



## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.30 p.m. – 6.10 p.m.

14 January 2010

Present: Councillor Stephenson (Chair), Watkins (Vice-Chair), Fairbairn, Jeraj, Little (A), Offord, Dylan, and Wiltshire

In Attendance: Councillors Waters, Brociek-Coulton and Bearman

Apologies: Councillors Bradford, Blower, Cannell and Driver

### 1. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 19 November 2009 and 10 December 2009.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Offord and A Little declared a personal interest in item 4

### 3. ANNUAL REVIEW CORPORATE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK FOR WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Councillor Fairbairn declared a personal interest in this item.

The annexed report was presented by The Director of Transformation, the Partnerships Manager, the Partnerships Officer and the Executive Portfolio Holder with responsibility for partnerships.

This was an opportunity for the scrutiny committee to pre scrutinise the annual review of the council's involvement with partnerships including new partnerships added, partnerships removed and key changes to significant scores prior to executive consideration.

Members were informed that the annual review of partnership governance arrangements required a risk assessment to be carried out for each highly significant partnership. It was noted that this was in line with the council's risk management strategy relating to partnership risks. It was emphasised that this process was not assessing the performance of partnerships.

Officers reminded the committee that the corporate governance framework and toolkit for working in partnerships was developed and implemented last

year. The toolkit was in line with the audit commissions recommended practice for good governance arrangements. Members agreed that it was important to maintain a sound system of internal control in relation to partnership arrangements. It was explained that the partnerships team had supported officers in applying the framework to new and evolving partnerships throughout the past year. Officers stated that the framework was now embedded.

The committee noted the process for the partnerships register as explained by officers. Directors and heads of service were involved in analysing the register against the score card. Highly significant scores were highlighted in appendix 2 of the papers attached to the agenda. It was explained and illustrated in the report that the same definition of a partnership had been used this year and that the same partnerships had been excluded from the register this year, as they did not meet the definition of partnership. The partnerships register now records 46 partnership arrangements showing their significance score.

In response to questions from members it was explained that it was important that regard continued to be given to the full list of partnerships, including those scored as non-significant, and the associated monitoring of impact and risk. Officers highlighted the strengths of partnership working and the benefits for the council but also brought to the attention of members' three key areas for improvement; dispute and conflict resolution, exit strategies and risk management. These would be built into action plans and service plans.

At this stage it was explained that as part of the process the executive will need to approve the partnership register.

Members were expressed the view that they were not satisfied that the process presented to them demonstrated that the scoring process was a reliable method for assessing risk. The Chair explained that more evidence was required by the scrutiny committee to show that the results of the process reflected the true picture and that it was not enough to have the end product in front of them for their consideration and endorsement. It was felt that resulting from their questioning that it was not demonstrated that adequate scrutiny arrangements were in place at officer or executive member level to test the effectiveness and appropriateness of the partnerships that the council was involved in.

It was suggested that a future meeting of the scrutiny committee consider the possible role that the scrutiny committee might play in effectively gaining an overview of the scoring process and possibly picking a small number of significant partnerships to test out the framework process and make any recommendations accordingly around the effectiveness of the process and the effectiveness and appropriateness of those partnerships selected.

#### **RESOLVED:-**

- (1) to inform Executive that Scrutiny Committee is not in a position to be able to recommend that the annual review: corporate governance framework for working in partnerships is adequate for assessing risk of partnerships;

- (2) include review of the performance and appropriateness of partnerships in the work programme.

#### **4. ALLOTMENTS TASK & FINISH GROUP**

The Chair said that the allotments task & finish group was set up by the scrutiny committee in late 2008 to review the effectiveness of the allotments service and make recommendations for any improvements that may be highlighted during the review. The Group was chaired by Councillor Bearman who worked with Councillors Offord and Cannell who together formed the group.

Councillor Bearman presented the final report of the task & finish group. In response to questions, she outlined the process that had produced the findings feeding into the recommendations: the involvement of officers working in the team that provided the allotments service and the consultation with plot holders and people on the allotments waiting list.

The Executive Portfolio Holder with responsibility for allotments welcomed the report and thanked the task & finish group for the work that had been carried out.

#### **RESOLVED to:-**

- (1) endorse the recommendations of the allotments task & finish group for the improvement and development of the council's allotments service and to recommend them to the Executive;
- (2) thank the allotments task and finish group for the work that it carried out.

#### **5. NORFOLK COUNTY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL**

The Chair said that a meeting of the Norfolk County Strategic Partnership Joint Scrutiny Panel was held at the Norfolk Records Office, County Hall on Monday, 11 January 2010. At that meeting Councillor Philip Cowen of Breckland Council was appointed Chairman for another term and Councillor Bertie Collins of Great Yarmouth Borough Council was reappointed as Vice Chairman.

The joint panel received a presentation by Debbie Bartlett, Head of Policy and Performance, Norfolk County Council; CAA Action Plan on Norfolk's Area Assessment and members learned that; face-to-face meetings with the Audit Commission had been the most effective means of communication. There could have been more effective liaison between the Audit Commission and other agencies, e.g. OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission. Members noted that the Audit Commission and the other inspection agencies were working to address these early operational difficulties towards working in a more effective, cohesive and complimentary way.

The County Strategic Partnership has achieved one green flag for participatory democracy and needed to consider how to achieve more green flags in future assessments especially by looking at other areas. It was important to raise the profile of things which were done well in Norfolk. Members felt this was something that should be built on and that Norfolk should not be shy about celebrating its successes.

The Audit Commission had also highlighted that the Oneplace website provided good information but did not live up to its aim to be accessible to ordinary local people.

The second presentation was made by Daniel Harry, Norfolk County Council; on the review and refresh of the Local Area Agreement and the Local Area Agreement Annual Review with GO East.

**RESOLVED** to note the work of the Norfolk County Strategic Partnership Joint Scrutiny Panel

## **6. NORFOLK HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – UPDATE**

**RESOLVED** to note that a meeting was planned the following month and Councillor Bradford would present an update at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting.

## **7. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Members discussed a possible future item for the committee's work programme looking at proposing a merger of the various bodies set up around Norwich that dealt with climate change issues; Norwich Carbon Reduction Trust, Norwich 21 and the Independent Climate change Consultation. Related to this, members also expressed interest in exploring a possible standardised process for setting up bodies that involved the co-option of non elected representatives.

**RESOLVED** to –

- (1) defer scrutiny of the housing improvement process until after the forthcoming peer review.
- (2) note the changes that had been made to the work programme since its publication.

CHAIR