

2nd ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2006/07

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Constitution requires the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to “report once a year ... on its current programme of scrutiny performance review and the performance review and the performance of the executive based against the Performance Plan (PP) or other objective criteria, and confirm its future scrutiny and performance review programme.”
- 1.2 This is the second annual report and covers the period from April 2006 to March 2007. It will go to full Council on 24th May 2007.
- 1.3 The report:
- a) Summarises the achievements of the Committee
 - b) Summarises how the Committee has developed in the past year and suggests options for further improvements
 - c) Comments on the overall effectiveness of the Cabinet and Council

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE

2.1 Neighbourhood Disputes

The Committee meeting on 20 April 2006 discussed the way in which the Council helped to resolve neighbourhood disputes.

Recommendations Made

- 2.1.1 The Committee recommended that
- New Members be provided with guidance on how to respond to reports of neighbourhood disputes as part of the induction process
 - That copies of the written guidance for officers be shown to interested Members
 - Councillors be advised to pass on any complaints they receive to the Contact Centre

2.2 Concessionary Fares

The Committee meeting on 15 June heard from lead officers and Cabinet Members from both the County Council and this authority on the controversial concessionary fares scheme, which only allowed people over 60 and those with disabilities to travel for free within their district. Questions were also received from members of the public.

Recommendations Made

- 2.2.1 The Committee recommended that
- The County Council continue to work with each district authority and start to look ahead to next year with the aim of implementing of a county-wide scheme under the auspices of the County Council.
 - All stakeholders continue to liaise with central government, in particular with regard to the allocation of funding, to attempt to implement a county-wide scheme.

Outcome

- 2.2.2 In August it was announced that council chiefs and bus operators in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough had agreed on a deal to deliver a free countywide scheme, which allows eligible passengers to cross district and city boundaries in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for free. It also allowed free travel to Cambridge Park and Ride services.
- 2.2.3 The Committee discussed the general provision of bus services at the meeting of 19 October and a small task and finish group was set up. This produced details of the bus services for each parish.

2.3 Standards Hearings

- 2.3.1 On The Committee heard from the Chief Executive on the costs incurred from recent Standards Hearings and legal advice and the way in which partnership working had reduced these costs. The Committee also discussed the importance of standards training but no recommendations were made.

2.4 Developing a Policy on CRB Checks

Following a recommendation by Council the Committee decided to ascertain the best way in which this policy could be implemented and pass its finding on to Cabinet.

Recommendation Made

- 2.4.1 The Committee recommended that Cabinet develop a policy on CRB checks which:
- will subject all newly elected Councillors to a standard CRB Check
 - will encourage all existing Members to agree to a standard CRB Check
 - will ensure the results of the CRB Checks be first reviewed by a manager of appropriate responsibility.

Outcome

- 2.4.2 Cabinet decided not to proceed with the proposal to require that all members be subject to a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check but, in the event of a councillor commencing in a role which does meet the CRB eligibility criteria, that the Leader or Democratic Services Manager advise the Council's CRB lead counter-signatory and that a CRB check be undertaken and the reasons for the councillor being CRB checked clearly be documented against the eligibility criteria.

2.5 Presentation from CALC

- 2.5.1 The Committee received a presentation from Keith Barrand the Chief Executive of CALC. There was a useful two discussion on relations between the authority, CALC and the parish councils. No recommendations were made.

2.6 Post Office Closures

Recommendation Made

2.6.1 The Committee agreed to

- set up an informal task and finish group of Councillors R Hall, Mrs EM Heazell, AG Orgee and Mrs HM Smith. This group will report back to the Committee on how best to respond to the Government's consultation exercise, basing the proposed response on the Committee's discussions. The response will be copied in to Postwatch.

2.6.2 The Government's consultation form, with Postwatch's two page explanation of the consultation process, was sent to all Members.

3.0 Options for Improving the Effectiveness of the Committee

3.1 Involving Service Heads In Policy Discussions

3.1.1 At its meeting on 20 April 2006 it was agreed that service heads would be invited to attend the Committee whenever matters of policy were being discussed.

3.2 Monitoring Portfolio Holders

3.2.1 On 15 June 2006 it was agreed

- To appoint two monitors to each portfolio, with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to deputise in the event of absence of the monitor.
- That the two members should be of different political groups

Outcome

3.2.2 Two Scrutiny monitors now attend each portfolio holder meetings and report back any relevant issues to the Committee. This has brought the scrutiny process into a decision making process that has hitherto been largely ignored.

3.3 Training

3.3.1 Details of LGIU course has been e-mailed to Members of the Committee. 10 Members attended a scrutiny training course at Newmarket on 20 November and the Vice-Chairman was sent to training in York.

3.4 Development of Webpage

3.4.1 The Committee set up a sub-group which facilitated the development of the Scrutiny webpage which allows residents to suggest agenda items for the Committee to consider.

4.0 PROGRESS BEING MADE BY THE EXECUTIVE

- 4.0.1 Presentations were received from all members of the executive, which provided Cabinet members with an opportunity to inform the Committee of the challenges that would be faced over the coming year and allowed Members of the Committee to question executive Members over their responsibilities.

4.1 Call-Ins

Climate Change Advisory Group

- 4.1.1 Cabinet's decision not to set up a Climate Change Advisory Group was called-in and scrutinised by the Committee on 20 July 2006. The Committee decided to refer this matter to Council, which accepted the Committee's recommendation to set up a Climate Change Advisory Group which reported directly to Council, not Cabinet.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1.1

Councillor
Chairman, Scrutiny and Overview Committee