

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 12 September
2007

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Colin MacMillan (Chair), and Councillors K Banks, J Brunner, J Cookson, A Fry, B Passingham and D Thomas

Also Present:

Officers:

C Smith

Committee Services Officer:

Jess Bayley and Helen Saunders

36. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Taylor.

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or of any party whip.

38. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 22nd of August 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

39. CALL-IN

Members received the Decision Notice of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday, the 5th of September 2007, with a view to considering the need for any Call ins.

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Chair

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RESOLVED that

no action be taken to initiate call-in procedures on any of the Key Decisions contained in the Executive Committee Decision Notice.

40. TASK AND FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING REPORTS

The Committee considered the original Scrutiny Proposal form for the Third Sector Task and Finish Group and reported that he had recently met with Officers to discuss this document, in the context of other work currently being undertaken by the Grants Panel, and had decided that the aims of the scrutiny exercise needed to be clarified further.

The Chair proposed that, in order to gain maximum benefit from the scrutiny, the document should be redrafted. The Chair also proposed that this redraft should be more forward looking and should incorporate the new Shopping, Investing and Giving (SIG) national guidelines.

Members agreed that the revised draft scoping document would be presented to the Committee for further consideration on the 17th of October 2007.

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments detailed in the preamble above,

- 1) the Third Sector Task and Finish Group Scrutiny Proposal Form be redrafted by Officers, in consultation with the Chair; and**
- 2) the Third Sector Task and Finish Group Scrutiny Proposal Form be presented back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 17th of October.**

41. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Chair explained that this item had been added to the agenda to enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor and influence the progress of ongoing Scrutiny Reviews. The Chair stressed that it was important to stick to a time limit of two minutes for each report. The following oral reports were given:

- a. Communications Task and Finish Group (Stage One)–
Chair Councillor J. Brunner.

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The Chair of this Group reported that the Members had made good progress.

The Group had identified which individuals and organisations they wanted to interview as part of the exercise and had sent them questionnaires. The Chair also reported that a questionnaire was due to be sent out to Officers the following week.

The Chair informed Members that a brainstorming session was due to take place with Corporate Management Team on Thursday the 13th of September and that the Group had organised for external Expert Witnesses to be interviewed the week beginning the 17th of September.

The Committee agreed that, in view of delays occasioned by forthcoming Officer annual leave, the initial findings from Stage One of the Communications exercise should now be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 7th of November.

b. District Centres Task and Finish Group
– Chair Councillor A. Fry

The Chair of the District Centres Task and Finish Group explained that, due to Member changes to this Group, a bus trip had been arranged to take Members around Church Hill, Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Shopping Centres. The Chair reported that the bus trip had been very successful and that Members had identified a range of Officer Expert Witnesses to interview, including planning and landscaping officers.

c. Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group
– Chair Councillor C. MacMillan

The Chair reported that only one meeting had taken place for this Task and Finish Group. Members were informed that at the first meeting the Group had requested a large number of detailed pieces of information. The Chair reported that to enable Officers to complete the required work the second meeting of the Group had been scheduled to take place on Tuesday the 25th of September. Members requested that the Borough Director ask the relevant Officers to provide the required information as soon as possible.

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d. Housing Priority Task and Finish Group
– Chair Councillor B. Passingham

Officers reported that membership for this Task and Finish Group had been finalised and would comprise Councillors Passingham (Chair), Boyd-Carpenter, Cookson, Chalk and W. King.

Officers informed Members that they were in the process of finalising a date for the first meeting of this Group.

e. Gypsies and Travellers Task and Finish Group
– Chair Councillor P. Hill

Officers reported that relevant Officers and Councillor Hill had been consulted over the appropriate timing for this Task and Finish Group. Officers reported that as a result of this consultation process it had been suggested that the Task and Finish Review should begin in November. Members approved this suggestion and asked Officers to write to Group Leaders to request nominations for membership of the Group. Members also requested that Officers should provide future updates about the progress of this Task and Finish Group because Councillor Hill was not a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments as detailed in the preamble above,

- 1) the Communications Task and Finish Group delay the presentation of their recommendations for Stage One of the exercise until the Overview and Scrutiny meeting to be held on Wednesday the 7th of November;**
- 2) the Borough Director ask relevant Officers for the information requested by the Members of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group; and**
- 3) the Gypsies and Travellers Task and Finish Group begin its work in November 2007.**

42. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEMBER REMUNERATION

Members reiterated their concern that there was a lack of financial parity of Members' allowances between Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Members of the Executive Committee. Members argued that the current arrangements set by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) no longer reflected the change in structure of Overview and Scrutiny, which had moved from four separate Committees to the one current Committee with effect from the Council's Annual Meeting in May.

Members were concerned that, whilst the current Chair and Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee still received Special Responsibility Allowance, the money that would have contributed to the allowances for Chairs and Vice-Chairs of all the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the 2005/06 structure was not yet all allocated and expended.

In particular Members noted that allowances had been paid to three other Chairs and three other Vice-Chairs in the previous Overview and Scrutiny system. Members suggested that the money which would have contributed to those previous allowances could be pooled and divided up between the remaining Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members also discussed the need to allocate allowances to all the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in recognition of the new procedural role requiring Members to act as the individual Chairs of Task and Finish Groups. It was felt by some Members that the increased workload for these Chairs should warrant some financial recognition.

Officer explained that the next set of changes to the Members' allowances was due to take place from May 2008 and that Members would need to collectively decide how they would want to influence this prior to those arrangements being finalised. Officers pointed out that essentially there were two issues that Members might have wanted to bring to the attention of the IRP. Firstly, Committee Members may wish to make recommendations that reflect the changes to the Overview and Scrutiny process in time to influence the new scheme for Member allowances in the May 2008. Secondly, Members may want to request that they receive some recompense under the current scheme for this municipal year.

Members agreed that the Borough Director, the Democratic Services Manager and Councillor Thomas should convene to review the current arrangements for Member Remuneration in this

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area. Officers suggested that recommendations developed in this meeting should be referred to the Group Leaders for consideration before bringing the item back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further discussion.

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments as detailed in the preamble above,

- 1) the Borough Director, Democratic Services Manager and Councillor Thomas consider the issue of Member Allowances for O&S Committee members further; and**
- 2) these Officers and Councillor Thomas consult with the Group Leaders over their recommendations and then report back to the Committee in due course.**

43. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORTS - PREPARATION

The Chair explained to Members that each Portfolio Holder was due to attend an Overview and Scrutiny meeting to provide some background to Members about their Portfolio service area. The Chair was keen to discuss with Members what they wanted to get out of the process and what questions they wanted to pose to the Portfolio Holders. The Chair noted that Portfolio Holders would have ten minutes to make their presentations which will be followed by twenty minutes of questions suggested by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members felt that the main aim of the sessions should be to brief the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members about key issues facing the Portfolio Holder's service area and any solutions that the Portfolio Holder was proposing in response to these issues. Officers suggested that Members could read the Corporate Performance Plan which sets out the key issues and priorities for each service area. Members also commented that the Constitution would provide some guidance in relation to the role of Portfolio Holders. Members agreed that they should read both of these documents before the next meeting. This would inform Members of the key issues for each Portfolio Holder and assist Members to draft a set of questions in time for the next meeting. Members agreed that these questions should then be sent to the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, who was due to make his presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 17th of October.

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Members discussed the role of the Portfolio Holders. Officers informed Members that Portfolio Holders did not currently have individual decision making powers but were rather viewed as “champions” for their particular service areas. Officers explained that Portfolio Holders could undertake several roles. These included monitoring and reviewing delivery and working closely with Officers to help influence policy in their particular service area.

RESOLVED that

the process for Portfolio Holders’ Annual reports be agreed, as detailed above.

44. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

45. WORK PROGRAMME

The programme of future work was received and accepted, without comment.

RESOLVED that

the Committee Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 7.50 pm