

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14th June 2004

**PRESENT:-**

**Labour Group**

Councillor Harrington (Chair) and Councillor Mrs. Mead.

**Conservative Group**

Councillor Hood and Lemmon (arrived at 4.15 p.m.)

**In Attendance**

Councillor Murphy (Labour Group).

**APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillors Bambrick (Vice-Chair) and Mulgrew (Labour Group).

CYS/1. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 4th May 2004 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

CYS/2. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

The Chair circulated the notes of the meeting of Scrutiny Members which had taken place on 7th June 2004. Members gave detailed consideration to the points discussed at that Meeting as follows:-

Annual Report

Members discussed views expressed at the informal Meeting that the Annual Report should be in two parts, the first being a short, easy to understand document for general circulation and the second a longer technical document for those requiring more detailed information. It was envisaged that both documents would be of high quality, containing photographs and graphics.

Role of Scrutiny and the Scrutiny Process

The Committee discussed the need for the development of the scrutiny process to include involvement by all scrutineers in the work programme, more input from external contributors and doing more to hold Policy Committees to account. A discussion took place and it was concluded that all Members should be involved in briefings prior to Meetings of the Committee. The Committee gave consideration to the slides presented by Councillor Murphy at the Meeting on 7th June 2004 suggesting a more formalised process in which all Members could contribute. This presentation had covered the scrutiny process as a whole, reasons for carrying out reviews and the review process. Copies of the slides from that presentation were circulated. The key messages arising from the presentation were to

challenge, be constructive, investigate with evidence-based questioning and be inclusive (all Members need to be involved). Members discussed how the process outlined could be applied to a scrutiny exercise which raised a number of issues such as the need to scope and outline the purpose of the review, stakeholder expectations and timescales involved.

#### Scrutiny Contributors Charter

The Chair circulated a draft Scrutiny Contributors Charter which had been prepared by himself and Councillor Murphy (Chair of Corporate Scrutiny Committee). This document would also be circulated to Members of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee for comment.

#### Training and Development Needs

The Committee discussed the specific requirements for scrutineers, such as knowledge of performance management, project management and problem solving techniques together with interview skills and an ability to understand and interpret financial and other data. Councillor Murphy advised that he had subsequently discussed training and development needs of scrutineers with the Council's Employee Development Officer accordingly. Councillor Murphy emphasised that a role map (Job Description) was needed for Scrutiny Members. Other issues such as the room layout for interviewing as part of a meeting needed to be considered. Once job descriptions for all scrutineers were in place, the Employee Development Officer would be asked to interview Members on a one-to-one basis to ascertain their development needs.

#### Communication

At the Meeting held on 7th June it was felt that improved communication with local people and other stakeholders was central to the Council's plans for developing the role of the scrutiny function. Important aspects included more flexibility over arrangements for meetings, high quality and accessible reports, greater use of the Council's website (ideally scrutiny to have its own Web page), more feedback reports to policy committees and more sub-groups of the scrutiny committee together with regular items being included in the Council's Core Brief and local media.

#### Resources

The Committee acknowledged that the new ways of working proposed for scrutiny would require additional resources. Currently, scrutiny did not have a dedicated budget. The Deputy Chief Executive outlined that he would have concerns about designating a specific budget for scrutiny in the absence of clear spending proposals. A general discussion took place with regard to outsourcing work to consultants and the Deputy Chief Executive advised that outsourcing would need to be managed and therefore caution was urged. The Chair proposed that it would be useful to monitor costs involved with the scrutiny process during the next twelve months and accordingly this was agreed.

Scrutiny Conference

Members gave consideration to organising a conference to promote the Council's scrutiny function more widely and the Committee agreed that it would like to host a seminar for other fourth option councils on South Derbyshire's approach to scrutiny.

CYS/3. **CAR PARKING STUDY**

Under Minute No. CYS/53 of 4th May 2004, the Committee had received a report summarising progress made to date on the Car Parking Study. At that time it was agreed that the Safety and Security Audit should be referred to the Environmental and Development Committee for more detailed consideration and that the Emergency Services should be contacted regarding access problems in particular streets within the District. The Committee was advised that unfortunately, due to staff sickness neither of these tasks had been completed.

The Council's Policy and Best Value Manager advised that it was clear from the work undertaken to date that the car parking issue was a large project and that could potentially involve the use of a lot of Member and Officer time. However, it was also an issue which was important to local people, businesses and other stakeholders such as parish councils, the police and the County Council. It was essential therefore that if the project was to proceed it should do so in an ordered and structured manner with a clear focus on issues and expected outcomes. Members discussed options for taking forward the Car Parking Study and it was agreed that as a starting point, a review of the objectives would be needed to be discussed at the next Meeting.

CYS/4. **FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Policy and Best Value Manager advised of the existing Best Value Reviews and stated that the outstanding proposals contained therein had been incorporated into departmental service plans. Some formal procedure for "writing-off" the Best Value Reviews was required. It was reported that the Community Safety Best Value Review had recently been completed and Members also had the option of monitoring the progress of the Implementation Plan. The future Best Value Review programme was subject to further discussion with the Audit Commission. Possible reviews to be considered included a special project on a housing related topic area and some form of consultation and community engagement project. With regard to performance management, the Committee could look at the Corporate Plan, Service Plans (Targets and Milestones). With regard to plans and strategy issues, the Committee could look at documents such as the Crime and Disorder Strategy, Local Plan, Cultural Strategy, the Housing Strategy or the Community Strategy to be produced by the Local Strategic Partnership. Special projects could include car parking, health, partnership working, communication and consultation or the enforcement of low level environmental crimes (such as dog fouling etc).

It was suggested that as the Community Strategy was to be produced by the Local Strategic Partnership in July 2004, the Committee could co-ordinate the Council's response to it accordingly. Councillor Murphy advised that the CPA process would be looking at the Council's responsiveness to public need

and how it engaged young people. He stated that it was essential that the Council ‘rural-proofed’ its policies and suggested that a project for an appropriate Scrutiny Panel could be the Council’s response to the proposed Post Office closures within the District.

The Chair agreed to look at the Work Programme, giving consideration to the information circulated previously on “profiling” projects. It was agreed that a proposed Work Programme would be circulated prior to the next Meeting of the Committee.

CYS/5. **REPORTS TO POLICY COMMITTEES**

The Council’s Policy and Best Value Manager suggested that a “summing up” should take place at the end of every Scrutiny Meeting where it could be clarified how certain issues were to be processed through to the Policy Committee. It was agreed to set out Scrutiny’s vision for the year ahead and to lay down guidelines for commissioning reviews. The Committee gave consideration to the issue of reports to Policy Committees and agreed to circulate a report to Policy Committees on how Scrutiny Committees intended to approach this issue, seeking comments.

The Committee also agreed to submit a report to the Environmental and Development Committee on the Car Parking Project to date, outlining how the Scrutiny Committee proposed to take it forward and attempting to ascertain any issues arising that the Policy Committee wish to be pursued.

K. HARRINGTON

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.35 p.m.