

# Minutes



Meeting CORPORATE STRATEGY AND CO-ORDINATION STANDING  
SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2004 (commencing at 10.30 am)

## **membership**

Persons absent are marked with `A`

## **COUNCILLORS**

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

A Steve Carroll  
G Gilfoyle  
Richard Jackson  
B Laughton  
Ellie Lodziak  
J T A Napier

K L O'Toole  
Mrs Sheila Place  
Ray Poynter  
Maureen Tewson  
Y Woodhead

## **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

Councillor M Brandon-Bravo  
“ Mrs K L Cutts

## **MINUTES**

The minutes of the last meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2004, having been circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

## **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

None.

## **DOMESTIC BURGLERY RATES: RESPONSE FROM CABINET**

Councillor Kirkham attended the meeting to give the response to the Committee's recommendations arising from its scrutiny of domestic burglary rates. In addition to the matters mentioned in the report, Councillor Kirkham drew attention to the Nottinghamshire Community Safety Board, sharing good practice on anti-social behaviour, data sharing through the Jupiter Project, research on the stolen goods market, targeting prolific offenders to drug rehabilitation treatment, and the establishment of neighbourhood wardens, with a pilot scheme in Ashfield.

In response to questions, Councillor Kirkham agreed there was a need to ensure that the County Council's contribution of £100,000 per district was well spent, and that this was in consultation with district councils. He agreed that priorities meant that Police from across the county were drawn into the city, but pointed out that wardens were intended to provide some sort of presence on the streets. He offered to report to the Committee on the powers of neighbourhood wardens and community support officers. He explained how in Ashfield, neighbourhood renewal monies had been used to start the pilot project. Councillor Pulk reminded members that the Chief Constable would be attending the next meeting.

Councillor Gilfoyle indicated that the Chief Constable could decide what powers to grant to community support officers and wardens. He pointed out that powers of arrest would take such officers off the streets while they dealt with paperwork. He stated that the appointment of additional scientific officers had improved detection rates. He would like to see the County's £100,000 linked to match funding. He believed the money could be well spent, in comparison with the cost of dealing with, for example, vandalism to schools.

Councillor Laughton perceived a discrepancy in the numbers of officers in different areas. In discussion, wardens had told him they felt a lack of powers, and an unavailability of Police Officers to help them. Councillor Jackson believed there should be careful consideration of the relative values of community support officers and Police Officers. He wondered whether the £100,000 should be allocated equally to each district, and whether there should be some consideration of differing needs. Councillor Kirkham believed that the allocation of £100,000 to each district reflected their different problems.

Councillor Pulk commented that the presence of other figures of authority, such as park keepers or staff at railway stations had been lost. He emphasised the importance of publicity for the work the County Council was doing. Councillor Mrs Cutts believed all districts should be treated fairly, and commented that everyone wished to see the return of their local police constable.

### **PROPOSED BUDGET CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS 2005/06**

Peter Hurford, Assistant Director, Resources Department introduced the report on the various methods for consulting on the next year's budget. As well as roadshows and focus groups, it was proposed to make more use of the County Council's website. Councillor Pulk invited any member who wanted to observe a focus group to let him know.

Councillor Laughton wondered what participants expected of the consultation process, and what impact their views would have. Peter Hurford replied that responses had been published, and were free of political comment. People were provided with individual responses to their comments. Focus groups were told that their views were communicated to members, who took them into account, along with other factors, in deciding the budget. Councillor Poynter believed that people misunderstood the purpose of consultation. He added that people were not given enough choices, as had happened with "Balancing the

Books". He saw merit in asking the political groups if there were any ideas they would like included in the consultation. Councillor Pulk invited Councillors Laughton and Poynter to speak to the Cabinet Member, Councillor Carter about this.

Councillor Brandon-Bravo questioned the purpose of consulting the business community. Councillor Lodziak suggested that focus groups be used to fill the gaps not covered by the roadshows.

### **CORPORATE SELF ASSESSMENT 2004**

Eve Dewsnap, Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report on the work undertaken to provide the corporate self assessment requested by the Audit Commission. In reply to members' questions, she indicated that the results were expected on 16<sup>th</sup> December. She explained some of the terms used in the self assessment. Councillor Pulk suggested that the Audit Commission's evaluation be reported to the Committee at its 20<sup>th</sup> December meeting.

### **LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK**

Alistair McGrady, Scrutiny Officer invited any members interested in participating in Take Your Councillor to School Day on 22<sup>nd</sup> October to let him know. Councillors Laughton and Pettengell expressed an interest, and Councillor Jackson said he was already participating.

### **SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT IN THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**

Councillor Storey, the Cabinet Member for Education and David Wilson, Assistant Director (Resources) attended the meeting in relation to this item. Councillor Storey pointed out that it was a school's responsibility to manage its own staff, including their attendance. Mr Wilson continued by saying that nevertheless, attendance was an important matter, especially in the relationship between schools and parents, who perceived a series of supply teachers as unsatisfactory. He indicated that while recording of absence had improved greatly in the last year, there were two outstanding concerns regarding the return to work of absent staff, and possible double counting where staff had more than one employment. Mr Wilson indicated that there had been some increase in short term absence and a more striking increase in long term absence among both teaching and non-teaching staff. While the LEA did give advice to schools, this was not a service bought by all schools. In relation to non-school based staff, he stated that each Assistant Director in the Education Department had a target to reduce sickness absence. Councillor Laughton asked to see the sickness absence figures, and wondered whether the school holidays hid other absences. Mr Wilson replied that it was hard to comment, but felt it might be interesting to compare with LEAs which had moved to a five or six term year. Councillor Laughton pointed out that when contracts in the Further Education sector had been changed a few years ago, sickness absence had reduced.

Councillor Brandon-Bravo commented that stress could be an excuse for long term absence, when perhaps a career change should be the answer. Mr Wilson indicated that long term absence because of stress was supported by doctors' certificates and Occupational Health became involved. He pointed out that some governing bodies did eventually look at such absence in terms of capability, and dismissal was a possibility. Councillor Pulk believed that stress should not be singled out from other illnesses. Mr Wilson stated that the Department did seek a second medical opinion whatever the illness.

Councillor Poynter believed that few absences had such an impact on service as an absent teacher. The source of stress could be within the school or from outside work. He wondered if there should be an accelerated programme to re-orientate someone's career, given that a teacher who returned to work faced extra problems. Councillor Storey commented that at times middle management were not doing all they could, with too much focus being on pupil performance. He referred to the tension between the school's autonomy and the LEA's role, with the LEA having to pay the cost of teachers leaving the service. He drew attention to the difficulties which governors faced in dismissing poor staff.

Councillor Napier asked for information about non-school based staff. Mr Wilson replied that there were 1200 of these, compared with 6,500-7,000 school based staff. Long term absence amongst the former was in line with other Departments, and was too high. Councillor Gilfoyle believed that intervention must be timely. Councillor Storey drew attention to the need to not be heavy handed and counter productive. He referred to the high demands placed on staff, for example in attending evening meetings. Councillor Mrs Cutts wondered how much teacher absence was during the 190 days of contact time, and also what the patterns of absence were. Mr Wilson offered to provide the figures, and indicated that the Department did look at patterns of illness.

It was agreed that a more detailed report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee, with figures of sickness absences provided and trends identified.

## **WORK PROGRAMME**

Mr McGrady reminded the Committee that the Chief Constable would be attending the next meeting. At the suggestion of the Chair, it was agreed that the effectiveness of the County Council's travel policy be the subject of future scrutiny. Councillor Pulk indicated that he was aware that the Standards Committee was also looking at this issue.

The meeting closed at 12.15 pm

## **CHAIR**

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