

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE on 16 April 2007.

PRESENT: Mr JB Osborn (Chairman), Mr P Batchelor, Mr B Dalton, Mr AN Deane, Dr J English, Mrs ME Groom, Mr A Molland, Mr WR Moss, Mrs JH Rooke, Mrs P Rugg, Mr A Trotman, Mr RS While and Mrs M White.

Also present: Mr I West, Liberal Democrat Group Leader
Mr J Thomson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community Services
Mrs MJ Douglas, Joint Cabinet Member for Community Services

22. **Members Interests** Tony Trotman and Ian West declared personal interests in respect of relatives in receipt of community meals.
23. **Chairman's Announcement** The Chairman acknowledged the presentation and food sampling provided by Wiltshire Farm Foods to members immediately before the start of the meeting.
24. **Public Participation** Martin Fortune from the Wiltshire and Swindon Users Network made a statement in respect of the proposals for community meals.
25. **Call-in of Cabinet Member Delegated Decision on the Future of Community Meals** A report by the Assistant Director of Corporate Services was circulated setting out the procedural arrangements for the call-in. The relevant supporting documents identified by the members who called-in the decision and the Cabinet Member were appended to the report.

The Chairman invited Brian Dalton, Judy Rooke and Paul Batchelor to address the Committee on the reasons and evidence for requesting the call-in. Ian West initially spoke on their behalf commenting on the member and public concerns expressed following the press release. He questioned the appropriateness of taking the decision under delegated authority and the lack of information in the supporting report, particularly in respect of the reasons and alternative options. He also had concerns over the potential impact from the exist strategy from the current contract with Sodexo, and fears for the ability of clients to comprehend what was happening and to exercise the right choice. The timetable for consultation and making the decision was queried, along with a letter raising fears for the future due to the potential loss of service and particularly the matter of the associated welfare checks.

Judy Rooke, Brian Dalton and Paul Batchelor then spoke querying the delivery cost differentials between hot and frozen meals, day care policy changes, further isolation of clients, and the terms of the original contract regarding subsidy.

In reply, John Thomson Cabinet Member for Community Services explained the limitations on the content of the press release as it was issued jointly with Sodexo and confirmed he was comfortable with using the delegated decision process for this matter. However he was disappointed that none of the members who called-in the decision spoke to him during the "intention to make the decision" period. He went on to explain the background to the reducing numbers using the service including the withdrawal of WRVS, the Tillery Valley Foods scandal and changes in qualifying criteria for clients. The ready meals market was significantly different than when the original contract was tendered 7 years ago and Sodexo now realised it was no longer commercially viable for it to continue. The County Council were happy to negotiate early termination of the contract and work towards more flexible future provision.

The Cabinet Member was concerned about the alarmist reporting in the media and gave assurances that action was being taken to keep clients informed and offer alternatives. There were no plans to make savings from the subsidy this year and any opportunity would be taken to reinvest in care services. Welfare visits and risk assessments would remain an important part of the new arrangements. In addition Mary Douglas joint Cabinet Member for Community Services spoke about the wider benefits the new arrangements would bring and the intention to have on going dialogue with clients to ensure the service better meets their needs.

Other members then questioned the timing of the decision without other options having been more fully explored and how the message had been communicated especially in respect of the press release and subsequent letter. However members were pleased with the efforts being put in to secure alternatives and that costs would not rise as a consequence.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank the Cabinet Members for attending and responding positively to the call-in.**
- (2) To accept the offer made to have an update report to the Management Committee at the 6 September meeting, and in the meantime to note the intention to continue to keep members informed through regular bulletins.**
- (3) To take no further action as the Committee was satisfied with the responses given and inform the Cabinet Member that his delegated decision could therefore be implemented with immediate effect.**

(Duration of Meeting: 2.00 – 4.20pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Paul Kelly, Democratic & Members' Services, direct line: (01225) 713049.