

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 18 December 2003

PRESENT: Councillor SGM Kindersley – Chairman
Councillor *MP Howell – Vice-Chairman

Councillors:	SJ Agnew	RE Barrett
	RF Bryant	EW Bullman
	NN Cathcart	Mrs J Hughes
	EL Monks	WH Saberton
	Mrs GJ Smith	LJ Wilson

Councillors Dr DR Bard, JD Batchelor, RF Collinson, Mrs SA Hatton, Dr JPR Orme, Mrs DP Roberts and RT Summerfield were in attendance, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor PL Stroude and DALG Wherrell.

Officers:	John Ballantyne	- Chief Executive
	Tara Edwards	- Community Safety Officer
	Simon McIntosh	- Community Services Director
	Jane Thompson	- Cultural Services Manager
	Patrick Adams	- Senior Democratic Services Officer

The Chairman introduced Mike Mosley, Deputy Chief Executive of the East of England Regional Assembly who had been commissioned to review the Committee's performance.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Committee: Councillors MP Howell, PL Stroude and DALG Wherrell; and the following Councillors: Mrs EM Heazell & Mrs DSK Spink.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of 20th November 2003 were agreed as a correct record.

The minutes of 27th November 2003 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- Councillor NN Cathcart's name be removed from the list of apologies and his presence be acknowledged.

Councillor Cathcart suggested that a presentation should be given on the possibility of the Council providing its own Renewable Energy Supply Company. Councillor RF Collinson, portfolio holder for sustainability, recommended that the presentation be open to all Council members and unconnected to the Scrutiny Committee. The Committee agreed with this suggestion.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None.

5. DRAFT AGENDA PROGRAMME AND LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Councillor Mrs GJ Smith suggested that the Committee should examine the issues discussed at the Audit Panel on 17th December, including the corporate performance and the number of Performance Indicators. On the Chairman's suggestion it was agreed that these issues were the responsibility of the Audit Panel which reported directly to Council.

It was agreed that an alternative for shading be used to distinguish which agenda items had already been discussed, as shading did not show up on the photocopied paper.

It was understood that the Chief Environmental Health Officer would give a verbal report on the new waste management service in January.

The Committee **AGREED** to set up a task and finish group, comprised of Councillor Mrs GJ Smith and NN Cathcart, to investigate the maintenance of open space in our villages.

The Committee **NOTED** the Draft Agenda Programme.

6. UPDATE REPORT ON THE COMMUNITY SAFETY BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Community Safety Officer introduced this report which detailed the progress made on Community Safety since the Best Value Review had reported to the Committee on 24th October 2002.

The Community Safety Officer explained that the new National Crime Recording Standard had changed the definition of a reported crime and this had inflated crime figures nationally. This needed to be taken into account when analysing the local crime statistics for South Cambridgeshire. She highlighted the fact that crime had increased for the first quarter but had fallen during the second quarter indicating that the increase was due to the new way of recording crime and not a real increase. She informed the Committee that vehicle crime had increased but burglary had decreased.

The Community Safety Officer informed the Committee that the Council worked in partnership with the Police, but had no powers to tackle crime directly. The Anti-Social Behaviour Task Group was a product of this partnership. It was understood that there had been 3 anti-social behaviour orders granted in Cambridgeshire but none of them had been in the District of South Cambridgeshire.

The Community Safety Officer stated that the Vehicle Crime Task Group existed to tackle the increase in vehicle crime. She asserted that it was imperative that crimes were reported to ensure that remedial action could be taken to counteract crime in the area. Partnership working had led to the employment of Police Community Support Officers.

The Committee made the following suggestions:

- The report required more details of actions.
- An article should be placed in the South Cambs News describing the ways in which Parish Councils can end the isolation of vulnerable residents,

- including the appointment of Police Community Support Officers.
- The Council should focus on achieving a small number of targets, instead of making limited progress on a larger number of issues.
- The number of robberies per 1,000 homes should be kept as a local performance indicator.
- The Committee should receive another update report in a year's time.

The Community Safety Officer explained that the number of robberies per 1,000 homes could not be collected without a statutory marker and that had been removed.

Councillor Mrs DP Roberts paid tribute to the Community Safety Officer for her work with the communities, in particular with the children of the District. She praised the partnership that the Council had with the police, which allowed the authority to voice its concerns.

Concern was expressed regarding the future of the youth bus. The Community Safety Officer praised the effectiveness of the bus but explained that recent staff turnover had temporarily blunted its effectiveness. She stated that the Council was responsible for facilitating these types of projects but not for the running of them.

Concern was expressed over the protection of vulnerable people. The Community Safety Officer stated the Council were working with Age Concern, and local voluntary groups such as lunch clubs, to tackle isolation. She explained that residents in sheltered housing were well looked after and it made sense to focus on elderly residents in their own homes. The Bobby Scheme made contact with victims of crime but also works with those that are vulnerable to being victims of crimes such as those over 65 or the disabled.

The Community Safety Officer explained that appendix D showed a report that had been prepared to secure funding from Go-East and was included for the Committee's information to show how the recommendations of the Best Value Review were being implemented.

The Chief Executive explained that the Council had invested in the crime prevention partnership with the police and other public bodies. He stated that levels of crime in the District were low and maintaining those levels, despite government priorities being focussed on urban areas, was a considerable achievement.

The Committee **NOTED** this report.

The Chairman acknowledged that this was the first follow-up report to the Best Value Review and indicated that future reports could usefully focus on actions and achievements. He thanked the Community Safety Officer and the Cultural Services Manager for their contributions.

7. DRAFT SCRUTINY HANDBOOK

The Chairman introduced this report on the Draft Scrutiny Handbook and invited the Committee to suggest amendments. It was understood that the final handbook would be presented to the Committee, for agreement, at its next meeting in January.

Members of the Committee asked for the following issues to be added to the handbook:

- The Committee's power to form Task and Finish Groups.

- A record of the recommendations made by the Committee with an indication of results and consequences.
- The Committee's power to examine external issues.
- The Committee's responsibility to listen to the demands of the public.
- The Committee's responsibility to examine policy.
- The removal of the description of Chairman as "a figurehead".
- The Committee's duty to agree what needs to be discovered before conducting a scrutiny.
- A preamble that defines the role of the Committee.
- More emphasis was required on the overview role of the Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman stated that the Constitutional Working Party would examine whether the Committee should focus on policy. He asserted that the handbook needed to be simple, clear and informative.

Concern was expressed that members of the public were only allowed one supplementary question. It was noted that the Constitution had been amended to give the public the right to ask at least one supplementary question and the Chairman had the power to allow questioners more leeway if necessary.

Councillor Mrs Smith agreed to liaise with the Senior Democratic Services Officer on further minor amendments to the draft handbook.

8. REVIEW OF GRANTS POLICY FOR THE AWARDING OF PLAY EQUIPMENT

The Chairman introduced this report on the grant criteria for Play Equipment Grants to villages, which excluded grants to villages with a population of over 1,000. It was understood that this rule was introduced in the mid 1990s, then relaxed for two years, before being re-introduced.

The Chairman introduced Peter Miles, the Vice-Chairman of Little Abington Parish Council. Councillor Miles explained that Little Abington and Great Abington had agreed to jointly administer the recreation ground and as a result had been excluded from applying for a play equipment grant as the joint population of both villages was over 1,000. He asserted that this was unfair as the Council had encouraged the two villages to work together and individually both villages had a population under 1,000. Councillor Miles explained that funding secured for the play equipment from other bodies was not dependent on funding from the Council. Councillor Dr JPR Orme supported the grant application from the Abingtons and asserted that the current rule was arbitrary and unfair, especially for parishes who had populations just over 1,000.

Councillor Mrs DP Roberts, the portfolio holder for Community Development informed the Committee that the original play equipment in Abington had become damaged because the Parish Council had situated it in a flooded area. She expressed her disappointment that the combined resources of both villages could only contribute £2,000 to the total cost of £33,000. Councillor Orme explained that the Parish Council was contributing £20,000 towards the refurbishment of the village hall and could only afford £2,000 towards the cost of play equipment.

The Chairman informed the Committee that Barrington had also been excluded from applying for a play equipment grant as their population was over 1,000. The local member, Councillor DL Porter, had expressed his support for a policy change. County Councillor Tony Orgee had written to the Chairman to suggest that grant applications be

considered for all villages with a population of up to 2,000.

Members of the Committee expressed the following views:

- The existing policy was correct because it ensured a small budget was allocated to those communities who were least able to raise enough money for play equipment unaided.
- The rule was arbitrary and failed to take into consideration changes in population and cost of equipment.
- A sliding scale that offered larger grants to smaller communities should be considered.
- A sliding scale would remove funding from small communities to the benefit of those communities that could raise more money through their precept.
- Play equipment was very expensive and so a larger budget should be considered.

Councillor Mrs DP Roberts expressed her support for the current rule which was established and understood by local communities. She added that changing the rule would be unfair on those parishes that had recently paid for their own play equipment. She warned that without the rule, it would be impossible for small communities to obtain play equipment, which in some parishes are the only facility in the village.

Councillor Mrs Roberts opposed the adoption of a sliding scale, which would require a larger budget for it to be workable and would be more difficult to understand. She reported that a larger budget was unlikely given the recent Cabinet decision to identify savings to fund a greater number of CIP bids. The play equipment fund could only be increased by making savings elsewhere within the Community Services budget.

The Cultural Services Manager explained that the cost of play equipment had increased by approximately four times since the rule was introduced, mainly due to new safety rules. It was suggested that in view of this fact the rule should be reviewed.

It was suggested that this policy should be reviewed. Members of the Committee made the following points:

- The 1,000 number was arbitrary and did not take population increase into consideration.
- The cost of play equipment had increased considerably in recent years.
- A review was unnecessary as the current policy was correct.
- Extra funding was available through the National Lottery.

Councillor Mrs Roberts opposed reviewing the decision, which could lead to unrealistic expectations, when the size of the budget prevented any fundamental alterations.

In response to questioning the Community Services Director explained that the Council had a database which detailed which communities had play equipment as part of the future local development framework. The Cultural Services Manager reminded the Committee of the costs of maintaining play equipment.

It was suggested that either Great or Little Abington should apply for a grant as an individual Parish Council to comply with the rule.

Councillor Monks proposed and Councillor Barrett seconded that the existing rule remain unchanged and unreviewed. A vote was taken and by 6 votes to 4 the Committee

AGREED that no review be undertaken of the guidelines for awarding grants for play equipment.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Peter Miles, Councillors Mrs Roberts and Dr Orme, the Cultural Services Manager and Community Services Director for their attendance and contributions.

9. PROGRAMME OF KEY DECISIONS

The Committee **NOTED** the programme.

10. TO NOTE THE DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that future meetings would be held on:
2004: 22nd January, 12th February, 11th March, 15th April and 13th May.
All at 2.00pm unless otherwise stated.

The Meeting ended at 4.03 p.m.
