



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.30 p.m. - 6.15 p.m.

8 January 2009

Present: Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Watkins (Vice-Chair), Bradford, Cannell, Driver, Fairbairn, Fisher, Jeraj, Little (A), Offord and Ramsay

Apologies: Councillor Blower (on other Council business)

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 December 2008.

2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

(Councillors Blakeway, Brociek-Coulton and Sands, Executive Members for Neighbourhood Development, Residents and Customer Care and Children and Young People respectively attended the meeting for this item).

The Head of Community Services presented the report and reminded members of the background to the development of the draft Community Engagement Strategy. The Strategy was however a high level document and would be supported by a lot of detail including a tool kit to facilitate community engagement. He introduced Debra Harris, the new Community Engagement Manager who would be responsible for facilitating implementation of the Strategy, to the Committee. He said that the results of the current consultation on the draft Strategy would be reported back to the Executive in April.

The Head of Community Services answered questions about the proposed subdivision of the City into 7 geographical areas for the purposes of the Strategy. The areas had been chosen pragmatically to reflect the resource available and to align with existing boundaries. There would however be an opportunity to review the boundaries in the light of future local government re-organisation in Norfolk. He said that a named officer would be allocated to each area. Some of the officers would however have thematic as well as geographical roles. A member said that he would have liked to have seen more emphasis on community cohesion in the Strategy. Councillor Blakeway said however that this should be a by-product of community engagement.

Discussion took place on the resources allocated for the implementation of the Strategy. The Head of Community Services said that the budget set out in the report related to the additional spend on staffing costs. It was intended that the Community Engagement Team would work with communities to help them obtain grant funding not accessible to the Council.

The Scrutiny Committee also asked a number of questions about the arrangements being made to ensure that community engagement extended to individuals as well as organisations. The Head of Community Services referred to the range of mechanisms available to the Council to “talk and listen” and which would be used as part of the Community Engagement Strategy including the Place Survey, the Citizens Panel and the Customer Contact Team. A member referred to the need for a basic dialogue on what people wanted from Council services.

Members generally welcomed the Community Engagement Strategy. A member said however, that on the basis of the information provided, he was still concerned that there were not sufficient resources allocated to implement the policy. The provision of information to people on the outcome of consultation would require a significant input from teams across the Council. Councillor Blakeway pointed out however that provision for responding to residents was already incorporated in the budgets of individual services.

RESOLVED to submit the following comments to the Executive:-

- (1) Whilst the Scrutiny Committee welcomes the draft Community Engagement Strategy it is important that sufficient resources are available for it to be properly implemented. The information provided in the current report does not provide sufficient information for the Committee to be satisfied that adequate resources are available for its delivery;
- (2) It is extremely important that the implementation of the Strategy provides for engagement with individuals as well as groups;
- (3) Given the Strategy is at a very high level it is important that the practical affects of its implementation are evaluated after an appropriate period.

3. SCRUTINISING THE BUDGET SETTING PROCESS

(Councillor Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance, attended the meeting for this item).

The Scrutiny Officer presented his report and referred to the role of the Scrutiny Committee in scrutinising the budget setting process.

A number of members referred to the need for budget papers to be provided to the Committee in good time. Members also considered the level of information required by the Committee. A member said that whilst the Committee would want to concentrate on the major issues it was important that they also had the detailed information behind the issues. A member asked that the papers should also include figures for the current year for comparison purposes.

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer said that information such as Service Plans and the Corporate Plan would be available electronically. This Committee would then

receive the same budget information going to the Executive and Council. Councillor Waters commented on the problems caused by the volatility of the current economic climate. All Groups would be offered the opportunity for a briefing on the budget before Council. He pointed out however that it would be useful if members of this Committee could give advance notice of any particular questions they wished to raise at Scrutiny Committee so that answers could be prepared.

In reply to a question the Deputy Chief Executive Officer said that performance in delivering the budget was monitored through the quarterly performance reports. The performance report covering the third quarter of the current financial year was due to be considered by both this Committee and the Executive in February.

RESOLVED to note the legal framework for budget scrutiny and ask the officers to ensure that papers are available to the Committee at least a week before the meeting.

4. NORFOLK COUNTY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL - UPDATE

The Chair said that the first meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Panel had been arranged for 14 January 2009.

RESOLVED to note the position.

5. NORFOLK HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Councillor Bradford referred to some of the issues currently being considered by this Committee including the issue of GPs surgeries.

RESOLVED to note the position.

6. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their future work programme.

The Chair suggested that it would be useful for the Committee to consider the proposals for an Academy at Earlham High School. Members also considered the request made by the Executive for this Committee to review the issues raised by Greyhound Opening. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer said that a further report was to be submitted to the Executive on the outcome of the external review of the Council's investigations. She suggested that the Scrutiny Review should not take place until after this point. The Chair said that the two main issues to be considered by the Scrutiny Committee were whether proper processes were now in place to ensure that a similar situation did not arise in the future and whether a full internal investigation was required. Both issues did not however necessarily need to be considered at the same time.

In reply to a question the Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that he would check whether Executive or Council would be responsible for making the final decision on whether a full external enquiry should be commissioned and inform Group Leaders.

RESOLVED to agree the Scrutiny Work Programme subject to the following amendments:-

- the deferral of the item on financial inclusion, debt advisory services and credit unions to the February meeting;
- the inclusion of provision for consideration of proposals for an Academy at Earlham High School at an appropriate time in terms of the consultation process;
- the inclusion of provision for a review of Greyhound Opening at a date to be determined but provisionally schedule a meeting for 4.30 p.m. on Thursday 22 January if it is necessary to consider the issue before Council on 27 January.

CHAIR