

# **DRAFT FOURTH SIX MONTHLY SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT – MARCH 04**

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The Constitution requires the Scrutiny Committee to “report twice a year to full Council on its current programme of scrutiny performance review and the performance of the Executive based on the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) or other objective criteria, and confirm its scrutiny and performance review programme”.
- 1.2 This is the fourth six-monthly report and covers the period from November 2003 to April 2004. It will go to full Council on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2004.
- 1.3 The report:
- a) Summarises the issues considered by the Committee
  - b) Suggests options for improving the effectiveness of Scrutiny Committee
  - c) Comments on the overall effectiveness of the Cabinet and Council

## **2.0 THE ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE**

### **2.1 Public Questions**

- 2.1.1 Public questions have been heard on two subjects:

#### **High Court Appeal: Planning Permission 307 Huntingdon Road**

- 2.1.2 **Background:** The Council were being asked by representatives of X-Cape to help fund the High Court Appeal of the decision taken by the ODPM to overrule the verdict of the inspector and the District Council and allow planning permission for a primate laboratory at 307 Huntingdon Road.

- 2.1.3 **Outcome:** This issue was passed to the Chairman of the Development and Conservation Control Committee who was responsible for the decision. However, days after the meeting Cambridge University announced that they would not be developing 307 Huntingdon Road due to a lack of funds.

#### **Green Box Collection of Recyclable Waste**

- 2.1.4 **Background:** Residents from villages in the West of the District requested an explanation for the late collection of their green boxes after Christmas.

- 2.1.5 **Outcome:** Representatives from Cleanaway offered to attend Parish Council meetings to explain why collections had been delayed over the Christmas period and they also volunteered to write a short article for the various parish magazines. Cleanaway have been provided with the relevant contact information and the communication issue is under discussion by our Information Section and Environmental Health Department.

### **2.2 External Scrutiny**

#### **Arts Council England, East – Rural Touring**

- 2.2.1 **Background:** On 12<sup>th</sup> February 2004 the Committee discussed a report on Arts Council England, East (ACE) and the effect their change in funding policy would have on the Arts in Cambs on Tour(ACT).

- 2.2.3 **Outcome:** As a result the Committee:
- wrote a letter to ACE asking them to explain their new funding policy.
  - Recommended that an Advisory Group be set up to discuss the next District Arts Strategy 2005-2010.
  - Recommended that a letter be sent to the other local authorities who were part of the partnership project that formed ACT, to obtain their views regarding funding.

#### **Update on the Council's Occupational Therapy Referral Process**

- 2.2.4 On 20<sup>th</sup> November 2003 the Committee were given an update on the Council's OT referral process. The Committee unanimously supported the proposal

#### **Presentation on the Disability Discrimination Act**

- 2.2.5 On 20<sup>th</sup> November 2003 the Committee heard a presentation on the Disability Discrimination Act. Members were informed of the responsibilities of the local authorities and businesses within the District.

### **2.3 Other Ongoing Issues**

#### **Section 106 Agreement at Cambourne**

- 2.3.1 **Background:** The Section 106 Agreement dated 20<sup>th</sup> April bound the developers to provide a range of facilities by the occupation of a 1,000 houses. At a meeting of the Committee on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2003 a verbal report was presented on a meeting with developers regarding the provision of ten facilities that were guaranteed under the Section 106 agreement, but were yet to be provided.

- 2.3.2 **Outcome:** The Committee fully endorsed the officer decision to withhold planning permission and approvals of details of reserved matters for market housing in Cambourne until completion or substantial progress was made on the facilities promised under the Section 106 Agreement. The Committee's recommendation that the Development and Conservation Control Committee decide all decisions on permissions and approvals at Cambourne was accepted.

#### **Update Reports on Staff Sickness and Staff Turnover**

- 2.3.3 **Background:** The Committee had asked for these reports a year before to monitor these two issues which the Council was underperforming in.

- 2.3.4 **Outcome:** It was noted that there had been an improvement in staff turnover and a feasibility study into immunisation jabs for staff was requested. This was discussed on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2004 where it was recommended, on a split vote, that flu jabs be offered for staff in time for the winter of 2004/05.

#### **New Waste Collection Scheme**

- 2.3.5 **Background:** The Council implemented a new waste collection scheme, switching from the use of bags to wheeled bins, in late summer 2003 and this Committee continues to monitor the impressive progress made.

- 2.3.6 **Outcome:** The Committee received a detailed verbal report on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2004, which highlighted the achievements of the scheme, the way in which complaints are dealt with and the prospects for extra recycling in the future. It is expected that the Committee will play a part in the formal review of the new scheme later in 2004.

## **2.4 Training And Other Strategies To Improve The Committee**

### Meeting Dates of the Council's Committees

- 2.4.1 The Committee decided to meet on the third Thursday in every month for the municipal year 2004/05. Cabinet will meet on the second Thursday and Council on the fourth Thursday. This should make it easier for Members, Officers, the public and all other stakeholders to remember when these meetings will be held.

### Scrutiny Handbook

- 2.4.2 The Committee formally agreed the Scrutiny Handbook, which will be circulated to all Members and will form part of the induction pack for new members elected in June 2004.

### Scrutiny Training

- 2.4.3 The Committee commissioned Mike Mosley, the Deputy Chief Executive of the East of England Regional Assembly to analyse the Committee's performance on 23rd December. This report was discussed at the meeting on 22nd January 2004. This resulted in the suggestion that the Committee should observe the Overview and Scrutiny Committees of other local authorities. This discussion resulted in:

- a new style agenda that provides summary information of each agenda item on the agenda front page.
- Shorter reports and therefore shorter agendas.
- A list of the dates and times of all the County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

### Grounds Maintenance Task and Finish Group

- 2.4.4 The Committee has set up its first Task and Finish Group. A questionnaire has been sent out to all 102 Parish Councils. So far 48 responses have been received and are being analysed by the Group.

### Suggestions on how the Committee Could be Improved

- 2.4.5 One criticism of the Scrutiny Committee from Mike Mosley was that the Committee still debated issues as if the Council was under the old Committee system. It is possible that developing a report template for the Committee could resolve this situation.

## **2.5 Best Value Reviews**

- 2.5.1 On 29<sup>th</sup> May 2003 it was agreed that the Committee should receive progress reports on Best Value reviews from the relevant Lead Officer 12 months after the conclusion of the review. The following progress reports were received:

- Update Report On Land Charges Best Value Review
- Update Report On The Community Safety Best Value Review
- Implementation Of The Sustainability Best Value Review

- 2.5.2 The Committee received a report on the Access to Services Best Value Review on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2003. This review recommended that the 2004/05 budget include provision for the following:

- A Website Development Officer.
- A Customer Services Manager.
- Joint work with the Local Strategic Partnership to develop customer services.

### **3.0 PROGRESS BEING MADE BY THE EXECUTIVE**

- 3.1 Scrutiny Committee aims to make constructive and objective comments on the effectiveness of the Executive by playing the role of “critical friend”.

#### **3.2 Call-Ins**

- 3.2.1 No call-ins have been made during this six month period. However, the issue of awarding grants for children’s play equipment was discussed by the Committee as a result of Councillors expressing an interest in calling in a decision made by the portfolio holder for Community Development. The play equipment issue was fully discussed and the Committee decided, on a split vote, not to review the current policy any further.

#### **Scrutinising the Budget**

- 3.2.2 Background: The Review of the Continuous Improvement Plans (CIPs) took place on 27th November 2003 and a discussion on the Revenue and Capital Estimates took place on 12th February 2004.
- 3.2.3 Outcome: Although much useful information was forthcoming the Committee failed to exercise any real influence over Cabinet’s subsequent decisions. Reasons for this need to be investigated and suggestions made.
- 3.2.4 The rise in the cost of recharges to the portfolio holders’ budgets made it difficult to ascertain where savings had been made. As a result the Committee received a report on the recharging of staffing and central overhead account (including IT costs) to the portfolio budgets at its meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March.
- 3.2.5 Suggestions for Improvement: The scrutiny of the budgetary process has come in for criticism. The Committee might wish to consider setting up a sub-Group to review this process and report back to the Committee.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The Scrutiny Committee has now been in place for almost two years.

Councillor Sebastian Kindersley  
Chairman, Scrutiny Committee