

Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday, 24th October, 2006.

Present: Cllr Mrs J Beaumont, Cllr D Cains, Cllr J A Fletcher, Cllr K Lupton, Cllr J M Lynch, Cllr W Noble, Cllr Mrs M Rigg, Cllr J M Roberts, Mr T. Maxwell

Officers: G. Birtle, S. Connolly, M. Henderson, J. Trainer, M. Waggott (LD); J. Haworth (ACE)

Also in attendance: No other persons present.

Apologies: Cllr I. Dalgarno, Cllr M. Frankland, Cllr L. Narroway, Cllr Mrs K. Nelson, Cllr Mrs E. Nesbitt, Cllr R. Rix, Cllr Mrs A. Trainer, Cllr Mrs M. Womphrey, Cllr W. Woodhead, Mr I. Bartle, Mrs S. Mustafa

645 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Fletcher and Cllr Rigg declared personal, non prejudicial interests in item 7 - Final Report Preston Hall and Museum Strategy as they were Members of Eggescliffe Parish Council.

646 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th September 2006 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record

647 Review of new scrutiny co-ordination arrangements

Members considered a report on the proposed approach to the review of the Council's new Scrutiny Co- ordination arrangements and the Committee was asked to comment on the methodology for the review.

Members were reminded that when new Scrutiny arrangements had been implemented at the end of 2005 it had been agreed that there would be an interim progress check at the three month point, and that the arrangements would be reviewed by the Members' Advisory Panel after six months of operation.

The interim progress check had revealed that all arrangements had been implemented as agreed and progress was reported to Executive Scrutiny Committee on 4th July and the Members' Advisory Panel on 18th August.

In order to feed into the review by the Members' Advisory Panel, it was proposed that views on the implementation of the new arrangements be sought from Members and Officers on key issues. The Centre for Public Scrutiny had designed a self evaluation framework based on the principles set out in the "Good Scrutiny Guide". It was suggested that this approach could be adopted to review the Council's new scrutiny co-ordination arrangements by focusing on the key questions contained in the Framework. The subsidiary questions could be used as prompts by facilitators during workshop sessions. The framework aimed to provide objectivity by asking the evaluator to

- demonstrate evidence of achievement
- identify areas for improvement

- highlight potential barriers to improvement

The framework could be used in a variety of ways. The following approach was proposed:

- Use the framework as a survey sent to all Members
- Hold separate workshops for
 - Ø Executive Scrutiny, Select Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs
 - Ø Cabinet Members
 - Ø Officers (CMT, Link Officers and Scrutiny Officers)

The results could then be used to identify areas for improvement for further discussion at Members' Advisory Panel.

It was proposed that the review should take place during November and December 2006 to enable Members to have an input following the completion of the first reviews under the new arrangements.

Members considered the proposals and supported the suggested approach. A draft copy of a survey questionnaire that would be circulated was considered. The questionnaire asked key questions about Members' views on the effectiveness of scrutiny arrangements and invited them to comment. Such questions were considered to be essential, however, it was suggested that response rates would be improved if certain information was acquired by the use of tick boxes. It was therefore agreed that the questionnaire should be a mix of tick box questions and open questions. Members referred to problems associated with attendance at Scrutiny Committees and it was agreed that this could be highlighted in the questionnaire and attempts be made within the questions to ascertain the reasons for poor attendance.

Debate widened and discussion took place on what flexibility existed to change the current scrutiny arrangements. Members asked what the legal requirements were, relating to the Council's scrutiny function? What powers did Committees have and where did those powers come from? It was suggested that a brief presentation of this could be provided at the commencement of the proposed workshops.

Resolved that

1. the proposed approach to the review of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements be approved.
2. the survey questionnaire be amended to include a mix of tick box questions and open questions (including questions relating to attendance rates).
3. workshop sessions include a brief presentation on legal requirements of the Council's scrutiny function.

648 Timetable for Setting of Scrutiny Work Programme 2007/08

The Committee considered a proposed timetable for setting the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2007/08. The timetable had been produced in order to avoid

delays in scrutiny work commencing after the elections. If necessary, the draft programme could be reviewed and amended following the Annual Meeting:-

- Chair of Executive Scrutiny Committee to write to all Members for ideas - October
- Select Committees meet to discuss ideas – October/November (Item on Select Committee agendas)
- CMT – November/December
- Corporate Director/Head of Service Briefings with Cabinet Members – December
- Scrutiny Liaison Forum – 12 January 2007
- Executive Scrutiny Committee – 20 February 2007

RESOLVED that the timetable for setting the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2007/2008 be approved.

649 Final Report - NHS Dentistry

Members were provided with the final version of the Health Select Committee's report on its review of NHS Dentistry in the Borough which would be presented to Cabinet on 2nd November 2006.

The Committee noted that there had been a number of 'eleventh hour' agreed changes to the report's recommendations following discussions with the North Tees Primary Care Trust and Council's Integrated Transport Policy Unit.

Members were informed that the report would be formally presented to the North Tees Primary Care Trust on 21st November 2006.

Members discussed the recommendations and asked a number of questions for clarification.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

650 Final Report - Preston Hall and Museum Strategy

Members were provided with the final version of the Adults, Leisure and Culture Select Committee's report on its review of Preston Hall and Park and the Museums Strategy, which would be presented to Cabinet on 2 November 2006.

The Chairman of the Adults, Leisure and Culture Select Committee presented the report and briefly explained its structure and the reasoning that led to the recommendations.

Members considered the report and discussed the recommendations.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

651 Report of Select Committee Chairs and Progress of Scrutiny Reviews

Adults, Leisure and Culture Select Committee

The Chairman of Adults, Leisure and Culture Select Committee indicated that

following completion of its review of Preston Hall and Park and the Museum Strategy, work on the Committee's next identified review had began - Review of Major Festivals (SIRF/BIFF).

It was explained that a draft scope and project plan had been produced and was provided for this Committee's consideration.

Children and Young People

The Chairman of Children and Young People Select Committee explained that a first draft of the Committee's report and recommendations, following its Review of Teenage Pregnancy was being prepared and would be presented to this Committee on 21st November 2006 and Cabinet on 30th November 2006. The report would also be forwarded to the Children's Trust Board.

During November the Committee would be reviewing the implementation of approved recommendations coming from the Education, Leisure and Cultural Select Committee's review of Youth Club Provision.

The Committee would then move on to another review. The Committee's Work Programme currently identified Child Obesity as the Committee's next review. However, the Committee had questioned the value of undertaking this review as there was a great deal of work in progress on this issue. Other possible topics identified were Bullying and Careers Advice. The Chair intended writing to all committee members to get views and other suggestions for topics.

Corporate Policy Review

The Committee noted that Corporate Policy Select had completed gathering evidence and was currently formulating conclusions and recommendations. It was anticipated that the final report would be submitted to this Committee on 19th December and Cabinet on 4th January 2006.

Environment and Regeneration Select Committee

The Chairman of the Environment and Regeneration Select Committee provided an update on the work it had undertaken associated with its review of street lighting. This had centred around comparative work with other authorities. The Committee would shortly be discussing 'invest to save' issues relating to the reduction or removal of street lighting.

The review report was on target for completion and was likely to be presented to Cabinet on 1st February 2006.

The Committee's next scheduled review was Cemeteries. The Committee had also identified Rats and Pigeon Infestation and Food Shop Inspections as other possible review topics.

The Chairman of the Select Committee referred to instances that had occurred during the review, where the Committee had identified an issue, that it considered needed further investigation and work, only to discover that officers were already undertaking such work. It was suggested that if this became common it could compromise the value of a Committee's work.

Linked to this it was highlighted that in some instances the reviews actually triggered work by officers. The net result of this was that some potential recommendations identified by committees, at an early stage, were being implemented prior to the end of the review. In the light of this members discussed the possibility of interim reports and recommendations being made by Select Committees. It was suggested that the final reports of Select Committees should refer to any changes in services/policies, made during the course of a review, which had been influenced by the work of the Committee.

Health Select Committee

It was explained that the Committee's final report on its review of NHS Dentistry would be presented to Cabinet on 2nd November 2006.

It had previously been agreed that the Committee's next review would address issues associated with the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service. However, following discussions with the Head of Child Strategy, who explained that the service was undertaking changes to service provision, it had been agreed that the commencement of this review be delayed. The Committee therefore needed to identify a new review.

Members noted that the Healthcare Commission had launched a new basis for its Annual Healthcheck. As the Health Select Committee was one of the bodies involved in scrutinising the Healthcheck it had requested that the Healthcare Commission provide background and training on the new arrangements.

The Committee was informed that the Health Select Committee had made a submission to Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP) which was considering the differences in opinion regarding Prof. Darzi's proposals for acute service provision in the area. The Panel had complimented the Health Select Committee on the standard of its submission. The IRP's findings would be published in January 2007.

Housing and Community Safety Select Committee

It was explained that the Housing and Community Safety Select Committee had commenced its review of the development of Choice Based Lettings (CBL).

The review was at an early stage but the Committee had visited Erimus Homechoice in Middlesbrough and planned to visit Your Choice Homes in Newcastle.

The Committee was provided with a brief update of progress on issues identified by the Committee following its monitoring review of anti social behaviour.

General Issues

The Committee discussed the work of the Scrutiny Officers, and particularly their role during the period toward the end of a review and the beginning of another. It was indicated that during this period it was good practice for the

Scrutiny Officer, in conjunction with the Chairman, to prepare for the next review. It was envisaged that such preparatory work would ensure effective use of officer time and assist the Committee to produce high quality, robust scopes and project plans. In view of this it was important that, as far as possible, Select Committees followed their identified work programme, which set out forthcoming reviews. It was noted that such arrangements meant that there was little, if any, spare capacity in the Scrutiny Officers' workload.

Members were informed that arrangements had been made for the following seminars to take place and Members of the Committee were encouraged to attend:-

- 7th November 2006 - Feeding back the results of the MORI residents poll. An associate Director of MORI would present the findings and put them into the National context.

- 13th November 2006 – Key aspects of the Local Government White Paper, plus John Lowther from the Joint Strategy Unit would present the proposals contained in the Tees Valley Business Case. It was noted that the White Paper was likely to include proposals that would strengthen scrutiny.

RESOLVED that the updates and issues arising from them be noted.