

Minutes



Meeting CORPORATE STRATEGY AND CO-ORDINATION STANDING
SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 21st June 2004 (commencing at 10.30 am)

membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

COUNCILLORS

D E Pulk (Chair)
Tom Pettengell (Vice-Chair)

Steve Carroll	A	K L O'Toole
G Gilfoyle	A	Mrs Sheila Place
Richard Jackson	A	Ray Poynter
B Laughton		Maureen Tewson
Ellie Lodziak	A	Y Woodhead
J T A Napier		

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 10th May 2004, having been circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Councillor K L O'Toole *
" Mrs Sheila Place
" Y Woodhead *

* Denotes on other County Council business

BALANCE OF FUNDING REVIEW – REFORM OF THE COUNCIL TAX SYSTEM

A summary of the key findings from the review of alternatives to the Council Tax was circulated. Mr McGrady from the Chief Executive's Department introduced the report. He stated that responses were still coming in but there seemed to be almost unanimous agreement that the current levels of Council Tax were too high and that the system needed to be changed. There was a feeling that too many people were excluded from paying the Council Tax. Retired people felt that the increase in Council Tax did not reflect the rise in their pensions. There

was agreement that the cost of collecting the tax should be kept as low as possible. Councillor Pulk thought that it had been a useful exercise to have the media involved. He suggested that the findings should be sent to the Government and all Nottinghamshire MP's. He added that there was an independent review which would be giving a response to the Government. Councillor Laughton stated that the Local Government Association had commissioned Rita Hale to look at other ways of local funding. He pointed out that another County Council were looking at removing education from the local funding, which would lead to a reduction of Council Tax. He added that Central Government may take that route, and if this had been suggested people would have said they did not want a local income tax. He thought that the responses had been distorted by not having all the information. Councillor Pulk explained that the review had been based on raising of the same amount of money as at the moment. He added that the review could have gone down all sorts of different approaches. The general feeling was that the way tax was collected at the moment was not a fair way. Councillor Laughton stated that there was disquiet because Council Tax was too high, but if it was managed more prudently the feeling would be more positive?

Peter Herford, Assistant Director of Resources, confirmed that Somerset County Council, who advised the County Council Network, were at the early stages of work at officer level to devise methods where funding was done in a different way and education had been selected as one of these. He added that Government might look at this in the future but it was too soon to say and the debate had not yet been had.

Councillor Ellie Lodziak pointed out that people appreciated being consulted. She added that she had raised the issue locally and that the results mirrored the ones obtained from this review.

Councillor Pulk stated that if there was a local income tax it would need 4p to raise the necessary amount. Councillor Mrs Cutts stated that she was distrustful of funds being collected elsewhere and passed on. Councillor Pulk stated that if there was a combination of taxes this increased the administration cost. He stated that there was a cost of local democracy and that if one paid a national tax, residents would not know the added value they were obtaining. He added that people had said that students should pay the community charge. Councillor Gilfoyle thought that the tax should be based on a person's ability to pay and on property. He referred to the poll tax and the problems collecting this. He added that there was the issue of the business rate and the percentage the Authority should get.

In response to a question from Councillor Laughton, Councillor Pulk stated that the focus group had been made aware of the percentage increase needed for a local income tax. Councillor Tewson agreed that everyone should contribute.

It was agreed that the findings should be sent to the Government and all Nottinghamshire MP's.

SICKNESS ABSENCE

Debbie Bentley from County Personnel introduced the report. She stated that the experience was that when a better recording system was introduced it showed an increase in sickness absence. It was hoped that this would reduce in future. She added that Nottinghamshire's performance was in the lower quartile and that there was still a lot of work to be done. The necessary procedures were in place.

Councillor Laughton felt that there was a need to look at the underlying reasons for sickness. He referred to a survey of NQT teachers where 49% had indicated that they did not expect to be in teaching in three years time and cited a lack of support and pupil behaviour. Councillor Pulk suggested that the Assistant Director of Education should be invited to the Select Committee to report on the working days lost within schools. Councillor Napier stated that he was not happy with the report. He commented that other areas also had stress and there was a need to learn and move on, and was concerned that this had not already happened. Councillor Pulk agreed that the Select Committee needed to ask awkward questions as there was a cost from sickness absence for everyone. In response to a question from Councillor Gilfoyle, Debbie Bentley stated that the departments which Price Waterhouse Coopers were looking at were Culture & Community, Resources and Environment. Councillor Gilfoyle thought there was a need to ask what information Cabinet Members were receiving and what action they were taking. He thought that as a caring Authority there was a need to ensure that employees got proper support through long-term sickness. He felt that the sickness absence situation would not be improved quickly but that the Select Committee could put pressure on perhaps through receiving regular reports. Councillor Pulk suggested that the Assistant Director of Education and the Cabinet Member and the Chair of the Education Select Committee be invited to attend. He thought it was about creating an environment of support and alleviating problems at work. Councillor Gilfoyle thought we could learn from departments which were working better. Councillor Mrs Cutts thought there was a need to separate the long-term and short-term sickness. She thought there was a need for weekly monitoring. She felt there was a need to manage the workforce in a proper way and look at employment policies.

It was agreed to consider the Education Department's sickness absence figures at the next meeting and that the Assistant Director of Education, the Cabinet Member and the Chair of the Education Select Committee be invited. It was hoped that the report of Price Waterhouse Coopers would be available for the September meeting and it was agreed that the date of the next meeting be changed if necessary.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE PLAN 2004-05

It was agreed to invite the Assistant Chief Executive to the next meeting.

SEMINAR ON COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr McGrady reported that it was proposed to have a half-day seminar in October on community safety.

The meeting closed at 11.47 am

CHAIR