



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.30 p.m. – 7.00 p.m.

5 June 2008

Present: Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Watkins (Vice-Chair), Faribairn, Gihawi, Jeraj, Little (A), Offord and Ramsay

Apologies: Councillors Blower (other Council business), Bradford, Cannell, Driver and Fisher

1. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair explained that as the Council had appointed a Scrutiny Officer there was an opportunity to review the scope of the work programme. It was proposed that the meeting on 10 July 2008 was used as an informal training session facilitated by an external facilitator to help the Committee formulate an effective work programme which would then be approved at the Committee's meeting in September 2008.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised members that the Norfolk Scrutiny Network was trying to arrange training for Scrutiny members and officers on an annual rather than bi-annual basis.

RESOLVED to note that the work programme would be reviewed and approved at the meeting in September.

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

The Chair advised the Committee that Councillor Bradford was willing to remain as the Council's representative on the Norfolk Health, Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There was a vacancy for a substitute, especially as the meetings sometimes coincided with those of the Planning Applications Committee. Councillor Stephenson could not continue as substitute for that reason.

Members noted the importance of representation at this Committee and the need to ensure that the health issues specific to Norwich were addressed by Norfolk Primary Care Health Trust.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) appoint Councillor Bradford as the Council's representative on the Norfolk Health, Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (2) ask the Committee Officer to canvas the absent members of this Committee as to their wishes to act as Councillor Bradford's substitute

when he cannot attend and to note Councillor Little's interest if no other member comes forward.

3. DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN

The Chief Executive gave a short presentation on the Corporate Plan and highlighted the amendments to the Plan following the Leader of the Council's speech at Council on 3 June 2008. A document showing these changes was circulated at the meeting. The two key priorities were continuing service improvements and preparation for unitary status for greater Norwich.

Considerable discussion ensued. Some members considered that the programme was ambitious and questioned whether it could be achieved. Members also asked specific questions relating to the performance indicators and targets and these were answered by the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive.

In response to a question, the Chief Executive explained the circumstances when the Council employed consultants and that the purpose was to add value to the Council's performance.

During discussion members considered the implications of the growth agenda and ensuring that education attainment was improved to meet the skills shortage. It was suggested that there should be a joint committee with the County Council for Schools, similar to the Norwich Highways Agency Committee. It was noted that the boundaries for adult and children's services were not coterminous. Members also considered that educational performance in local schools had been reported as a deterrent for people with families in deciding to relocate to Norwich for employment. Members also considered the importance of the Norwich Research Park but noted that there were limited employment opportunities for local residents. The implications of achieving Unitary status could mean a better realignment of grants to schools to improve educational attainment. Members also debated the growth agenda and the environmental strategy, and although some members considered these to be in conflict, it was considered that the environmental strategy should underlie all strategies and policies that the Council agreed.

During discussion on health members noted that one of the biggest determinants of health was the provision of good quality housing. It was noted that health authorities maintained a range of indicators on health. Members asked for a briefing note on how private rented housing was brought into use.

Members were advised that the distribution of the 'Citizen' by post would be cost neutral but would be more reliable and reach more households than the current distribution with free newspapers.

Discussion then ensued on monitoring the deliverability of the programme. The Chief Executive said that it was a robust programme and gave reassurance that it was deliverable and that progress could be monitored. There would be regular reports to the Scrutiny Committee and the Executive and the Budget round of Service Plans would also be a key point to check that the Corporate Plan was on target. Members considered that they were not in a position to suggest local performance indicators but could consider this in future. Members noted that the Plan was set over the long term and that the short term objectives were for the two year period to 2010. A joint

meeting of the Executive and Scrutiny members was planned and it was suggested that priorities and deliverability could be discussed there.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) that the Committee is concerned about the deliverability of the Corporate Plan and to express to the Executive that the Scrutiny Committee will wish to monitor its performance during the year;
- (2) to request that information relating to bringing void private housing properties into use be circulated to members of the Committee.

4. PERFORMANCE DATA – YEAR END 2007/08

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the report and together with the Chief Executive and the Policy and Improvement Consultant answered questions.

Discussion ensued and it was pointed out that the implementation of new performance indicators replaced some of the old less meaningful ones. These indicators should help measure outcomes, for instance performance indicators relating to improved recycling rates ultimately contributed to reducing waste going into landfill. With regard to waste packaging, the Government could legislate against excessive packaging, but the City Council's Economic Development Team could contribute by encouraging the public to buy local at the Market, with less packaging, and provide information on minimising packaging. The Council had started at a low base for recycling rates. The second phase of the 'blue bin' roll out was currently being implemented and was being overseen by the Waste Management Working Party.

Members welcomed member engagement in the negotiations for the renewal of the CityCare contract and the benchmarking exercise with Steria.

It was noted that the Council was on target for achieving the 'decent home standard' by 2011.

Councillor Watkins asked what the progress was on the Planning Improvement Plan. The Chief Executive said that the Audit Commission had just completed the inspection and that the Planning Services was now fully staffed, and although improving it was still early days. The report would be available in the next few weeks.

In relation to the speed that the officers responded to telephone calls, members were advised that the introduction of the new telephone number from 1 July 2008 would tell customers where they were in the queue.

In relation to street cleaning members were advised that there had been some inconsistency in the collection of performance indicators. Members considered that the increased number at the Tourist Information Centre indicated an increase in tourism in the City.

Members also noted that encouragement for people to report racial incidents led to an increase in the numbers being recorded and that the proportion of staff employed

by the Council from ethnic minorities had changed because the total staff numbers had fallen.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) that the Scrutiny Committee had no comments to make to the Executive on this report;
- (2) to circulate further information regarding:-
 - (a) confirmation that the Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and Local Enterprise Growth Initiative Programmes were on target;
 - (b) the delays to the introduction of revised charges for permit parking due to software issues.

CHAIR