

Minutes



Meeting CORPORATE STRATEGY AND CO-ORDINATION SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 20th December 2004 (commencing at 10.30 am)

membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

COUNCILLORS

D E Pulk (Chair)

Tom Pettengell (Vice-Chair)

Colin Bromfield
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

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 22nd November 2004, having been circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

None.

GERSHON REVIEW: PRESENTATION BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive gave a presentation on the Gershon Review and its implications for local government and the County Council in particular. He indicated the types of efficiency savings which might be made, and how the County Council was responding. He referred to the work of the Regional Centre for Excellence, whose director was Chris Allison, Assistant Director in the Resources Department. Mr Allison indicated that the role for the RCE, as appended to the report, had been agreed, with one of its aims being to promote best practice. In reply to a question from Councillor Pulk, Mr Latham stated that the government had made assumptions about the efficiency savings when deciding the financial settlement for 2005/06.

Councillor Pulk asked whether cuts in front-line services would affect the county council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Mr Latham replied that it could, as would an inappropriate balance between cashable and non-cashable savings. In reply to Councillor Poynter, he said that schools were not part of the county council's calculations, and there must be care to avoid double counting. The estimates for savings needed from services in county council control was £7-8m. Councillor Poynter asked about the implications of cutting grants to Joint Use Leisure Centres, where another authority would take the choice about reducing services. Councillor Pulk observed that this would go against the culture of partnership.

Councillor Pettengell asked about the affect of changes in procurement practice for local businesses. Mr Allison indicated that 25% of the county council's local spending was in Nottinghamshire, and 49% was in the East Midlands. He stated that 155 businesses were dependent on county council business, and with the assistance of Regeneration Division, there would be work to develop new business for them. Mr Latham emphasised that there was no wish to damage the local economy or to reduce the quality of supplies. However there were examples of the same produce or service being sourced from a number of suppliers, against which must be balanced the need to avoid monopolistic suppliers.

Councillor Pulk thanked Mr Latham and Mr Allison for their useful introduction to the Review and its implications.

CORPORATE ASSESSMENT 2004

Andrew Muter, Assistant Chief Executive, introduced the report on the Audit Commission's Corporate Assessment, and informed the Committee that the County's overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment rating was excellent. He pointed to capacity as being the only area where weakness outweighed strengths, and identified areas requiring particular attention before the next assessment as being:-

- Raising the Social Care Adult score to 3.
- Making good progress on user focus and diversity.
- Value for money

In reply to Councillor Pulk, Mr Muter stated that the County did spend more than average on services, but there were other counties which spent more. He added that inspectors would look closely at value for money in high cost services. In reply to a question from Councillor Bromfield about the balance between statutory and discretionary services, Mr Muter pointed out that the inspectors would ask questions about low performing statutory services when there was above average spending on discretionary services.

Councillor Poynter wondered whether the county council could use its status to question the CPA system; what exactly was meant by Nottinghamshire being a top 20 authority; and the need to ensure that the Audit Commission made valid

comparisons. Councillor Pulk commented that while the authority could express a point of view about the CPA, the Audit Commission itself decided the details of the process. In terms of comparisons, Mr Muter observed that while the high level figures did make comparisons difficult, there was consistent information available for benchmarking at a lower level. He pointed out that, for example, Derbyshire County Council had achieved an excellent ranking, with a lower spending per head than Nottinghamshire. Councillor Pulk referred the need to adhere services to the wishes of local people.

Councillor Pettengell asked for clarification about the financial implications. Mr Muter explained that the costs were for preparation for the recent inspector's visit, and the visit itself. The costs of achieving the scores were not included, and he pointed out that the authority would be monitoring the performance in any case. Councillor Laughton wondered how the authority planned to maintain services while seeking Gershon savings. Mr Muter reminded members that Gershon was concerned with efficiency, not with reducing services. The authority would be looking at the whole organisation and its priorities. However he explained that if, for example, the authority chose to address issues of rurality, then the cost of services could increase. He referred to political choices about investment and contraction. Councillor Pulk hoped that CPA was flexible enough to recognise local priorities. Councillor Bromfield drew on the example of library services, where it was difficult to compare services in rural and urban areas and still meet Department of Culture, Media and Sport standards. Mr Muter observed that the Audit Commission had greater difficulty in identifying such issues when carrying out a desktop exercise rather than an inspection.

At the suggestion of Councillor Pulk, it was agreed that the CPA outcome be formally reported to Committee, with an Audit Commission representative present if possible, and the action plan arising from the inspection be presented to Committee in due course.

COUNTY COUNCIL SIX MONTHLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

The report on the County Council's performance for the six months to September 2004 was noted. Mr Muter agreed to look into the concern expressed by Councillor Poynter about the change in the job creation target.

WORK PROGRAMME

Alistair McGrady, Scrutiny Officer indicated that the budget would be the main item of business for the next meeting. There would be a seminar on crime and disorder issues at 10.00 am on 10th March 2005 at County Hall.

The meeting closed at 11.55 am.

CHAIR

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