

Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 24th May 2007 in the Committee Rooms A, B & C, Level –1, Monkton Park Offices, Chippenham, commencing at 6.00 p.m.

Present:

Chairman: C.J. Caswill.

Committee Councillors: P.J. Doyle, R.L. Cinnamond, P.C.B. Coleman, J.M. Hartless, R.B. MacGregor, S.G. Parker, M.L. Singlehurst and J.P.S.S. Thomson.

Other Members Present: S.K. Doubell and J.B. Whincup.

Officers Present: S. Pangbourne (Deputy Chief Executive), P. Timmins (Section 151 Officer) and J. Whittleton (Policy & Democratic Services Assistant).

O3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Councillors A.K. Hill and C. Reid

O4. Membership

There were no changes of membership.

O5. Public Question Time/Receipt of Petitions

There were no public questions nor petitions received.

O6. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 29th March 2007 were considered.

Resolved that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 29th March 2007 be signed as a correct record.

O7. Declarations of Interest

None.

O8. Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman, Councillor C.J. Caswell:

The Chairman welcomed those in attendance and asked them to introduce themselves.

He stated that the Committee had an opportunity to change the way it operates. He put forward some ideas of how the Committee should conduct its work, including:

- To ensure that the Council works effectively, achieving value for money;

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 24th May 2007

- To hold the Executive to account; and
- To be in touch with other Councillors, local residents, the work of the Executive and staff.

He added that the Committee had an opportunity to be innovative and went on to present suggestions of His own, including:

- Ensuring informal and inclusive meetings in order to encourage public participation;
- To operate in a non-confrontational style;
- To work across party divides;
- To achieve an appropriate balance between internal and external scrutiny;
- To communicate effectively when Councillors are minded to use the call-in mechanism;
- Not to fulfill the role of the opposition or to be micro-managers;
- To improve communication from the Committee (through a more prominent web-page and press briefings);
- To produce an Annual Report;
- To meet in the other market towns of North Wiltshire and to engage with Parish Councils and local Chambers of Commerce etc;
- To establish Task Groups, with specific Terms of Reference and time limits;
- To effectively use Councillors in 'lead' roles, with 6 monthly reports;
- To monitor the Committee's actions by producing a regular action reports;
- To avoid jargon when producing report and minutes etc;
- To establish the resources available to the Committee; and
- To 'clear the decks', when producing the Committees Work Plan.

09. A Programme of Work for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Following on from the Chairman's Announcements, a discussion took place on some of the points raised. This was discussed in two parts.

Part One – Councillor Doyle introduced his paper 'Financial & Management Information Reports' and invited the S151 Officer to advise. The advice covered:

- There were developments that met many of the issues raised. The Budget & Strategic Planning Working Group is a cross-party group that considers all budget matters and advises the Executive; it includes representation from O&S. In addition, a Committee on Treasury issues is shortly to come into being. Also, monitoring information will be made available to all Members as soon as it becomes available. Consequently, this Committee need not burden itself with detailed budget matters;
- A new approach to planning the allocation of resources - comparing price and performance, plotting them on a grid and making strategic decisions - offers a more fruitful approach to allocating resources. This will be considered in the summer, the results of which, can be reported to this Committee, rather than duplicating work.
- Other systems will deliver some of the outputs. A further edition of the Budget Book, due prior to the summer recess, will enhance the information available to all Members. Monitoring reports will produce some information as a bi-product.
- Consequently, representation on the BSPWG and other developments will meet the concerns that lie behind the paper.

Councillor Doyle accepted this as the best way forward and the Committee agreed it would later agree the representation to the Budget & Strategic Planning Working

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 24th May 2007

Group. The Chair moved that a list of documents which exist in the proposal from Councillor P.J. Doyle be produced for the next meeting.

Part Two – the further issues discussed included:

- The importance of effective scrutiny as there was now a large majority;
- The need to base reports on evidence;
- The importance of not following the Executive Workplan, in order to be able to look in depth at specific topics;
- The need to produce an Overview & Scrutiny Workplan;
- That outside meetings will prove unsuccessful unless driven by a particular topic;
- The importance of placing tight remits and time limits on task groups;
- The extraordinary Council meeting to discuss unitary status and whether it is appropriate for this Committee to examine the issue; and
- The importance of Overview & Scrutiny not becoming a complaints forum.

Topics raised by Committee Members as issues which could be examined by Overview & Scrutiny were as follows:

- Partnership Working;
- The decision to provide housing advice in-house, taking the function away from the Citizens Advice Bureau;
- Confidential Paperwork;
- Alternate Weekly Collection;
- The provision for Planning Enforcement; and
- The relationship between Council Tax collection and bailiffs.

The Chairman encouraged Members to give further thought to topics which they would like Overview & Scrutiny to examine.

Resolved

- 1) That a Task Group, comprising of three Members (Councillors R.L. Cinnamond, S.G. Parker and M.L. Singlehurst), be established to look at the decision to remove the housing advice function from the Citizens Advice Bureau and bring it in house.
- 2) That the Committee consider the Provision for Planning Enforcement at the next Committee meeting, by inviting the relevant officer and portfolio holder and requesting a small paper on work in this field.
- 3) That an outline Workplan be drawn up for consideration at the next meeting.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 24th May 2007

- 4) That a request be made to the Executive and the Chief Executive that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be allocated a budget and an allocation of specialist officer time.
- 5) That the Chairman contact the Communications Team with a view to producing a communications plan.
- 6) That Councillors P.J. Doyle, C.J. Caswill and C. Reid be appointed to an Urgent Matters Sub Committee.
- 7) That Councillors P.J. Doyle and R.B. MacGregor be the Overview & Scrutiny representatives on the Budget & Strategic Planning Working Group.
- 8) That a list of documents which exist in the proposal from Councillor P.J. Doyle be produced for the next meeting.

The meeting finished at 8.05pm.

There were 0 members of the public present.

\\serv02260\corpservices\Share - committee\MEETINGS\Overview & Scrutiny\Dates\2007\07.05.24\Draft Minutes 24.5.07.doc