



South
Cambridgeshire
District Council

Scrutiny and Overview Committee 2nd Annual Report to Council



26 April 2007
www.scams.gov.uk/scrutiny

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Constitution requires the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to “report once a year at the April meeting of Council (as the last Council meeting of the municipal year) on its current programme of scrutiny 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 Council on [26 April 2007](#).
- 1.3 The report:
- Summarises the achievements of the Committee
 - Summarises how the Committee has developed in the past year and suggests options for further improvements
 - Comments on the overall effectiveness of the Cabinet and Council

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE

Neighbourhood Disputes

- 2.1 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
- 2.1.2 These recommendations were passed to officers for implementation.

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 concessionary fares scheme, which allowed people over 60 and those with disabilities to travel for free only 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, allowing eligible passengers to cross district and city boundaries in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for free. It also allowed free travel on 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.



2.2.4 It was suggested at the meeting of 15 February that concerns regarding transport could be raised at a meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership, possibly under discussions of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

2.3 Standards Hearings

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 findings 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.

Outcomes

- 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 Barrant, the Chief Executive of CALC. There was a useful discussion on relations between the authority, CALC and the parish councils. No recommendations were made.

2.6 Post Office Closures

- 2.6.1 The Committee heard a presentation from the watchdog Postwatch at its meeting on 18 January. The Committee reviewed the progress made on this issue at its meeting on 15 February to ensure that the Council gave a comprehensive response to the Government's consultation process.

Outcomes

- 2.6.2 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 which:
- Sent a letter to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, expressing concerns about the closure programme, the proposed criteria and the proposed process.
 - Asked all members to give details of their local post offices and collated their responses.



- Completed the Government's consultation form, with extra information on the post offices that had been provided by local members, including transport links and the importance of this service provision to the residents.

2.6.3 At the Committee's meeting in [February](#) it was decided to write a second letter to the Minister as no response had been received from the first letter. The Chairman wrote a letter regretting the lack of a reply and restated the requirements for the criteria on consultation. No answer has been received to the Chairman's second letter.

2.7 Council's Complaints and Compliments Procedure

2.7.1 The Committee discussed a draft version of the Complaints and Compliments procedure at its meeting in [March 2007](#).

Outcomes

2.7.2 The Committee

- Suggested that the number of internal stages be reduced from three to two
- Made a number of minor textual amendments to the draft policy
- Set up a task and finish group of Councillors DH Morgan and CR Nightingale to ensure that the essence of the points made by the Committee were addressed in the final policy.

3.0 OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMITTEE

3.1 Reviewing the Council's Policies

3.1.1 At its meeting on [20 April 2006](#) it was agreed that it was inappropriate for the Committee to ask officers, who were not a service head, to answer questions on the Council's policies.

3.1.2 The Committee reviewed this matter at its meeting on [15 February 2007](#) and decided that only members of the Executive should be asked questions on the Council's policies. This would allow senior officers to spend less time at meetings and focus more on service delivery.



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 decision making. It could be possible to develop this further in the future with all Scrutiny members acting as monitors.

3.2.3 This practice was praised in the recent corporate governance report and it is expected that Committee will continue to develop it.

3.2 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 attended a residential training course in York.

3.3.2 The Vice-Chairman reported to the Committee on the training course in York, to ensure that all members benefited from his attendance.

3.3.3 Training sessions are being facilitated by the Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA), the first of which took place on 15 March. These sessions will inform the recommendations from the Scrutiny Sub-Group, as described in paragraph 3.9.1.

3.3.4 The Chairman of Scrutiny will be going to the Leadership training academy in the summer.

3.4 Development of Webpage



3.4.1 The Committee set up a sub-group to develop the [Scrutiny webpage](#) which allows residents to [suggest agenda items](#) for the Committee to consider.

3.4.2 The Committee agreed to further develop the page, after analysing the number of hits received.

3.5 Monitoring of Recommendations

3.5.1 At its meeting in [February 2007](#) the Committee agreed that some form of monitoring of its recommendations was required, to ensure that the annual report could properly review the Committee's effectiveness. This will be implemented for the coming year.

3.6 Updating the agenda programme

3.6.1 At the Committee meeting in [March 2007](#) it was suggested that too much of the Committee's time was being spent on examining the agenda programme, instead of focussing on more strategic issues. It was decided that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman should be responsible for amending the agenda programme.

3.7 Role of non-executive members

3.7.1 At its meeting in [March 2007](#) it was suggested that all non-executive Councillors should choose to be a member of one of the following:

- Scrutiny and Overview Committee
- A Group of Members to be appointed by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee onto its Task and Finish Groups
- Licensing Committee
- Planning Committee

3.7.2 This suggestion was made in the expectation that the Cabinet will not be setting up any Advisory Groups in 2007/08. Council agreement will be required to adopt this suggestion.

3.8 Evening meetings and meetings being held outside the Council Office

3.8.1 March's Committee broadly agreed that meetings would be held in the evening in 2007/08. It was also hoped that suitable venues could be found to host meetings away from the Council Offices, a move intended to make it easier for residents to attend meetings of the Committee.

3.9 Scrutiny Sub-Group

3.9.1 A sub-group was set up by the Committee to suggest ways in which the scrutiny function of the Council could be improved. Following the training on 15 March, the Sub-Group contributed to a draft action plan drawn up by Warren Leigh, Local Government Services Consultant, from the IDeA. It is expected that draft action plan will inform discussions on how the Committee should respond to the criticism of the scrutiny function detailed in the corporate governance report.

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 Group

4.1.1 Cabinet's decision not to set up a Climate Change 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 Group which reported directly to Council, not Cabinet.



4.1.2 The Climate Change Group will meet in [April 2007](#), following the appointment of the new Strategic Sustainability Officer.

4.2 Corporate Governance Inspection (CGI)

4.2.1 The CGI report was published on [8 February 2007](#) and stated that the Council "*does not meet minimum requirements in three of the four aspects of corporate governance assessed*". The report was critical of both Cabinet and Scrutiny and it is clear that both bodies will have to work together to respond to the challenges resulting from the Inspection. The effectiveness of current arrangements and the introduction of enhanced arrangements, supported by the appointment of a dedicated scrutiny support officer, will be taken forward as part of the Improvement Plan, to be agreed by Council in response to the CGI report.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1.1 Whilst the Committee has produced useful work this year, there can be no doubt that a radical overhaul is required. In particular the Committee will have to direct its focus on:

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

5.1.2 All members of the Committee need to be committed to implementing the changes that will be necessary to improve the scrutiny function.

5.1.3 Council will need to agree to recommendations from the Committee with regard to the place of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee in the Council's structures.

Councillor Mrs EM Hezell
Chairman, Scrutiny and Overview Committee