

Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 21 July 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **21 July 2005** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr K H Hudson
Vice-Chairman: Cllr P K Savill

Cllr R G S Choppen
Cllr K J Gordon
Cllr Mrs S A Harper

Cllr T Livings
Cllr P F A Webster

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr P A Capon, Cllr Mrs T J Capon, D Helson (Rayleigh & Rochford Association of Voluntary Services), and H Squier (Rochford Chamber of Trade)

ALSO PRESENT

Cllr J M Pullen	- Vice-Chairman of Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee
E Ellis	- Vivista
J Sheaf	- South East Essex Chamber of Trade
K Wickham	- Federation of Small Businesses

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	- Chief Executive
R J Honey	- Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
R Crofts	- Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
M Martin	- Committee Administrator

297 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

298 INTERVIEW WITH CHAIRMEN/VICE-CHAIRMEN OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Committee held interviews with the Vice-Chairmen of two of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committees to ascertain their views on the performance of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, including the role of Overview and

Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 21 July 2005

Scrutiny Committees in policy development and their effectiveness as a vehicle for the challenge of executive decisions.

An objective of the interviews was to identify information that would assist the Committee in developing an understanding of the Council's requirements of Overview and Scrutiny and the way forward for Overview and Scrutiny in Rochford.

In responding to questions, interviewees offered the following observations:-

- The Overview & Scrutiny function enabled honest, unfettered views to be aired, without political bias.
- It could provide a "challenge" to decisions taken at Policy Committees.
- The three Overview & Scrutiny Committees complemented the work of the three Policy Committees.
- Whilst the Overview & Scrutiny Committees had not always operated as effectively as possible in terms of the quality of debate/questioning, this was not a criticism of the process itself.
- Effective on-going Member training was required, particularly around questioning skills.
- The work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees enabled the opinions of expert witnesses to be considered.
- The process could be used to review an area to confirm that it was offering the best value and did not have to be confined to issues with identified problems.
- Members were acquiring a better understanding of the process.
- The greater use of small task and finish groups to gain a more in-depth view of an issue also had the ability to stifle debate.

299 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the Schedule relating to Progress on Decisions and in response to Member questions the following was noted:-

Rayleigh, Rochford & District Association for Voluntary Services (RRAVS) – Core Funding Support (Minute 539/04)

The Local Strategic Partnership would continue to address this issue via Essex County Council and the Primary Care Trust and this Committee would be advised of progress.

CPA Improvement Plan – Progress (Minute 119/05)

The CPA Improvement Plan was an on-going three-year programme, which would not be concluded until 2007.

Community Transport - Longer Term Funding (Minute 120/05)

Members commended the Taxi Voucher scheme, but recognised it served a different need to that of the Community Transport Scheme. Currently 3 trustees were appointed to the Board. Members were reminded that the project was funded by the County Council. The Policy & Finance Committee would continue to keep this under review.

300 INTERVIEW WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The Committee had invited a number of stakeholders to attend the meeting to complement the views of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Council's Committees in respect of the performance of Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Those who either attended or submitted a written response offered the following wide-ranging observations:-

- In highlighting their problems at meetings of the Council, stakeholders could be regarded as having a negative viewpoint.
- As only 2% of businesses within the District employ more than 150 people, the views of the Chambers of Trade should be regarded as very representative of businesses within the District. It was felt that the Council's policies did not always take this into account.
- Planning policy needed to address the shortage of buildings available for industrial use.
- The Tourism Study being undertaken by the Council was to be welcomed, but the issues surrounding lack of infrastructure/capital investment would need to be addressed if employees/businesses were to be attracted to the area.
- Of immediate concern for the District ought to be the projected increase in traffic movements that would ensue as a result of the planned new major port development at Shell Haven.
- The mis-match of skill set levels of education relative to employers' needs needed to be addressed.

Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 21 July 2005

- Business opportunities should not be lost and where necessary the labour force would need to be brought in from outside the District.
- The view existed that 'lip service' only was paid to the consultation undertaken with stakeholders.
- Representatives from the local Chambers of Trade did meet regularly with the Council's Economic Development Officer in a separate forum, but it was felt that greater Member attendance at such meetings ought to be encouraged.
- Although not supported by all those present, it was suggested that if Overview & Scrutiny was to operate as originally envisaged, it was important that partner organisations/stakeholders were invited to attend all relevant meetings of appropriate Committees and to be invited to participate in the debate, so that their views were reflected in the Minutes.
- In terms of the role of monitoring the Council's contracts, it was considered that this had been successful, but greater feedback on presentations made to the O&S Committees was to be welcomed.
- The two-way communication process between the Council and its stakeholders needed to be improved for the mutual benefit of those concerned.

The Committee recognised that the District had made a very valid contribution to the Thames Gateway agenda, specifically around tourism, regeneration and historic themes, which had resulted in successful funding bids.

Members noted some additional evidence circulated in respect of the review, specifically addressing the issue of whether all fact-finding discussions conducted in overview and scrutiny reviews should be held in public session.

301 REVIEW OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE POLICY

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) seeking approval to the revised assessment of our compliance with the Local Code of Corporate Governance, which had been appended to the report.

During debate, the following was noted:-

Dimension 1: Community Focus

- The Parish Liaison Sub-Committee was involved in the initial work of bridge-building with the Town/Parish Councils
- The Consultation Panel met once a year.

Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 21 July 2005

- The references under the second and third bullet point of section (e) under the column headed 'Plans for Improvement' should have indicated '2006' budget and 2006/7 Performance Plan.

Dimension 2: Service Delivery Arrangements

- Best value service reviews needed to clearly demonstrate that all equality issues were specifically included and equality policies needed to be kept under review.

Dimension 3: Structure and Processes

- The well-developed Member training programme would be kept under review by the Standards Committee.
- Compliance with the 'executive Member' role needed to be demonstrated even though this Council operated under the fourth option Committee structure.

Recommended to Council

That the annual assessment of the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance be agreed. (CD(F&ES))

302 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received and noted the annual report of the Head of Financial Services for treasury management for the year 2004/2005.

Members were particularly pleased to note the out-performance on temporary investments.

The meeting closed at 9.35 pm.

Chairman

Date