

# minutes



Meeting OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009 (commencing at 10.30 am)

## Membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

## COUNCILLORS

Edward Llewellyn-Jones (Chair)

Jen Cole

Yvonne Davidson (Vice-Chair)

John Knight (Vice-Chair)

Joe Lonergan MBE

A Peter D Prebble

Andy Stewart

Chris Winterton (Vice-Chair)

Brian Wombwell

## MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2008, having been previously circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

## APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Peter D Prebble.

## DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

None.

## CONSULTATION ON BUDGET PROPOSALS 2009/10

Alan Sumbly, Service Director – Finance, introduced the report. He stated that the budget consultation process for the first time had utilised the Nottinghamshire Listens Citizens Panel and that a response rate had been achieved of 55% which MORI had felt was surprisingly high for a questionnaire focussed primarily on budget issues. Following comments last year on the range of services selected for comment this year they had covered all service areas as opposed to being selective. The response from the County News questionnaire and the website was poor. He suggested that the County News for next year needed an envelope to return the questionnaire and perhaps a small financial inducement in terms of say a £50 voucher prize. The survey had been sent to Parish Councils as had been suggested last year but there had been a small response. He reported that a meeting had been held with representatives of the business community on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2009. They had made the following comments:-

- indicated a strong preference for local procurement;

- were keen to join the Building Schools for the Future contract;
- wanted the Council to speed up the payment of invoices;
- wanted a review of the Authority's activity in economic development;
- hoped that the business rate would not be increased.

He reported that the report which had been agreed by Cabinet on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2008 had been widely circulated through partner organisations and other stakeholders seeking responses. The responses were disappointing with none being received from LAA partners or Parish Councils and only 4 responses from schools.

Councillor Andy Stewart thought that the 362 responses from County News was very poor and wondered whether offering a £50 voucher prize would have much effect. He thought that the lack of responses from Parish Councils was probably to do with the cycle. He added he would raise this issue at the next Nottinghamshire Local Government Association meeting.

Councillor Jen Cole raised concerns about the use of inducements for people to respond and wondered whether people would just tick a response to try to obtain the prize. She thought that if people did not reply then that was a response in itself. She wondered with the MORI survey whether people had enough information to answer the question whether the Authority spent "too much", "too little", or "the right amount" for services. She thought that perhaps when people answered "the right amount" it was probably a "don't know".

Councillor Joe Lonergan felt that the number of responses from the Citizens Panel was reassuring. He thought that if the aim was to establish what the public thought then it had been successful. He commented that he had been critical last year on how consultation had taken place but felt that this had improved enormously this year. He expressed disappointment with the lack of response from LAA partners. He thought that a lot of Parish Councils did not meet in December and that the response time for them needed to be longer.

Councillor Brian Wombwell agreed with Councillor Jen Cole. He agreed that there had been improvements in the consultation from last year. He felt that there was a need to establish whether the people voting used the service as this would add more credence to the results.

Councillor Chris Winterton thought that the County News article on the budget was well set out. He was not keen on having a prize for responses and felt it might lead to the wrong responses being received.

Councillor Llewellyn-Jones agreed that inducements were not the best way. He thought that if people were interested then they would comment and that inducement might lead to the wrong responses. He added that it was difficult to consult everyone and that there were difficulties in the Parish Councils cycle dovetailing into other timescales. He thought that not having comments from LAA partners was unfortunate and would take this up. He believed that anonymity for responders allowed them to be more honest. He welcomed the Citizens Panel which had a representative sample of the public on it. He commented that whether everyone had enough information to make a response was a big question. On balance however he thought the Authority were going in the right direction.

In response, Alan Sumby commented that they had tried to consult Parish Councils twice both in the summer and after the December Cabinet meeting. He pointed out

that the December consultation period was very tight as the Cabinet meeting was on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2008 and the report had to go back to Cabinet on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2009 so there was only a 4 week period. He agreed that the response from LAA partners was disappointing.

It was agreed that the Committee's views on budget consultation as set out above be forwarded to the Cabinet.

## **STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMES/IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK 2008-12**

Faye Booker, Temporary Service Director - Policy, Development and Partnerships, Chief Executive's Department gave a presentation on the Strategic Improvements Programme/Improvement Framework. She stated that the aim was that in 4 years the County Council would be an exemplar of good practice. There had originally been 5 improvement programmes but that the Corporate Leadership Team had reviewed this in the summer and decided that there should be 2 strategic programmes focused on employees and the public and that the other work should be business as usual. There was ongoing work to review and refine strategic improvement priorities for the future. A programme board had been established and terms of reference and key work strands agreed. Two project managers had been recruited and quick wins underway – the staff suggestion scheme and new EPDR forms. The customer access and communication programme had been refreshed and aligned to the customer focus strategy. There had been significant improvements in external communications such as changes to County News. Communications with employees had been improved by increasing the frequency of In Contact. The Chief Executive's bulletin had received positive feedback and would be continuing.

She indicated that a task and finish group on Service Level Agreements (SLAs) had been established which was trying to make them sharper and speedier. A standard layout for HR, Finance, IT and Property SLAs had been agreed. With regard to performance management task and finish group had been established and departmental performance boards set up. A raising performance programme was being run over a 2 week period. With regard to speedier decision making a task group had been established to review the constitution. An HR procedure and policy task group had also been established.

In response to a question from Councillor Yvonne Davidson, Marge Toward, Temporary Head of HR explained that the role of the project managers to work up proposals such as reviewing EPDR forms and the staff suggestion scheme and bring these to the programme board and then implement. Faye Booker explained that the Customer Service Centre was set up with the public in mind. The aim was for them to release staff time to deal with complex cases and the scripts were written by departments. She said that the rate of complaints were low. Councillor Yvonne Davidson expressed dissatisfaction with Members being told to use the Customer Services Centre. Faye Booker indicated that she would look into the concern expressed by Councillor Davidson.

Councillor John Knight commented that we have been criticised by the Audit Commission for a lack of performance management and that most of the work that seemed to be carried out was monitoring. Faye Booker explained that the process over the last 3 months had been for officers to be called in at board meetings to engage and challenge where performance had been unmet. For example, street

lighting, where the targets so low they would never take us out of the bottom quartile. There was a need to have consultation and to set realistic targets being set. Where there were resource implications this would be fed through to the Corporate Leadership Team. She stressed that it was a challenging performance management and hoped that it was partnership with teeth. Councillor John Knight thought it would be useful to have information on this and how changes had been made.

Councillor Andy Stewart indicated that he had used the Customer Service Centre once but would not do so again and would use his own officer contacts. Councillor Yvonne Davidson pointed out that there were some Councillors that were using the Centre. Faye Booker indicated that she would look at the feedback.

Councillor Lonergan thought that the concept of calling and challenge on performance management was excellent. In response to questions from Councillor Lonergan, Faye Booker stated that a draft plan had been brought to the departmental briefing meeting and useful comments had been received. There was now a long term plan emerging. Some members were involved in task and finish groups. With regard to the LAA there was a role in improving how we worked together. Crime had been asked to be a main topic out of the LSP board. There needed to be a challenge. The Audit Commission said that this was the area they were most concerned about. It was a problem for all the partners and we were only as strong as the weakest link.

It was agreed that an update on the delivery of the Strategic Improvement Framework be requested 6 months after it is approved.

## **RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY REVIEW - SICKNESS ABSENCE**

Consideration was given to a response from the Cabinet Member to the recommendations made to the review of Sickness Absence.

Councillor John Knight indicated that the crux of the recommendations was number 4 "that managers should ensure that they conduct "return to work" interviews after every incidence of sickness absence and that compliance of this should be monitored at service director level". He asked why this recommendation had only been partially accepted. Councillor John Stocks, the Cabinet Member for People Performance and Property stated that the scrutiny exercise had been useful. There had been discussions with the trade unions and expectations had been confirmed with managers. He pointed out that the sickness absence arrangement had been imposed without trade union agreement. He explained that where the recommendations had been partially accepted it was a question of degree and the timing. In response to a further question from Councillor John Knight, Councillor John Stocks explained that he had taken recommendations 3 and 4 together. He had accepted that attendance was an issue for all managers and that the Chief Executive had reinforced this message. There was a whole section on the intranet giving details to managers. There was mandatory and refresher training. Sickness absence was a key issue. The attendance management team had been increased and there were now 6 rather than the 7 that the review had recommended. There was however also clerical support from the Customers Services Centre. Monitoring was taking place but the attendance team was there to assist managers not to do their task. He added that he could demonstrate that they had taken action to make managers responsible. He had not said that this should be at service director level as he did not accept that this was the right level to monitor. Service directors would receive information from time to time.

Councillor Lonergan thought it was disappointing that the Cabinet Member had only partially accepted recommendations 4 and 7. He was amazed that the County Council were still a long way from resolving this issue compared with Derbyshire. He felt there was reluctance for managers to manage people. He thought that unless radical action was taken the situation would not improve. The lack of progress was constantly coming up in inspections.

Councillor John Stocks stated that the trade unions had been taken on when the scheme was introduced. The key element was to address trigger points. In the report it recognised the need for negotiations with the trade unions and it had been raised as an issue with them. He wanted to maintain the downward trend. Trade unions had stated that they would resist changes to trigger levels; they wanted the current processes working effectively. He stated the Trade Unions questioned the validity of Derbyshire's figures in respect of the counting of temporary staff. He did not feel that imposing trigger levels was the right thing to do at the moment.

Councillor Brian Wombwell also expressed disappointment at the progress being made. He pointed out that one day over the target meant 25000 days lost. This was a loss of production which added stress to employees. He thought the trade unions would back action being taken. Councillor John Stocks indicated that he only partially accepted the recommendation because he wanted to make the team permanent but that he was not sure of the funding. He added that the trade unions were getting pressure from staff that had to cover absent colleagues. Councillor John Knight stated that they were not asking service directors to get involved but were saying that they had to accept responsibility as senior managers. At the moment they were not taking any responsibility. Councillor John Stocks stated that they were trying to drive in expectations in return to work interviews. He did accept that service directors monitored the situations.

It was agreed that a further report be requested in 6 months time providing a review of the progress in implementing the recommendations and giving a break down of the absence figures.

## **RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY REVIEW – SAFEGUARDING VULNERABLE ADULTS**

Consideration was given to a response by the Cabinet Member to the recommendations made by the review of Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults. Councillor Edward Llewellyn-Jones thought that this had been a good scrutiny and he was pleased with the answers received from the Cabinet Member. He expressed disappointment however that some organisations had not replied, particularly the police. Councillor Chris Winterton who chaired the review praised the cooperation which had been received from the Adult Social Care and Health Department. Councillor Alan Rhodes, the Cabinet Member expressed appreciation for the review of what was an important area. He pointed out that the police were aware of the issues and did work with the department.

Jon Wilson from the Adult Social Care and Health Department reported that they were carrying out a detailed audit in the Department of adults and that the results were expected in February. Feedback so far suggested that staff had support from colleagues in police and health. He thought however that there was perhaps a need to engage with them at strategic level.

Councillor Lonergan stated that he was pleased with the response from the Cabinet Member. He expressed disappointment with the response from the Independent Safeguarding Authority concerning foreign nationals coming to work with vulnerable adults. In response to a question Jon Wilson stated that everyone was concerned that the de-regulation of the market could lead to further abuse of vulnerable adults. He explained that the issue was around choice. Under direct payments a person had a right to request a direct payment, and the process was to create a flexible market place. A number of unpaid carers would now be able to be paid. The question was would we want them all to be registered – as there was a balance to be struck. Councillor Yvonne Davidson agreed there was a need to take a sensible approach as we would not want to be CRB checking family members. Councillor Alan Rhodes commented that it was a fact that majority of abuse came from family members or someone the vulnerable adult knew. He stated there was a need to ensure that the Department had robust policies which were being implemented by staff.

It was agreed that a further report be requested in six months time providing a review of the progress made in implementing the recommendations.

### **PROGRESS REPORT – REVIEW OF SUPPORT FOR THE OLYMPICS AND PARA-OLYMPICS**

Consideration was given to a report on the progress of the recommendations made by the Olympics and Para-Olympics Select Committee.

Councillor Edward Llewellyn-Jones reported that he had, had discussions with the officers and the portfolio holder. He thought that there needed to be a group of people who were responsible to take forward the recommendations in respect of the London Olympics 2012 as at the moment these issues were being dealt with on an ad hoc basis. He suggested that Cabinet be asked to set up 2012 Officer Group to coordinate a whole Council response.

Keith Stevens from the Communities Department commented that he was conscious that there had not been movement on some of the recommendations but the problem was that we had no dedicated staff responsible. He reported that Essex County Council had 5 Officers working on the 2012 Olympics and Norfolk had 3, whereas we had none. Part of the response was in Cultural Services but there were other dimensions. He added that there were things happening with other organisations and partners. He referred to the cultural partnership between the City Council and Districts working closely together on the cricket 2020. Here agencies were working together, which was seen as a template for the Olympics. He explained that with the 2020 competition in June they wanted to have series of Kwik-Cricket in schools on the back of the sports event they wanted to organise some cultural events. They were talking with restaurants about special presentations during this period. They hoped to translate this concept to the Olympics and pointed out that Trent Bridge would be holding archery and that Holme Pierrepont would also be used. A new canoeing facility would be opening in 2010 in Hertfordshire so that the elite canoeists would relocate. He commented that after an Olympics Game there was an increase in tourism which would probably run from 2012 to 2016. The feeling was that there was a need for extra services. There had been an under spending in sport which was being put into an Olympics fund for talented athletes.

Councillor Yvonne Davidson felt that all Cabinet Members should be involved in responding to the strategy. Councillor Edward Llewellyn-Jones stated that the only

way to move the matter forward was to send another recommendation to Cabinet not just to one Portfolio holder.

In response to a question Keith Stevens stated that Nottinghamshire could still get training camps but would they be for the sports that young people would want to be involved with. He felt that the legacy of the Olympic Games should be about increasing participation and tackling obesity. He added that the only event outside of London was sailing and there would be no improvement to facilities outside of London.

Councillor Winterton thought that there was a need for an audit of facilities. He did not think that we had marketed the opportunities in the county for foreign teams. They would not come to Nottinghamshire unless it was marketed. Keith Stevens pointed out that the world had shrunk and that teams would train in Europe, for example, our rowers would be in Holland. Councillor Wombwell agreed that the issue should be referred back to Cabinet. He thought that one Member of Cabinet should take the issue forward as there were many strands to be pulled together. Keith Stevens stated that there was no cash to access as there was no money available from the lottery and sponsorship levels were down. Councillor Wombwell stated that we were on our own but were in competition with others in the United Kingdom. Councillor John Knight pointed out that the Olympics had been awarded to London not the United Kingdom.

Councillor Edward Llewellyn-Jones felt that there was a need for at least 1 person to be engaged on work for the 2012 Olympics to co-ordinate activities. This was needed to implement recommendation 1 of the review. There was also a need for an audit to be carried out so that we would be ready for the spin off from the Olympics. He thought that this recommendation needed to go to the Leader and Cabinet with a view to the Leader reporting back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was agreed:-

1. That cabinet be recommended that a person be identified to coordinate the response to the 2012 Olympics; and that an audit of potential facilities be undertaken,
2. That the Leader be asked to report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee.

## **MANAGING A PROGRAM OF WORK**

The updated programme of work for 2008/09 as set out in the appendix to the report was agreed.

The meeting closed at 12:50 pm.

## **CHAIR**

Ref: overview and scrutiny/m\_19jan09