

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15th May 2006

**PRESENT:-**

**Labour Group**

Councillor Lane (Vice-Chair in the Chair) and Councillor Mulgrew.

**Conservative Group**

Councillors Atkin, Bale and Bladen.

**In Attendance**

Councillors Pabla and Wilkins (Labour Group).

COS/32. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 3rd April 2006 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

COS/33. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

Further to Minute No. COS/27, the Chair sought an update about the Rural Development Charter. The Principal Policy Officer had researched this matter through the DEFRA website and he gave an outline of the complex consultation programme being undertaken at present. At the last Meeting, the Deputy Chief Executive advised Members of the approach taken to respond to consultation documents. It was noted that the Local Government Information Unit, which often responded to such consultations on behalf of member local authorities, had not yet submitted a response to this consultation. Officers felt there would be opportunities for the Council to feed into this process over the next year. An outline was given of the main themes of this Charter, which accorded with some of the Council's social inclusion aims. However, there was quite a commitment in signing up to this Charter, with many objectives and requirements that the Council would need to ensure it had the capacity to fulfil. This item could be included on the Committee's future work programme.

Councillor Atkin asked which of the policy committees was the appropriate one to consider the Charter. There was a discussion on this issue and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Finance and Management Committee were invited to contribute. It was noted that the Finance and Management Committee had broad terms of reference, although a report was included on the Annual Council Agenda to give authority for all policy committees to consider appropriate consultation documents. It might be appropriate to submit this matter to all policy committees, as the Charter would touch on different aspects of their respective terms of reference. Councillor Atkin explained that pursuing this Charter could impact positively on the Council's CPA rating. The Principal Policy Officer offered to undertake further research and to produce a digest for Members, with a view to submitting reports to policy committees in the late summer.

**COS/34. RESPONSE FROM FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ON THE STRATEGIC PLANNING REVIEW**

The Chair introduced this item and reminded those present of the work undertaken by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on the Strategic Planning Review. The resultant report contained many recommendations and it had been considered by the Finance and Management Committee. The Scrutiny Committee felt it was appropriate to discuss the response received with the Policy Committee's Chair and Vice-Chair. An extract of the Finance and Management Committee Minutes from 23rd March 2006 had been circulated. The Chair took Members through the various review recommendations and the response from the Policy Committee.

The Review's second recommendation was for adoption of the planning process within this municipal year. The Chair referred to the last two paragraphs of the Policy Committee's response and he sought an update. Councillor Wilkins provided a context on the process of plan preparation and the mechanisms for consultation. There was also a discussion about the status of the "achieving more" framework and the benefits that would accrue from it.

Recommendation 3 related to visioning and priority setting. Councillor Bale was concerned about how residents' views were assessed and taken into account. Councillor Wilkins replied, referring to the consultation processes and the size of sample used, which compared favourably to that used by MORI in its opinion polls. The Council provided information to residents through its newspaper and he also spoke about the number of "hits" on the Council's website, which showed the level of interest in Council services. The Principal Policy Officer supported this view and he explained that the Council was strengthening its consultation methodology. He spoke about qualitative consultation and research, for example, through the use of focus groups. Consultation for hard to reach groups was also mentioned. Councillor Wilkins used a specific example in Newhall, where periodic consultation and targeted action had resulted in changing priorities for local residents. Councillor Pabla felt there was ample opportunity for residents to submit their views to the Council. Councillor Atkin questioned how feedback from the Council's newspaper was being used and Councillor Wilkins offered to look into this.

With regard to review recommendation 5, which concerned support for policy research and effective co-ordination on cross cutting issues, there were concerns about capacity. Under recommendation 6, Councillor Wilkins referred to "modern day living" and highlighted initiatives under the People Strategy. By improving employees' working conditions, this should lead to improved service delivery. The Chair asked for an update on development of the strategy and the Principal Policy Officer provided further information. The Chair also referred to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Councillor Wilkins gave an outline of the new inspection regime and the ability for councils to request a further inspection, if they felt their direction of travel was improving. Councillor Bale considered that crime and disorder was a concern for many residents. Councillor Wilkins agreed and the fear of crime was a particular issue that had been recognised by the Crime and Disorder Partnership. He spoke about the Council's partnership working, in particular referring to the Safer South Derbyshire Group and the successful Liberation Day initiative.

Recommendation 7 concerned the consultation strategy and capacity for its delivery. There was a discussion about resource issues and the work undertaken through the Council for Voluntary Services. The Principal Policy Officer referred to the Derbyshire Consultation and Engagement Group, giving an outline of its composition and its involvement with the Citizens Panel. There were clear benefits from joint working to reduce consultation costs and to streamline consultation processes.

It was noted that recommendation 8, to provide political groups with Officer support had not been approved by the Policy Committee. This was mainly a resource issue and a comparison was made to the unsuccessful service development bid for a Corporate Consultation Officer. Councillor Bladen did not feel there was a need for political assistants, but from an opposition perspective, his Group valued the advice received from Officers.

Under review recommendation 9, Councillor Atkin questioned whether a representative of the Opposition Group should be included in the Management Team's meetings with leading Members. Councillor Wilkins did not feel this was appropriate, but there might be the opportunity for the political group leaders to meet separately. He confirmed the leading Members that met with Management Team and gave examples of the broad range of issues discussed.

The Chair sought further information about the Policy Committee's response to review recommendation 9. Councillor Wilkins commented firstly about the Policy Committee's feedback on the Strategic Planning Review. With the exception of the political assistant posts, all of the recommendations had been approved in whole or in part. He spoke about the delays in responding to this Scrutiny Report and the need for a quicker mechanism, possibly through a sub-committee or use of the Improvement Panel in the future.

Councillor Lane then asked if the same process would be used for the preparation of the Corporate Plan in the future. It was considered that the process had been successful, although an earlier start would be made for future years. Councillor Atkin referred to the consultation arrangements and the scoring of priorities. Some parish council representatives had attended a number of forums and were able to submit their views several times, which he felt detracted from the process. This point was acknowledged, but the consultation aimed to be inclusive. Councillor Bladen felt there was a need to change the approach of parish councils, to work with the District Council rather than acting as its scrutiny function. Councillor Pabla referred to the Council's newspaper and a survey could be included to seek residents' feedback. There was also a discussion about levels of feedback generally.

The Committee discussed review recommendation 10 and noted that the Corporate Plan would be submitted for final approval to the Annual Council Meeting on 25th May 2006. The Chair thanked Councillors Pabla and Wilkins for their attendance and contribution.

#### COS/35. **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2005/06**

It was noted that the Overview Committee would give final consideration to the Annual Report at its Meeting on 22nd May 2006, prior to its submission to the Annual Council Meeting on 25th May 2006.

COS/36. **LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PROJECT**

Following the earlier discussion of this item, it was confirmed that the Council's representatives on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) were Councillors Whyman M.B.E., Wilkins and Mrs. Wheeler, together with the Chief Executive. It had been established that the LSP was now at the end of its first year action plan. The Scrutiny Committee could ask the Council's representatives if they felt the LSP had made a difference. The Chair was mindful that the Committee's composition would be reviewed at the Annual Council Meeting and the new Committee would need to revisit its work programme.

COS/37. **WORK PROGRAMME**

Further to Minute No. COS/31, the Chair outlined potential items for the Committee's future work programme. These could be discussed at a Scrutiny "away day" and it might be appropriate to seek the Finance and Management Committee's views on additional areas for this Scrutiny Committee to consider.

R. LANE

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.30 p.m.