

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 – COMMUNITY AND HOUSING held at the COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 12 SEPTEMBER 2001 at 7.30 pm

Present:- Councillor D J Morson – Chairman.
Councillors A Dean, M A Gayler, R A Merrion, R J O'Neill,
Mrs S V Schneider and P A Wilcock.

Also present:- Councillor R P Chambers.

Officers in attendance:- R H Chamberlain, Mrs E Forbes, Mrs R Fulton,
Mrs J Postings and Mrs C Roberts.

S1.1 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed all those attending the first meeting of Scrutiny Committee 1, saying that he foresaw a challenging and exciting time ahead.

Before the commencement of the meeting, he invited Members, to stand in silence for one minute as a mark of respect for those who had died in the recent tragic incidents in New York and Washington DC.

S1.2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs C D Down, D M Jones and R C Smith.

S1.3 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND PROCEDURE

The Committee received a document which set out the Terms of Reference and Procedure Rules for Overview and Scrutiny Committees. These had been approved at the Special Meeting of the Council on 28 August 2001. Councillor Merrion referred to term of delegation number 3 and asked what was meant by "service reviews". The Chairman explained that the Scrutiny Committee had power to monitor service reviews and request those who were involved in their preparation to attend and give explanations. The Head of Legal Services added that the process was linked to that of Best Value. The Chairman stressed however that it would be wrong for the same item to be monitored twice.

Councillor Wilcock asked a question about the role of Task Groups in the context of Scrutiny. The Chairman explained that the Committee had the power to appoint Task Groups to consider particular matters. He continued that the Task Groups would report back to their parent committees.

Councillor O'Neill drew Members' attention to the fact that there was no reference to Best Value in the terms of reference or terms of delegation.

RESOLVED that the Constitution Task Group be requested to consider the insertion of a reference to Best Value in the terms of delegation.

Councillor Merrion asked whether expenses would be paid by the Council for outsiders attending the Committee. The Head of Legal Services explained that there was no set policy, but in practice visitors from other organisations would often pay their own expenses. The template would be that of Council Officers' expenses.

Councillor A Dean referred to para 7.4 of the Call In rules which he felt did not, as currently drafted, reflect the decision taken at the special meeting of the Council on 28 August 2001. The draft before the Committee effectively gave the Chairman power to veto a call in.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the call in procedure be referred to the next meeting of the Council for correction to record the intention of the proposer and seconder of the recommendation to Council.
- 2 that the Chairman of Scrutiny Committee 2 be advised of this situation.

S1.4

COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2001/02

The Committee noted that the session would contain four meetings. The report drew the Committee's attention to a number of key issues which would arise during the rest of the Council year. It also outlined the suggestions of the Chairman of the Committee and of officers on topics which the Committee might wish to consider.

It was inevitably important that the Committee should consider how to conduct service reviews. A report on performance would be made to the November meeting at which time the audit of draft budgets might also be a major issue.

The Chairman of the Committee invited Members to consider Item 7 of the agenda at this point, being a request from Councillor A Dean concerning the Council's role in promoting the District's natural assets for leisure and economic benefit.

Councillor Dean explained his concern that footpaths were overgrown and in some cases unsigned. He also felt they should be marketed by explanatory leaflets which could be published via the TICs.

The Chairman commented that it was a part of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy to develop footpaths.

Councillor Mrs Schnieder suggested that information boards might be useful on some paths. Councillor Merrion informed the meeting that the Essex County Council via the Parish Paths Partnership helped Parishes to supply map boards. He suggested that it would be helpful to link up the Parishes

which were a part of the Parish Paths Partnership and that it would be good to include cycle ways as well as bridleways in this initiative.

Councillor O'Neill commented upon the excellence of the leaflets already produced regarding footpaths but said it was important not to run parallel Committee Systems and therefore he left the Scrutiny Committee should encourage the appropriate policy Committee to reply about this matter.

The Chief Executive suggested that since it was not clear to members of the Committee what was in hand or planned for the footpaths, Officers should prepare a situation report on the progress in implementing the Leisure and Cultural Strategy, particularly about the work in train and planned for footpaths.

It was agreed that this report be brought to the January meeting of this Committee.

Councillor Wilcock referred to the leisure centres, Stansted Airport and the Museum and asked that the Committee consider how best to deal with these matters. Councillor A Dean suggested that scrutiny of the leisure centres should perhaps be passed to the other Scrutiny Committee. A debate ensued on the areas of work which should be scrutinised having regard to the membership of the Committee. The importance of the Committee's role in policy formation was noted and the fact that the joint chairs of the PFI Board were members of Scrutiny Committee 2.

In considering the Officers' report, some Members felt that the Committee should scrutinise those things the Council was responsible for rather than the actions of outside bodies.

The Chief Executive commented that the Museum would be part of one Best Value Review, in 2002 for which the terms of reference would be agreed in due course. She informed the meeting that a presentation open to all Members was to be given before the meeting of the Health and Housing Committee on 1 November by the National Health Service/PCT. The Chairman pointed out that relevant Best Value Reviews would be a part of this Committee's Terms of Reference. The Chief Executive added that there were agreed parameters for the methods of review to be used. It was also noted that there was annual review of the housing stock.

RESOLVED that

- 1 in addition to standard items the Committee considers at its November meeting how it intends to conduct service reviews in future years and looks at the co-ordination of Community Transport initiatives, and that Officers prepare a report on footpaths for Members' information at the November meeting.
- 2 the topics of the footway and the Leisure and Cultural Strategy be chosen for discussion at the January meeting.
- 3 That the situation be reviewed at the November meeting.

S1.5 WARDEN SERVICES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing and Property Services which posed various questions about the sheltered housing service and the "Lifeline" emergency system. The Head of Housing and Property Services stressed that the aim was to provide the same service for all of the Council's sheltered tenants within the district. He described the comprehensive consultation exercise which had taken place whereby the views of all tenants and lifeline users had been sought. Councillor Gayler declared an interest insofar as he was employed in Social Services. He asked that the Members' views be added to the report as it was progressed and expressed the view that the basis of the existing Warden system be retained since it promoted independence for longer periods.

In answer to a question, the Head of Housing and Property Services explained that there were 14 Wardens covering 18 locations in the District.

S1.6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND LEISURE COMMITTEE HELD ON 4 SEPTEMBER 2001

Members noted the Decision List.

Members were in agreement that more detail was required on why decisions had been made, the decision alone being insufficient for the purposes of the Scrutiny Committee.

S1.7 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF THE HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE HELD ON 6 SEPTEMBER 2001

Councillor A Dean said he had received the impression that the Committee had little to do and that workloads between Committees therefore needed balancing.

The Chief Executive agreed that this could be done if necessary but not on the basis of one agenda, and suggested that the workloads be reviewed in March.

Members reiterated the need for a fuller description of decisions.

Councillor Wilcock referred to the consideration of the Housing Strategy Statement by the Health and Housing Committee with regret. He considered that the Health and Housing Committee should have analysed it to a greater extent, a job which on previous occasions had been carried out by the appropriate Working Party.

Mrs Schneider asked that Decision Lists be standardised as to headings and Councillor A Dean asked for a convention to be arrived at on file names for ease of access.

S1.8 SUMMARY

The Chairman thanked Members for contributing to the first meeting of Scrutiny Committee 1 and itemised the achievements as follows:-

- (i) Areas of concern had been established as regards the Call In Rules and Best Value
- (ii) Further information had been provided about the Best Value review of the Warden Service
- (iii) A programme had been agreed for the November and January meetings
- (iv) The working of number 7.4 of the Rules relating to Call-in had been rectified
- (v) Officers had been requested to provide greater detail of decisions made for scrutiny by the Committee.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm.