



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.30 p.m. - 6.50 p.m.

18 June 2009

Present: Councillor Watkins (Vice-Chair) (in the Chair), Bradford, Cannell, Driver, Fairbairn, Gihawi, Jeraj, Offord, Ramsay and Wiltshire

Apologies: Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Blower and A Little

1. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Watkins as Vice-Chair for the ensuing civic year.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 9 April 2009.

3. APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE AND SUBSTITUTE TO THE NORFOLK HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Bradford as the Council's representative on the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee with Councillor Watkins as substitute.

4. CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive Officer presented the report and gave a presentation on the background to the establishment of the Corporate Improvement and Efficiency Board. The Unitary Programme Manager outlined the overall parameters of the programme and the principles for handling change. He referred to the work already done and ongoing projects under the themes of value for money, performance improvement, local democracy and neighbourhoods, customer focus and culture change. He referred to the timetable for the savings and improvement work and the potential role of the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance, commented on the programme from an executive perspective. He said that local government was well placed to carry people through the recession and deliver local services. He considered that services should be transferred from quangos to local government wherever possible.

Discussion took place on the work being undertaken and which of the projects it would be most useful for the Scrutiny Committee to consider. The Chair pointed out that the Committee were already scheduled to consider the housing improvement programme at their July meeting.

A member commented on the work relating to staffing spend and the implications of the current vacancy freeze on services such as housing. The Chief Executive Officer said that there would not be any reductions in housing staffing as housing management was ring fenced to the housing revenue account. It was for members to decide on any service cuts. This decision would need to take account of what were discretionary rather than statutory services. It might be appropriate to remove a whole service rather than imposing a lesser level of cuts overall. In the meantime as many vacancies as possible were being held in order to avoid the need to make staff redundant. This process was being managed by a Vacancy Management Panel which would identify any posts that could not be left unfilled.

In reply to questions the Chief Executive Officer said that the Corporate Improvement and Efficiency Board met every six weeks. The programme was however overseen by CMT on a weekly basis. Executive members were then involved in the major pieces of work.

The Chair said that scrutiny members had, in the past, talked about debt recovery and income generation. It might be appropriate to consider any projects impacting on these areas.

Discussion took place on the need to identify which services were most important to the man on the street. Councillor Waters said that effective consultation needed to be built into the programme. Councillor Watkins said that pre-scrutiny of the new corporate plan might be a useful way forward. It would also seem appropriate to look at discretionary and statutory services. Another member stressed the need for the Scrutiny Committee to be given the opportunity to consider the choices that would have to be made at an early a stage as possible.

The Chief Executive Officer said that work was currently being undertaken to scope work plans for individual projects. These would include milestones. Some of the issues involved however related to issues of commercial sensitivity and would need to be considered in private. She said that some analysis of discretionary/statutory services had already been undertaken. The identification of those services that had to be provided in turn identified services where choices could be made. This would assist members in understanding the parameters of the issues.

A member said that it was important to look at the knock-on effects of removing or reducing services in terms of both the consequences of the reductions and who would be affected. Another member referred to the need to look at the cost effectiveness of statutory as well as discretionary services.

RESOLVED to -

- (1) identify the following topics as potential subjects for future scrutiny:-
 - analysis of discretionary and statutory services in terms of identifying areas of choice;

- a review of choices to be made in terms of service cuts or reductions bearing in mind the outcome of public consultation on the services considered to be most important and the consequences of those reductions and who would be most affected;
 - projects relating to debt recovery and income generation.
- (2) ask that work plans for the individual projects should be submitted to this Committee at the earliest possible stage to enable members to identify those where they would wish to monitor progress;
 - (3) note that the housing improvement programme will be considered at the July meeting of the Committee;
 - (4) consider the draft Corporate Plan as a pre-scrutiny item

5. SAFER NORWICH PARTNERSHIP - HALF YEAR PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Community Safety Manager presented the report and answered a number of questions about the performance of the Safer Norwich Partnership in meeting their crime reduction targets for 2008/09. Councillor Bremner, Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion, referred specifically to the significant reductions achieved in both domestic and non-domestic burglaries. The reduction in the public perception of anti-social behaviour, which was partly due to the work of the safer communities team, was also very encouraging.

Discussion then took place on the safer neighbourhood priorities identified by local communities and the actions being developed to address these priorities. The Community Safety Manager said that a number of actions being taken to address issues of anti-social behaviour related to the provision of activities for young people.

The Community Safety Manager answered a number of questions about the arrangements for citywide collaboration between the different SNAP areas. He said that information on common problems was shared through "share point" which was accessible to staff within the police and the council. Good practice was also shared through internal management arrangements in both organisations. He would look into why community wardens appeared to be more heavily involved in some SNAP areas than others.

He said that consultation on the future of the SNAPS was currently on hold. He understood that the police now wanted to consider how they worked in neighbourhoods in general rather than just as meetings. He said that representations had been made to the police about the city centre boundary issue and he was confident that the problems would be resolved.

He referred to project work being undertaken with young people. Young people were also being encouraged to participate in SNAPS. He said that funding had been obtained to continue the taxi marshalling service beyond December. It was hoped that clubs would become involved in the continuation of the scheme in the longer term.

RESOLVED to -

- (1) note the report and record the Committee's satisfaction with the work of the Safer Norwich Partnership;
- (2) ask the Community Safety Manager to investigate how the Community Wardens can be involved more equally in all of the SNAP areas.

6. ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report and referred to the evolution of the scrutiny function within the Council during the past year.

Discussion took place on the future training of scrutiny members. The Scrutiny Officer said that the Norfolk Scrutiny Network were looking to hold a scrutiny conference in October. Further training and development needs could be identified through a self evaluation exercise.

In reply to a question the Scrutiny Officer said that the Annual Scrutiny Report would be available on the Council's website. He would also look to include information on the "councillor call for action" on the website.

RESOLVED to -

- (1) approve the Annual Scrutiny Report for submission to the Council on 14 July 2009;
- (2) record the Committee's appreciation of the work done by both the chair of the committee and the scrutiny officer during the past year.

7. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

The committee received updates on the work of ongoing task and finish groups as follows:-

- **Cycling** - Councillor Jeraj said that the group would be looking at areas with high levels of accidents in July. He said that he, together with Councillor Lubbock, had recently attended the 'Barriers to Cycling' conference;
- **Allotments** - Councillor Offord said that a further meeting was scheduled for July to consider the future monitoring of the improvement programme. It was hoped that it would be possible to update the Scrutiny Committee in July with the final report to the Committee in the Autumn;
- **City Centre Toilet Provision** - Councillor Bradford said that, as previously reported, the group hoped to be in a position to report back to the Scrutiny Committee in October;
- **Burial Provision** - the Scrutiny Officer said that the initial meeting of this group had agreed the scoping of the work to be done. A second meeting would be held shortly.

RESOLVED to note the report.

8. NORFOLK COUNTY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL

RESOLVED to note the issues discussed at the meeting held on 20 April 2009.

9. NORFOLK HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Councillor Bradford referred to the issues considered at the last meeting of this committee. He said that papers for the meeting were available on the County Council's website.

RESOLVED to note the report.

10. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer pointed out that the current work programme had been set in September 2008. He would try and identify a date for an informal session to look at the agenda for the next 12 months.

RESOLVED to note the position.

CHAIR