



## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**4.30 p.m. - 6.10 p.m.**

**12 June 2008**

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

Apologies: Councillors Blower and Gihawi

### **1. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2008 subject to the following amendments:-

- (1) item 3 - declarations of interest - being amended to reflect the fact that Councillor Ramsay rather than a friend lived in one of the properties affected;
- (2) the references to Lara Tyne in item 5 - Post Office Network Change Programme - being amended to read Laura Tarling;
- (3) the addition of the following recommendation to the Executive in the resolution to item 5 - Post Office Network Change Programme – “write to the Government asking that all Post Offices should be allowed to provide all services”;
- (4) the addition of the words "at the earliest opportunity" to the end of resolution 4 to item 6 - Communal Aerial Digital Upgrade.

### **2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Head of Community Services presented the report and explained the current position so far as stage 1 of the implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy was concerned. It was hoped that the draft Strategy would be presented to Executive in July.

He answered a number of questions about the proposed role of the Area focussed community engagement team. He said that whilst there would be direct involvement at neighbourhood level in terms of working with and developing communities and assisting them to, for example, draw-in funding from external sources, they would also support other officers in community engagement. It was anticipated that the team would be based in the neighbourhoods for at least part of the week.

Discussion took place on the alternative mechanisms for community engagement. The Head of Community Services referred to the need to address the needs of communities of interest as well as geographical communities. He outlined the work done to date with community groups. Wherever possible groups at the local level were being encouraged to come together so that they could learn from each other, share training and work collaboratively.

A member suggested that it would be easier to engage community groups if they were given specific areas of responsibility such as was the case with parish councils. The Director of Transformation pointed out however that parish councils did not all have the same responsibilities. It would be important to adopt a flexible approach which would allow for the adoption of different models in different areas depending on their individual needs and local capacity. A member welcomed the grass roots up approach suggested.

In reply to a question the Director of Transformation said that whilst current City Council policy was to adopt a citywide approach a new unitary authority might want to adopt a differential policy and concentrate resources into the most deprived areas.

The Committee also discussed the need to ensure that the consultation undertaken was as wide ranging as possible. A member expressed concerns that some of the stakeholders were not necessarily representative of the whole community. The Head of Community Services said that work with groups was just one of the ways of engaging with the community. Would be undertaken to try and identify options for engaging with other people, including hard to reach groups, in the future. A member referred to the need to consider full diversity in consultation. Wards were not all homogenous and there was a role for Councillors in helping to ensure that appropriate consultation was undertaken.

Considerable discussion took place on the future role of this Committee in monitoring the implementation of the Strategy once it had been agreed. Options considered included the appointment of a Champion to monitor progress on behalf of the Committee, the establishment of a sub-group to monitor the position or regular monitoring reports to the whole Committee.

**RESOLVED** to -

- (1) ask the officers to take on board the comments made about the need for any consultation undertaken to be as wide ranging as possible and to ensure that the Strategy covers the whole of the community;
- (2) note that this Committee will be consulted on the draft Strategy as part of the formal consultation process following consideration by the Executive;
- (3) consider further the options for the future monitoring of the Strategy by this Committee at that time.

### **3. E-PETITIONS**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report and said that it would be possible to implement the e-petition software currently used by the Government without incurring any significant expenditure on either the hardware or software. There would however be costs in terms of managing the site. These costs were however difficult to quantify as they would be dependent on the numbers of petitions submitted.

A member said he understood that the petition systems had been implemented successfully in other parts of the country. In the circumstances he considered that it should be trialled in Norwich subject to appropriate caveats and conditions.

Discussion took place on the extent to which the conditions relating to the submission of paper petitions should be applied to e-petitions. A number of members were of the view that it would be easier to get people to sign-up to an e-petition rather than a paper petition. On that basis a greater number of signatories such as 200 should be required before an e-petition was considered. It might also be appropriate to adopt a stepped approach on the response to be given to petitions achieving the minimum number of signatories dependent on both the content of the petition and the number of signatories. The response could either be by an officer, by an Executive member or by the full Council.

Discussion also took place on the need to be able to verify the identity of signatories to e-petitions to ensure they had the requisite local connection. It was also necessary to ensure that adequate safeguards were put in place to ensure that people signing e-petitions were not subject to spam. The Chair referred to the need for the site to be available in languages other than English.

#### **RESOLVED to -**

- (1) support in principle the establishment of an e-petition site on the Council's website;
- (2) ask the officers to work up detailed proposals for the operation of the site to take account of both the conditions already applied to the submission of petitions to Council, the response to the recent Government consultation on petitions and the discussion minuted above for further consideration by this Committee prior to submission to the Executive.

### **4. NORFOLK HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Councillor Bradford reported on the discussion about polyclinics at the last meeting of the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

#### **RESOLVED to -**

- (1) note the report;
- (2) appoint Councillor Watkins as the substitute representative to the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee with Councillor A Little acting as a reserve substitute if this is allowable.

**5. SCRUTINY TRAINING**

**RESOLVED** to note the arrangements for Scrutiny training at 4.30 p.m. on Thursdays 3rd, 10th and 24th July.

CHAIR