

SCRUTINY BOARD

31st January 2005 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Roden (Chair); Councillors Abid, R.J. Davis, Garrett, Mead and Siederer.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Shaw.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Bashir and Simmons.

2 MINUTES (REF: 2.1)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Board held on 30th November 2004 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 FEEDBACK FROM CHAIR ON WORK OF SOCIAL INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REF: 7.1)

The Chair of the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee was present at the meeting and outlined the work currently being undertaken by the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee noted the information and thanked the Chair for his attendance.

Resolved: (i) That the information provided by the Chair of the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee be noted.

(ii) That the Vice-Chair of the Bedfordshire and Luton Joint NHS Scrutiny Committee be invited to attend the meeting of the Scrutiny Board to be held on 8th March 2005.

(iii) That the Chair of Performance, Resources and Assets Scrutiny Committee be invited to attend the meeting of the Scrutiny Board to be held on 26th April 2005.

4 CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY SELF-EVALUATION (REF: 8.1)

The Director of Scrutiny reported on the Centre for Public Scrutiny Self-Evaluation Framework that had been completed by the Council.

Throughout, the framework asked “What we do well?” and “How can we improve?” in relation to a variety of different questions. The “How can we improve?” section was designed to provide a set of action points in relation to the four principles of effective scrutiny and the Director of Scrutiny invited the Board to consider those action points.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the action points set out below be supported:

- ii) Develop a checklist to help Scrutiny Members examine the Executive Forward Plan.
- iii) Send out a pre-questionnaire to stakeholders to obtain their views on what the topic/review should include or exclude (but keep it short and sweet).
- iv) Encourage Scrutiny Chairs and Portfolio Holders to meet outside of meetings.
- v) Protocol needs to be developed to publicise the work of Scrutiny. And the input Scrutiny has had on the work of the Executive.
- viii) Encourage more communication with Lead Officers to approach Committee as soon as they know there is going to be a problem, rather than leaving it till they are due to come to report back.
- ix) Ensure summing up of meeting actually happens – keep a record of it happening

(iii) That the action points set out below not be supported for the reasons given:

- (i) Ensuring the Executive Forward plan is a standing item on the Agenda for the Scrutiny Board.
Reason: Every Member of the Council receives a copy of the Forward Plan so it is up to Scrutiny Members to look at it regularly and bring forward any item they wish to be scrutinised.
- (vi) Should have a standing item on the agenda of the Scrutiny Board for any member to attend the board meeting and ask questions regarding scrutiny

Reason: Any Member is welcome at any time and would be allowed to ask a question.

- (vii) Need to improve the status of Scrutiny so that it is on an equal footing with the Executive
Reason: Scrutiny could not be placed on an equal footing with the Executive.

5 WORK PROGRAMMES (REF: 8.2)

The Director of Scrutiny reported on the work planned to be undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees and Panels.

Members were advised that the single scrutiny work programme had now been discontinued with each Committee now preparing its own work programme.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

6 BUDGET GROWTH PROPOSAL (REF: 8.3)

The Director of Scrutiny referred to Minute 54/04 and reported that, as directed by the Board, he had submitted a growth bid to the Chief Executive's Management Team for one additional Scrutiny Officer (estimated cost £30,720) to enable the scrutiny process to develop. However, the bid had not been supported by colleagues to proceed any further.

A Member referred to a previous growth bid that had been put forward by Environment and Non-Executive Functions Scrutiny Committee that had been agreed by the Executive but had not been taken any further. The Director of Scrutiny advised the Board that this related to the final report on enforcement and the recommendation which the Executive had accepted, that the additional annual cost of £158k should be considered alongside all other growth proposals within the budget process for 2005-06. However, although a growth proposal had been prepared it had not got beyond consideration by officers.

Members of the Board commented that it was unacceptable that in both cases the proposals had not been supported by Officers to proceed and had not at any stage been put forward to Members for consideration. They felt that Members recommendations should be considered by Members.

Resolved: That Performance, Resources and Assets Scrutiny Committee be requested to recommend to Council (Budget) on 17th February 2005 the budget growth proposals set out below for consideration:

- (a) One additional scrutiny officer post to enable the scrutiny process to develop - estimated cost to be £30,720.
- (b) The resources in the sum of £158,000 per annum to deal with the removal of fly tipped waste from private land.

7 SCRUTINY TEAM – STAFFING (REF: 8.4)

The Director of Scrutiny reported with regard to the latest staffing position in the Scrutiny Team.

Members were advised that approval had been given to fill the vacant Scrutiny Officer post on the basis that it was within the approved establishment and was necessary for the effective functioning of scrutiny.

The Director of Scrutiny advised the Board that although two people on the redeployment list had been skills matched they had decided not to apply. An internal secondment had been advertised but no responses had been received. The post would be externally advertised that week with a closing date of 18th February 2005.

Members were advised there may be a temporary slackening in pace of work due to the staffing situation and a further report would be submitted to the Board if the current staffing situation had adverse effects on committees/panels.

The Director of Scrutiny commented that due to a shortage of staffing in Democratic Services, it had not always been possible for the same Administrator to support a Committee, which could lead to some inconsistency.

Resolved: That the report and the interim allocation of responsibilities be noted.

8 ANNUAL REPORT (REF: 8.5)

The Director of Scrutiny sought approval to the adoption of a different approach to the production of the scrutiny annual report to avoid unnecessary duplication.

Resolved: That the approach set out in the report of the Director of Scrutiny (Ref: 8.5) to the preparation, production and submission to the Council of the scrutiny annual report be approved.

9 SCRUTINY AWAY DAY (REF: 8.6)

The Director of Scrutiny reported that he proposed to make arrangements for a Scrutiny Away Half Day to take place at The Hat Factory on the morning of

Saturday 2nd April 2005 to explore ways to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny and to look at the relationships between scrutiny with the Executive, Departments and Area Committees

He further reported that he intended to invite all Members of the Council, the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors, the Scrutiny Team and the Head of Local Democracy.

Concern was expressed by Members at the event being scheduled over the weekend. The Director of Scrutiny advised that this was due to the lack of availability of alternative dates.

Resolved: That the Director of Scrutiny be requested to write to all Members of the Council to assess interest and availability.

10 HEALTH SCRUTINY UPDATE (REF: 8.7)

The Director of Scrutiny updated the Board on the work of the Bedfordshire and Luton Joint Health Scrutiny Committee.

The Director of Scrutiny suggested that Health Scrutiny be a standing item with an update at each meeting of the Board due to the amount of work undertaken by the Joint Committee.

Members were advised that a special joint committee with Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire County Councils had been formed and met recently. The Director of Scrutiny outlined the work programme.

Members raised concerns that time/resources should be not wasted in areas not relevant to Luton.

Comparisons were made with Hertfordshire County Council and how health scrutiny was devolved down to district level. A study should be made of how funds are allocated in Hertfordshire County Council.

The Director of Scrutiny reported that he was due to attend an Officers meeting on 3rd February 2005 with his counterparts in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire and would raise the issues at that meeting.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That Democratic Services be requested to place a standing item entitled "Health Scrutiny Update" on all future Scrutiny Board Agendas.

(iii) That the Director of Scrutiny be requested to submit a report to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Board regarding the Officer meeting to be held on 3rd February.

11 TRAINING, ETC. (REF: 8.8)

The Director of Scrutiny sought the Board's views on the approach to Member training and whether any changes to the scrutiny arrangements should be contemplated for the next municipal year.

Members confirmed that they were happy with in-house training but advised that other commitments i.e. ward problems/visiting constituents could affect training schedules.

The Scrutiny Board considered that training in conjunction with other authorities was another option for consideration – a lot could be learned from understanding different approaches.

The Director of Scrutiny tabled details of a conference organised by Buckinghamshire County Council entitled "Looking Outside - Scrutinising External Organisations". He requested Members to inform him if they wished to attend.

The Director of Scrutiny submitted the December bulletin from the Centre for Public Scrutiny for information.

The Director of Scrutiny reported that the Terms of Reference of the 5 Scrutiny Committees had never been intended to coincide with Executive Portfolio responsibilities or departmental structures.

Due to changes planned to the Council's organisational structure, the Director of Scrutiny enquired if the Scrutiny Board considered that scrutiny arrangements needed to be changed to align with Departmental or Executive responsibilities. Members had no firm views on the issue.

A Member suggested that the issue could be fed into the Scrutiny Away Half Day for discussion.

The Board mentioned that it might prove useful to look at what all Committees/Panels were working on to avoid duplication of effort.

It was suggested that temporary panels should be temporary panels and if they were required to undertake further work following the completion of a topic they should be reconstituted to provide clear guidelines/role clarification and avoid duplication of work.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Director of Scrutiny be requested to include the issue of terms of reference of scrutiny committees on the agenda for the planned away half day.

12 WORK OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES – MONITORING (REF: 9)

Members were invited to report back on the work of Scrutiny Committees that had taken place since the last meeting of the Board.

The Chair reported that she had recently attended a meeting of the Environment and Non-Executive Functions Scrutiny Committee when the topic under discussion had been conservation. She described it as an extremely interesting and well-run meeting.

Resolved: That the information be noted.

(Note: The meeting ended at 7.22 p.m.)