

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21 October 2002

Councillors *Robertson (Chair), *J Brown (Vice Chair), *Adamou, *Davies, *Dawson, *Diakides, *Dobbie, *Lister, *Prendergast, *Simpson and *Williams.

*Mrs Shukla, *Mr B Aulsberry (REJCC Representatives), *Mrs Berkery-Smith, Mr L Haward (Church representatives), *Ms E Pine and *Mr R Sharp (Parent Governors representatives).

Also present Councillors Adje, Bull and Featherstone.

*Members present

SC26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: We received apologies for absence from Mrs Berkery-Smith and Mr Sharp and an apology for lateness from Councillor Lister.

SC27 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (2nd September 2002)

Matters Arising

With reference to SC22: Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel, we noted that the Liberal Democratic Party was offered the opportunity to chair the Budget Scrutiny Review Panel. A request was made by the Liberal Democrats to commission an independent advisor to the Panel. There had been on going discussions about this at the highest level and officers, with the support of the Leader, turned down this request for the following reason:

The Chief Financial Officer of this Council was a statutory officer who must be objective and impartial. The Code of Guidance governing this post required the postholder to service the whole Council and all political parties. To bring in an independent advisor would undermine the statutory nature of advice that the postholder gave and the view was that no reputable advisors would take on a role envisaged by the opposition. Additional to this, we already have external auditors.

This had been fed back to members of the opposition, who declined to chair the review panel. Budget Scrutiny should now be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee expressed disappointment at the outcome of the above discussions and agreed that it was important to establish a protocol on the use of external consultants.

SC28 SCRUTINY ROLE IN BEST VALUE (Report of the Assistant Chief Executive OD - Agenda item 6):

This report outlined the roles and responsibilities of the Executive and Scrutiny in Best Value and the two Best Value Reviews for 2002/03 were noted.

We noted that the Executive had agreed that policy issues appertaining to Best Value were within the purview of the Executive. It was also agreed that Executive members might invite interested Members from both parties to participate in reviews as appropriate. Additionally, a quarterly progress report was presented to the Executive covering completed Best Value Reviews and those in progress. These reports were not presented to Scrutiny as a matter of course, but could also be if requested.

We note the following comments:

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 October 2002

- There was insufficient scope on the agenda of Scrutiny Panel for constructive debate on Best Value and members suggested that the number of panel meetings be increased from 4 to 6 per year.
- In response to a query on the differences between Scrutiny Reviews and Best Value Reviews it was noted that the new constitution gave scrutiny more responsibilities and would continue to strengthen the role of Scrutiny, with an emphasis on encouraging public and parent involvement. Scrutiny Panels had comprehensive new statutory powers allocated to Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise decisions and the activities of the Executive and officers. Scrutiny panels were responsible for scrutinising Best Value reviews to ensure that they had been conducted to acceptable standards. Panels also ensured that reviews were conducted in a rigorous and open fashion.
- Best Value Reviews considered the quality of services and provided the basis for realistic and deliverable change. Reviews achieved this by following the four 'C's namely:

Challenge - Why how and by whom a service was being provided

Compare - process and performance of others across a range of relevant indicators taking account the views of service users and potential suppliers.

Consult - local taxpayers, service users, partners, the wider business community, and the voluntary sector, social enterprises, staff and trade unions

Compete - use fair and open competition wherever practicable as a means of securing efficient and effective services.

- A rigid Inspection regime followed best value reviews
- The Committee expressed concern regarding the independence of the scrutiny function and the involvement of the Executive.

RESOLVED

That Scrutiny:

1. Consider the scope and progress of the two Best Value Reviews for 2003; the Best Value Review of Services to Children with an Additional Educational Needs Statement for their families and, (b) the forthcoming Youth Best Value Review.
2. Consider the quarterly progress report on Best Value; once it had been considered by the Executive.
3. Consider the Finance and performance monitoring reports, once the Executive had considered them.

SC28 UPDATE ON DISABLED ACCESS TO COUNCIL BUILDING (Report of the Director of Support Services - Agenda Item 8):

The Executive Member for resources updated the Committee on the progress in implementing the recommendations of the Scrutiny Disabled Access to Council Buildings review of February 2002. We noted that 36 access audits of public areas in buildings have been completed. Comments to thirty-six council commercial estates had also been audited. The audits had identified comparatively few physical barriers to disabled people (e.g. ramps and disabled toilets).

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 21 October 2002

Council had been active in addressing this aspect over many years. However, visual disability (requiring improved signage, tactile surfaces etc) and aural disability (requiring induction loops and visual alarms needed to be addressed to meet the requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act. The future of many of those buildings was being considered as part of an Accommodation Strategy currently been discussed with Members.

Access improvements were planned to be completed by March 2003 and the Capital funding of up to £350,000 had been identified for the improvements in this financial year. A proposal would be made so that any under-spent would be carried forward into the next financial year as a contribution to other required improvements. Access audits were planned for further buildings such as play centres, public conveniences, car parks, residential homes, luncheon clubs etc. It was estimated that there were in excess of 100 such properties.

It was considered that the aim of the council should be to ensure completion of access audits for all buildings identified by October 2004. However it was recognised that the financial cost of achieving compliance by this was prohibitive. The implications of the Disability Discrimination Act had been incorporated into the Council's Asset Management Plan and the Accommodation Strategy review. We noted the Council's intention to discuss and agree priority buildings from a service perspective taking into account the users of the services and, where appropriate, providing for the various services to embark on consultation exercises with disabled users of the particular service. This together with the Accommodation Strategy would inform the next phase of identifying those properties to undergo adaptation.

RESOLVED

1. That the progress report be noted.
2. That a further progress report be presented to the Committee at a future date.

SC30 CONSULTATION - DEVELOPING A CORPORATE FRAMEWORK (Report of the Assistant chief Executive Strategy - Agenda item 7):

We considered the report from Executive Member, Community Engagement, outlining the proposals for a new corporate consultation strategy and framework with the purpose of improving the Council's performance in public consultation. We noted that consultation and community involvement were required as part of the modernising process. It was felt that consultation was not well co-ordinated amongst the 26 business units and the authority lacked an overall strategy that could guide the whole Council. The LGIP peer group review recommended that we 'prioritised the review of existing consultation arrangements in order to establish a coherent and all encompassing strategy'

The draft consultation strategy was pragmatic and focussed on the Council's capacity to provide opportunities for local people and organisations to become involved in decision making. It contained eight guiding principles that all members and officers should employ when carrying out consultation. The first step was to improve on the Council's own performance; the underlying message of recent research into the Council's capacity to consult was, 'better consultation, not more.' Therefore this strategy would apply for one year to enable the Council to strengthen its consultation infrastructure.

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 21 October 2002

We note the following comments:

- The communication strategy should run concurrently with the consultation strategy.
- Consideration should be given to our multi-cultural community
- Consideration should be given to the use of voluntary sector organisations to reach local residents.
- Resources should be identified corporately to ensure communication strategies w mainstream.
- There was a need to consider Multi cultural languages etc.
- It was important that we considered the tone in our communications.
- It was important that we revised our standard letters to ensure they were easily understood.
- Consideration should be given to the use of Citizen Juries

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

SC31 REGENERATION IN HARINGEY - MONITORING REPORT (Report of the Chair of Regeneration & Partnerships Scrutiny Panel - Agenda item 9):

We noted the monitoring exercise undertaken since the progress report following the scrutiny review of regeneration. The report outlined successes and highlighted areas, which need improvements.

Scrutiny and Haringey Strategic Partnership (HSP)

Whilst it was noted that the Partnership had a much wider remit than purely regeneration, it was noted that no formal arrangement had been established for the involvement of scrutiny. The report reiterated the view that scrutiny members should attend meetings of the HSP, particularly as scrutiny of the Executive was now a statutory requirement. Scrutiny members needed to play a positive and constructive role, even if this was limited to observer status.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

SC32 UPDATE ON SCRUTINY REVIEWS - Agenda item 10

We noted progress with the current scrutiny reviews on:

- Inclusive Education
- Anti-social Behaviour - Harassment
- Leaseholders Review
- Maternity Services Review

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21 October 2002

- Parking Scheme for People with Disabilities
- Support to small businesses

Attendance of Members at Scrutiny Panel Meetings

The Committee expressed concern at member attendance at scrutiny panel meetings; Overview and Scrutiny Committee should monitor this. The Chair agreed to meet with the Head of Local Democracy and the Chief Whip to discuss the issue and report back. The Chair of Lifelong Dobbie wished to thank Councillor Featherstone for her presentation on Graffiti in London at a recent meeting of the Crime and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel.

SC33 MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANELS - Agenda item 11

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the scrutiny panels outlined on the agenda be endorsed.

SC34 GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON HEALTH SCRUTINY - Agenda item 12

We were advised that the government had issued further consultation in relation to health scrutiny. The two aspects were (a) a consultation paper on the regulations which posed a number of questions and (b) a support document which expanded on some of the issues in the former and gave an idea of how the Government would expect various aspects of the scrutiny function to be implemented. The deadline for responding to the consultation document was November 2002.

RESOLVED

That Councillors Adameu and Robertson provide a response to the Government's consultation on behalf of Scrutiny.

Councillor Irene Robertson
 Chair