts and so had not entered into Service Level Agreements would be liable for spot checks.

### **Saving room hire costs**

It was suggested that voluntary organisations could be saved hire costs if they used sheltered housing communal rooms throughout the District. The Chairman stated that tenants and residents on the scheme would have to approve such usage.

Councillor Mrs Heazell thanked Councillor Ford and the Community Development Manager for their attendance and informative answers.

## **10. UPDATE FROM POST OFFICE SUB-GROUP**

Councillor Mrs Heazell reported that a letter had been sent by the Post Office Sub-Group to the Secretary of State for the Department of Trade and Industry on 24 January 2007. No reply had been received. It was noted that in future all correspondence sent on behalf of the Committee should be sent on Council headed note paper.

It was noted that the Government's deadline for responses was 8 March 2007, which limited the amount of time Committee members could spend on this matter.

The Committee **agreed** that the informal Sub-Group should meet again and send a second letter to the Minister. The Senior Democratic Services Officer was instructed to send a reminder to all those Members who had not yet responded to his earlier messages requesting details about the post offices in their villages.

## **11. 2ND ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL (DRAFT)**

Councillor Mrs Heazell presented this item on the draft 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report to Council by suggesting that working on this report could become a task for the training day. It was noted that the final report would have to be agreed at March's meeting so that it could go to April's Council.

The Committee made the following comments:

- There had been no monitoring of the recommendations on the Neighbourhood disputes.
- Concerns of bus services task and finish group could be passed on to the Local Strategic Partnership with reference to the Community Strategy.
- The issue of legal advice offered by CALC could be revisited. It was noted that both Milton and Shepreth parish councils had received beneficial assistance from CALC.
- The letters being sent to the Minister regarding the post office closures should be included in the report.
- Paragraph 3.1.1 be reworded to explain that the Committee now considered that it was inappropriate for officers, however senior, to be questioned on matters of policy, which should be the domain of Cabinet members. It was suggested that there should be less attendance from senior officers than in the past, to enable them to focus on service delivery.
- The monitoring of portfolio holders had been praised in the CGI report, but

- should be further developed.
- Mention of the Vice-Chairman's report on the scrutiny training in York should be included in paragraph 3.3.1.
  - The issue of website development needed to be re-examined, with reference to the number of hits received.
  - Paragraph 4.0.1 should make reference to the CGI report.
  - Paragraph 4.1.1 should be amended to include the fact that the Climate Change Advisory Group would meet in April, following the appointment of the new Strategic Sustainability Officer.
  - A Scrutiny Sub-Group had been set up to look at the scrutiny function, but its work had not been fully referred to.

The Head of Policy and Communication suggested both the Committee's annual report and the forthcoming training day should cover:

- What the Committee was trying to achieve;
- What difference scrutiny had made to services for residents;
- Where the gaps were in the Committee's approach to scrutiny and how it could learn from good practice elsewhere.

He added that the underlining in the report should be removed, in line with the Council's Disability Equality Scheme, as it made it more difficult to read.

### **Monitoring**

In the absence of an item on the agenda, the Committee's monitors were invited to report any matters of note. Nothing was reported.

Councillor Mrs Heazell suggested that Members should look at the scrutiny arrangements of our surrounding authorities with a view to undertaking a site visit. It was suggested that any attendance of another authority's Committee should be made by invitation only.

### **Training in York**

Councillor Hall stated that he would bring a full report on the recent training course in York to the next meeting. In summary he stated that there had been 20 delegates from 15 authorities, the majority of which had more than one scrutiny committee.

## **12. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee **NOTED** the following future meeting dates:

**2007:** 15 March, 19 April & 17 May

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**The Meeting ended at 4.05 p.m.**

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