

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23rd July 2001

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Routledge (Vice-Chair in the Chair) and Councillor Evens.

Conservative Group

Councillors Harrison and Mrs. Robbins.

In Attendance

Councillors Bell, Carroll and Whyman (Labour Group).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillor Richards (Chair) and Councillor Knight (Labour Group).

CYS/1. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

Councillor Harrison referred to a petition he presented at the Finance and Management Committee Meeting held on 19th July 2001 regarding the changes proposed for the Sheltered Housing Service. He felt that it was a matter that required calling in and was advised that the issue had been placed on the Agenda for consideration at the Overview Committee taking place on Tuesday 31st July 2001.

CYS/2. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

A copy of the Procedure Rules together with Article 6 for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees was circulated. The documents were to be submitted to the Council Meeting on 9th August 2001 for ratification. Members considered the documents in detail making various suggestions/alterations to the documents and also agreed to advise the Legal and Members' Services Manager of any comments they had to make on the documents following the Meeting.

It was noted that it was intended to refer to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the Community Scrutiny Committee in the future.

With regard to the Terms of Reference it was agreed that the preparation and monitoring of the annual Best Value Performance Plan and/or the Best Value Review Programme or individual reviews should be a function of both the Corporate and Community Scrutiny Committee depending on the individual reviews being undertaken.

Members were advised that only the Overview Committee had the power of call in but that any three members of the Council (from at least two political parties) could, in writing, request a decision to be called in. (The Legal and Members' Services Manager advised that a form would be devised to assist in this matter.)

With regard to the rules on Call In Members asked that Policy Committee decisions should be published where possible by electronic means and should be available at the Council Offices and sent to all Members within two working days of being made.

Members also suggested that where possible after consultation with the Chair of the Overview Committee and in any case within ten working days of a request being made to call in a decision, an Overview Committee should be called, however, it was noted that this was a very tight timescale.

Under the heading of “Urgent Decisions and Call In” Councillor Whyman expressed concern that part of these provisions could be used by Officers to circumvent the proper system using the urgent provisions.

Members discussed in detail whether it should be the Chair or the Leader of the Council who determined whether a matter could be treated as a matter of urgency and it was agreed that this function should be the responsibility of the Chair of the Council.

(At 5.00 p.m. Councillors Carroll and Whyman left the meeting.)

CYS/3. **ANNUAL WORKPLAN (TO MAY 2002)**

The Chair praised Councillor Bell for his work on the Scrutiny Committee role and advised that Councillor Bell had prepared a document on suggested topics that could be scrutinised which was duly circulated. Councillor Harrison talked about the duplication of the Scrutiny exercise and the overlap with Best Value Reviews and asked for guidance as to whether Scrutiny Committees should “back off” until Best Value Reviews had been undertaken. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that representatives of Scrutiny Committees should have a meeting with the Leader of the Best Value Review Team about to commence a Best Value Review with a view to “steering” such a Review. It was suggested that such inputs at appropriate times would ensure that Reviews were carried out in sufficient detail to assist the Scrutiny function. The Policy and Best Value Manager suggested that the Scrutiny Committees could be involved between the Scoping and Final Report stage and accordingly she outlined which Best Value Reviews would be taking place during the remainder of 2001 and also during 2002.

Councillor Harrison asked how the Scrutiny function was to be staffed and was advised by the Chief Finance Officer that this depended on how Scrutiny Reviews were programmed. If such work was programmed in accordance with work that the Council was already doing then this would place less pressure on existing staff. The Chief Finance Officer talked about the financial constraints of the Council and suggested that Scrutiny Committees (when considering the list of topics circulated) could consider how this would fit in with the Council’s current workplan. He advised that the Council had not identified specific resources to assist the Scrutiny function and that Scrutiny Committees needed to bear this in mind. If particular resources were required to assist the Scrutiny function then particular officers would not be carrying out work in other areas.

Councillor Routledge expressed concern regarding the staffing of the Scrutiny function as he felt that a dedicated officer was required. The Deputy Chief

Executive suggested that if Scrutiny Committees were concerned about a particular issue then these could be incorporated into Year 3 of the Best Value Review work programme. Councillor Routledge felt that a budget for the Scrutiny role needed to be identified for the next financial year and the Deputy Chief Executive suggested that this issue was a matter that perhaps the Overview Committee could raise with the Leadership Group. Councillor Harrison felt that the Council would be in a better position in the future to decide what resources would be needed for the Scrutiny function but was concerned that when a particular area of the Council was being scrutinised the staff involved in that area might become defensive. Councillor Bell advised that Scrutiny would be based on acquiring certain information and how much officer time would be taken on such matters was unknown. He felt however that it was clear that the Scrutiny function would need officer support and that officers would need to gather both internal and external information and be able to present it in a relevant format.

Arising out of the above discussions it was agreed to examine the Scrutiny topics circulated and in the meantime officers would prepare a draft plan of work for the Corporate and Community Scrutiny Committees in accordance with the Council's current workplan. Councillor Bell asked that this exercise considered why and how certain reviews would be undertaken and whether Members would need to co-opt onto such reviews. He advised that timescales and contributors were also issues which should be pre-planned to influence the workplans of the Scrutiny Committees. Councillor Harrison suggested that when Members considered the Scrutiny topics circulated and gave feedback to officers that their preferences be limited to three priorities in order that popular topics could be identified.

CYS/4. **TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Members were advised that Councillor Knight had indicated that a 4.00 p.m. start time for Scrutiny Committees did not suit his personal circumstances. A general discussion took place with regard to the timings of future meetings and it was agreed that meetings should start at 5.00 p.m. in future.

RECOMMENDED:-

That the Terms of Reference, Annual Workplan and Time of Future Community Scrutiny Committees be agreed subject to further comments of the Overview Committee and the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and that final conclusions be recommended to Council for approval.

W. ROUTLEDGE

CHAIR

The meeting terminated at 6.00 p.m.

