

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 – COMMUNITY AND HOUSING held at THE COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 7 NOVEMBER 2001 at 7.30 pm

Present:- Councillor D J Morson – Chairman
Councillors A Dean, Mrs C D Down, M A Gayler, D M Jones, R J O'Neill, Mrs S V Schneider, R C Smith, Mrs E Tealby-Watson and P A Wilcock.

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Councillors W F Bowker, R P Chambers and Mrs J F Cheetham.

Officers in attendance:- R H Chamberlain, Mrs S McLagan, J Pares, M T Purkiss and Mrs C Roberts.

S1.9

MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCIL AND THE PRIMARY CARE TRUST

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Fiona Gilmore of the West Essex Community Health Council and Peta Wilkinson from the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust. He said that he had invited the representatives of these organisations so that a discussion could take place on how the Scrutiny Committee could work in harmony with health service organisations. The boundary of the Primary Care Trust was coterminous with the District boundary, with the addition of Steeple Bumpstead, and this enabled close co-operation to take place. The Community Health Council was a watchdog agency for patients, but its role was being phased out and it had been suggested that the Scrutiny Committee could take over part of its role in the future. Councillor Morson asked the health representatives what they expected from the Council, how the various organisations could work in partnership and how the Council could develop its role of being watchful of developments in the Health Service.

Peta Wilkinson said that the Primary Care Trust hoped to ensure the development of local community health services, which were accessible and of an appropriate level to meet the needs of local people. She said that the partnership with the Council and other organisations had to be meaningful, formal and practical. She saw the partnership with the Council as being at three levels. Firstly, joint planning, eg joint posts or committees; secondly, reviewing how the two organisations utilised their resources, eg avoiding duplication of services and thirdly, the important issue of communication and involvement of the public.

Councillor Mrs Cheetham said that county councils appeared to be charged by the Government with the duty of scrutinising health services and she asked how district councils could fit in to this scrutiny role. Peta Wilkinson said that whilst county councils would operate at a strategic level, the measure of how well a job was being done was best carried out at a local level and the input of district councils would be meaningful.

Councillor Smith said that he was concerned about accountability in health services and felt that there could be a danger of the district council adding to

this problem. Peta Wilkinson said that there was a need to separate the issue of accountability from the issue of partnership. The lines of accountability for health and social services were clear.

Councillor A Dean said that the Local Agenda 21 initiative included a number of health improvement targets and asked how this would be monitored. Peta Wilkinson said that in Uttlesford, this was being monitored and local data was available. She added that it was important to co-ordinate the monitoring of work programmes across key service areas.

Councillor Gayler declared an interest in this matter insofar as he was an employee of Essex County Social Services. He understood that a care trust was being formed in Braintree to carry out social services and health provisions and asked whether similar arrangements would be appropriate for Uttlesford. He also asked how the Primary Care Trust worked in partnership with the Ambulance Trust. Peta Wilkinson said that whilst the Primary Care Trust had not expressed an interest in forming a care trust when it had first been formed, an interest had now been registered. She also explained the partnership arrangements with the Ambulance Trust and the improvements which were planned.

Fiona Gilmore described the work of the community health councils, which would have to be taken over by the District Council, mentioning in particular, learning disabilities support, the Ambulance Trust and the future of Ferguson Close, Saffron Walden. She stressed the importance of monitoring and scrutinising the health service and being aware that major difficulties could arise swiftly due to insufficiently imaginative work or lack of co-ordination. The CHCs tried to work with the health service where possible and to challenge only where this was necessary. Fiona Gilmore added that the CHCs proposed to produce a paper on their current methods of scrutinising the health service and proposals for joint working during the transitional period.

The Chairman of the Committee stressed that the Committee could not take over the whole of the work which had been undertaken by the Community Health Council. It was necessary to establish what could be done and what links with other organisations might usefully be made. Fiona Gilmore assured the Committee that the staff of the Community Health Council would be happy to work with them. She also emphasised the value of scrutiny by lay people.

The Chairman summarised the discussion and listed the action which could be taken by the District Council as:-

- (i) examination of PCT national targets
- (ii) monitoring of indicators of effective performance
- (iii) liaison with and input to for a concerned with patient issues
- (iv) focussing on particular issues, eg the ambulance service, mental health and learning disability services.

S1.10

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R A Merrion.

S1.11 **HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**

At the request of Councillor R P Chambers, Members next considered matters arising from the meeting of the Health and Housing Committee held on 1 November 2001.

The Committee and Communications Manager explained that the second item on the decision list for that meeting had been called in at the request of three Members.

A written statement made by Councillor Mrs S Flack, who had chaired the meeting in question, was circulated.

The decision in question had been about the decision taking process for best value action plans. The Health and Housing Committee had asked that the Constitution Task Group consider whether best value review action plans could be the subject of resolution at policy committee level or should be referred to Council.

The call in had been instituted due to concern that a decision might have been taken without Members being alerted, by the Agenda, to the subject matter and the intent to discuss it. Some Members said they had been unaware that a formal decision was happening and thought it a mere aside. Other Members, however, had accepted the matter as a reasonable extension of the subject under discussion with a decision which had been greeted by no objections at the time.

Councillor R P Chambers also answered questions from Councillor A Dean about the Health and Housing Committee Budget.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Scrutiny Committee records its concern and,
- 2 asks the Constitution Task Group to evaluate the processes whereby committee decisions are identified for the purposes of the Minutes, but
- 3 otherwise takes no further action as regards the particular decision under consideration.
- 4 in the future, Members be informed of items called in as soon as possible, by e-mail.

S1.12 **COMMUNITY AND LEISURE COMMITTEE**

The Committee then considered matters arising from the meeting of the Community and Leisure Committee held on 30 October 2001. Councillor R P Chambers answered questions from Councillor A Dean about the budgets available for running CICs at Thaxted, Dunmow and Stansted. Councillor Dean asked that this matter be noted for reconsideration when the Community and Leisure Committee re-examines its budget before the budget is finalised.

S1.13 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2001 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the addition of Councillor Mrs Tealby-Watson to the names of Members having given their apologies.

S1.14 **BUSINESS ARISING**

As regards the footpath report referred to in Minute S1.4, the Committee and Communications Manager informed the meeting about a partners and stakeholders meeting about footpaths which had been planned for November. It was hoped that matters of common interest and issues, which would be relayed in the report, would be brought forward.

Members also expressed their compliments to those concerned with the production of decision lists, which now contained much more information.

S1.15 **COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2001/02**

The Committee and Communications Manager explained that there were no new issues to be considered under this heading, but it was suggested the work programme should be included as a regular item within the Agenda.

The Chairman referred to the substantial items scheduled for discussion at future meetings. In answer to a question from the Head of Community and Leisure Services, Councillor M A Gayler confirmed that the Committee wished to scrutinise the whole of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy.

S1.16 **FUTURE SERVICE REVIEWS**

The Committee considered a detailed report on how the Best Value Service Reviews should be conducted in 2002/03. In particular, Members were asked to decide the best way of determining the terms of reference and scope of future reviews. The Committee noted the arrangements for officer Review Teams and the role of "critical friends" and challenge events. Members were also asked to consider options for Member involvement, which was a particularly important part of the process. Councillor O'Neill circulated a document, which set out proposals on how this could operate. The Chairman thanked him for this helpful document.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 Member involvement in service reviews be continued for the next two years as at present, with the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee appointing three of its Members to oversee and steer each review and report on progress formally to the Committee and informally to the political groups,
- 2 the procedures set out in paragraphs 6-8 of the report regarding terms of reference of review bodies and challenge events be

- adopted, subject to the terms of reference and scope of reviews being agreed by the Scrutiny Committee after considering advice from the appropriate policy committee,
- 3 the service review process be reviewed following completion of the 2003/04 programme.

S1.17 **COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INITIATIVES**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Community and Leisure on community transport initiatives which catalogued those currently in existence and referred to costs and funding. Some discussion ensued upon this report and it was noted that rural transport tended to be considered in terms of its providers rather than its users. Members considered that youth transport was important and that representatives of its users should be invited to meetings of the appropriate forum.

RESOLVED that the Environment and Transport Committee be invited to submit comments on this report to Scrutiny Committee 2 – Resources and Environment.

S1.18 **YEARLY PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Committee received a report by the Policy Officer on performance information for the year 2000/01. Members had a number of questions about different areas of the performance indicators. Members would submit any further questions to the Chairman so that an appropriate response could be made.

S1.19 **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in paragraphs 1, 7 and 12 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

S1.20 **INTERNAL AUDIT SECTION**

The Committee considered a report for information about the results of internal audit work completed during the previous seven months as regards services falling within the remit of the Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee. Information was also given on the results of a recent benchmarking exercise.

The meeting ended at 10.07 pm.