

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5th December 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Murphy (Chair), Councillor Lane (Vice-Chair) and Councillor Mulgrew.

Conservative Group

Councillors Atkin, Bale and Bladen.

In Attendance

Councillor Harrington (Labour Group).

COS/18. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 24th October 2005 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair. Councillor Bale sought further information about the Risk Analysis work undertaken, which the Director of Corporate Services duly provided. There was a discussion about such arrangements for parish councils also. Councillor Lane raised the issue of reports and recommendations to policy committees. He felt it would be useful to have a list of outstanding items. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration reminded of the exercise undertaken and she offered to look at this again. There was a discussion about specific projects, the action taken and if there was a need for further reports to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Lane felt this would be a useful standard item for future agendas and the Chair agreed. A discussion took place about the special project to review the Best Value process and the number of detailed recommendations made to the Finance and Management Committee.

The Chair questioned the value of Scrutiny's work and the perception of the Scrutiny Committees by both Members and Officers. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration commented on the operation of scrutiny. She felt it was more difficult to undertake scrutiny in an alternative arrangement Council than under a cabinet structure. There was a discussion about the need for the Scrutiny Committees to organise another "away day" session. Councillor Bale asked how Scrutiny's achievements could be "scored". The Chair felt that Scrutiny had to provide evidence of a robust challenge. He referred to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and questioned how scrutiny added value to the policy making process. He felt there should be a more open discussion of scrutiny reports at policy committees and Council Meetings.

The Director of Corporate Services questioned whether a review of process would be useful for all Members and the Chair reminded of a presentation made to a previous Council Meeting. It was suggested that a scrutiny event be held in January and the Vice-Chair proposed linking this to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 30th January 2006. The need for Members to work within their respective political groups was also raised.

COS/19. **PERFORMANCE AND BUDGET COMPARISONS**

The Chair reminded Members of the background to this item. A report had been submitted to the September Committee Meeting by the Head of Finance and Property Services. This provided a breakdown of expenditure for the various priority areas. Arising from that meeting, it was requested that a document be provided to link expenditure to performance in these priority areas. Officers had pursued this and a report was circulated which linked expenditure to Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) data over a three year period, to give trends.

The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration explained that the quartile information circulated was for 2004/05 and was yet to be audited. The final information would be available from the Audit Commission after Christmas and would then enable a comparison to other local authorities, including the Council's near neighbours. There was a discussion about the Council's performance targets. It was noted that upper quartile performance was sought for the majority of BVPI's. Reference was made to the new performance management framework and the availability of data for the 2005/06 year. The report circulated could be developed further to include the 2004/05 targets, whether these were achieved and to expand the commentary within the document. Once the new Corporate Plan had been approved, a similar document could be provided to give data on the new Corporate Plan priority areas.

The Director of Corporate Services made a comparison to the role being undertaken by the Improvement Panel. There was a need to ensure this was not duplicated and to consider how the Scrutiny Committee approached this project. Members agreed and discussed the way forward. The Chair referred to the information on core expenditure initially supplied by the former Director of Corporate Services and the subsequent information from the Head of Finance and Property Services. He felt there was a need to compare performance against expenditure. The Council was moving to a new Corporate Plan and he also noted the need to contribute to the budget process. Officers could be asked to look at the new Corporate Plan document, the allocation of funding to priorities and to see if there had been a shift of resources. The Vice-Chair questioned the level of detail required. As a Council it was not clear yet how this process would be pursued. It was felt there was a need to focus on one of the areas raised at the Meeting and questioned whether it might yet be premature to commence this process.

The Chair provided further information about the available performance management data, value for money and how this linked to the decision-making process. There was a discussion about how to set levels of performance and the likely financial implications. A comparison could be made to upper quartile contemporaries, to assess the likely cost for South Derbyshire. Councillor Bale questioned whether available finance would determine the implementation of improved service levels. This point was acknowledged, but priorities could be set and performance levels could then be compared against available funding. The Director of Corporate Services suggested that Members consider the desired outcomes from this process. Unless it was focused onto a specific area, the project could be too broad and she used a specific example to demonstrate this.

Further discussion took place on the information circulated and it was noted that the new Corporate Plan would include clearer targets. Reference was also made to the absence of Local Performance Indicators (LPI's) for some areas. It was questioned how robust LPI's were as compared to BVPI's. From January 2006, the available data would develop. The Chair questioned whether the new framework would give information on Value For Money (VFM)). The Director of Corporate Services replied that performance management was one aspect of VFM and it was noted that quarterly performance information was produced. The Director explained the other elements of VFM and from the Best Value regime the "four C's" were still considered relevant.

Note: At 4.40 p.m., Councillor Atkin joined the Meeting.

The Chair spoke about how VFM should be built into all processes, "at the front end" of the planning process and there was a discussion on how this would evolve from the current situation, where it tended to be more reactive. The Chair suggested that Members take the documents away, provide feedback and discuss this issue at a future meeting, to shape a project for the Scrutiny Committee. He asked that Members suggested amendments be made to the document circulated to enhance it further. The Director of Corporate Services reported on the use of budget data to assist a review of expenditure, focusing initially on low performing, costly services. Officers agreed to amend the document in line with Members' suggestions.

COS/20. **MEMBER CHAMPIONS**

Note: At 4.45 p.m. Councillor Harrington joined the Meeting.

Further to Minute No. COS/17 of 24th October 2005, the Chair introduced this item. A report had been provided to enable a discussion on a proposed review of the roles of Member Champions. The Chair was mindful that this was a cross-cutting project and would need to be considered either by the Overview Committee or to be run in parallel with the Community Scrutiny Committee. Appended to the report was a list of the Member Champions, their function, brief and when they were appointed.

Councillor Harrington suggested that Overview could co-ordinate this project and it could then be referred to both scrutiny committees for a simultaneous project. It was questioned whether all champions had been identified and noted that Councillor Bell needed to be added to the list as the Risk Management Champion. There was some confusion over the six theme based LSP Champions and it was suggested that these be included as part of the review process.

A draft questionnaire had been circulated together with information sources for the review process and potential questions to be posed to contributors. The Chair urged Members to look at this information and to provide feedback. He asked Councillor Harrington to submit these documents to the Community Scrutiny Committee, in order that they could be finalised and initial contact made with the Member Champions.

The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration summarised the way forward with this project. It was agreed that the Overview Committee be asked to determine the Terms of Reference for the review. The document prepared by

the Chair would be circulated to all scrutineers, so that it could be finalised and provide the first point of contact with Member Champions. Councillor Atkin noted there seemed to have been little feedback from Member Champions generally, but he acknowledged a few exceptions.

COS/21. **SCRUTINY SIMULATOR**

This item had been included at the request of the Vice-Chair, to enable a discussion of Derby City Council's "Scrutiny Simulator" model. The Vice-Chair presented this item and took Members through a series of presentation slides on the scrutiny simulator. These comprised planning the project, the witnesses, a typical "question tree" and contents of the handbook. Details were provided of a review flow chart, evidence gathering and producing the draft report. The final presentation slides covered how the simulator could be used and tailored to meet individual requirements.

Copies of the simulator were available at a cost of £250, which included a licence to make up to 10 copies of the software and the Scrutiny Handbook cost a further £15. The Vice-Chair felt the Committee might wish to see the software being used. A visit could be arranged to Derby City Council or it might be possible to have a presentation to Members at this Council. There was a discussion about the funding implications. It was agreed to invite Mr. Romaine to make the presentation to Members at this Council, otherwise to provide an open invitation for all scrutiny Members to visit Derby City Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Bladen, it was confirmed that the Committee's special project on the Strategic Planning Process would now be considered at the Special Council Meeting on 15th December 2005.

S. MURPHY

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.15 p.m.