



MINUTES

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5.00 p.m. – 6.25 p.m.

11 December 2008

Present: Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Blower, Cannell, Fairbairn, Gihawi, Jeraj, Offord and Ramsay

Apologies: Councillors Watkins, Bradford, Driver and Little(A)

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 November, 2008, subject to the first paragraph being amended to read ‘...this research would focus on plants and micro-organisms...’.

2. CASTLE GARDENS

(Councillors Blakeway and Bremner, relevant portfolio holders, sent their apologies for not being able to attend this item).

The Chair said that the issue of anti-social behaviour around the Castle Gardens area was something the Committee had identified as a possible item for the work programme.

Colin Penfold, Community Safety Manager, gave a presentation on the current position regarding anti-social behaviour at Castle Gardens including photographs and Police statistics. There had been 56 incidents reported to Police in 2006/07 and 42 in 2007/08 with the main complaints involving the presence of groups of youths and drinking related issues.

He said that the Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel had discussed the problem and had made anti-social behaviour at Castle Gardens one of its priorities. Following an environmental audit in September 2008 a multi-agency action plan had been put in place and the Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel would be receiving a progress report on the action plan in February, 2009. He added that the Council's Green Spaces section was preparing a separate action plan to ensure that Grounds Maintenance was carried out effectively, including pruning trees and shrubs to help lighting and to rationalise the number/location of bins on site.

In reply to members questions and comments, he acknowledged that a lot of activity in the area was not reported to the Police and there had been some problems with the 0845 number. Also, Castle Mall staff received many calls direct.

He said the main times when problems were reported were 4-7 pm weekdays and daytimes at weekends. Bob Cronk, Head of Community Services said that young people were drawn to areas that were well lit because they felt safe. Colin Penfold said that the aim was not to exclude young people from the area and Castle Mall was looking at the possibility of improving the shelter in Castle Gardens which could encourage the youths to gather there instead. John Jones, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, said that during Local Democracy Week some young people had suggested that an area be designated for use by young people and suggested that if they were allowed to take responsibility and ownership then anti-social behaviour issues might be less likely to occur.

RESOLVED to –

- (1) consider Castle Gardens at the March, 2009 meeting when progress on the Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel action plan will be available;
- (2) start the meeting at 4pm at Castle Gardens and ask Colin Penfold to encourage interested parties, including young people, to meet us there when the Committee members can split into small groups to aid discussion;
- (3) ask members to inform Colin Penfold if they have any ideas/suggestions to help the Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel's work;
- (4) ask the Scrutiny Officer to arrange for Colin Penfold's presentation to be available on e-councillor.

3. EQUALITY STRATEGY LEVEL 2

Nadia Aman, Policy Officer, presented the annexed report.

RESOLVED to –

- (1) note the progress towards achieving Level 2 of the Equality's standard;
- (2) consider the Equality Standards Framework again as pre-Scrutiny prior to the Council's bid to achieve Level 2 in March, 2009.

4. REPORT BACK FROM TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

Members received the following updates on the work of three Task and Finish Groups:-

City Centre Toilet Provision

Councillor Blower said that the City Centre Toilet Provision Task and Finish Group had met twice to receive background information and details of current toilet provision in the city centre.

Steve Goddard, Scrutiny Officer, said that the next stage would be to discuss the information further with officers, identify possible short term solutions with a view to recommending longer term strategic actions.

Cycling

Councillor Jeraj said that the Cycling Task and Finish Group had met once to scope the review. It would be looking at a range of issues including cycling on pavements, proficiency/maintenance courses, one way streets and cycle to work schemes. A cycle hire scheme would not be looked at as this was already being developed.

The Task and Finish Group was identifying a range of questions to put to cyclists and other interest groups and the questionnaires will be finalised at the next meeting. The Task and Finish Group was working towards drafting an overall strategy for cyclists for presentation to Scrutiny Committee.

Allotments

(Councillor Bearman attended for this item).

Councillor Bearman said that the Allotments Task and Finish Group had met once. Steve Goddard added that the Group had identified questions for officers and the response to these would help to scope the work further at the next meeting.

RESOLVED to note the progress of the three task and finish groups.

5. NORFOLK COUNTY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL

The Chair and Steve Goddard said that they had attended a useful training session organised by Norfolk County Council which was aimed at helping members understand their role in scrutinising local strategic partnerships and local area agreements.

The first meeting of the countywide Scrutiny Panel would be held early in the New Year.

RESOLVED to note that –

- (1) a briefing session on partnerships and local area agreements would be arranged in the New Year for all councillors;
- (2) there would be a standing item on the Norfolk County Strategic Partnership Joint Scrutiny Panel on future Scrutiny Committee agendas.

6. NORFOLK HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – UPDATE

No update was available as the Committee's representative had sent apologies.

7. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Steve Goddard said that an additional item of work for the Scrutiny Committee was consideration of the 2009/10 budget proposals. At the January Scrutiny meeting a report would be presented aimed at assisting members to consider and pre-scrutinise the draft budget. The draft budget would then be considered by Scrutiny Committee at its February meeting prior to final consideration of the budget by the Executive and Council approval.

A member emphasised the importance of Scrutiny Committee having all relevant documents well in advance of the February meeting including summaries of the key issues as well as the detailed figures. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that service plans would be available on e-councillor after Christmas.

RESOLVED to note the current work programme and to add Scrutiny of the budget 2009/10 to it.

CHAIR