

Policy & Finance Committee – 19 October 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy & Finance Committee** held on **19 October 2005** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr T G Cutmore
Vice-Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Cllr C I Black
Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr D G Stansby

Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr Mrs C A Weston

VISITING MEMBERS

Cllrs R A Amner, Mrs R Brown, T E Goodwin, K J Gordon, J E Grey, Mrs S A Harper, K H Hudson, A J Humphries, Mrs L Hungate, T Livings, P K Savill and P F A Webster

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren – Chief Executive
R J Honey – Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
R Crofts – Corporate Director (Finance and External Services)
S Fowler – Head of Administrative and Member Services
J Bostock – Principal Committee Administer

403 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the word 'Police' replacing 'Policy' in the final line of resolution (2) of Minute 388.

404 REVIEW OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN ROCHFORD – PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The Chairman welcomed Councillor K H Hudson, Chairman of the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee and other Members of that Committee to the meeting.

Cllr Hudson delivered a PowerPoint presentation on his Committees findings with respect to its review of the overview and scrutiny process in Rochford.

The presentation covered:-

- The requirements and aims of the Local Government Act 2000 as they relate to committee arrangements.
- The contribution of overview and scrutiny to greater transparency, public involvement and responsiveness to the public.

- The role/responsibilities of Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in taking the lead and owning the overview and scrutiny process on behalf of the public.
- The factors associated with effective overview and scrutiny.
- The expectations associated with the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process.
- The nature of the review undertaken by the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee and conclusions reached on what overview and scrutiny should and should not be.
- Revised committee arrangements (and associated terms of reference) being suggested by the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a result of the Committee's review.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Hudson and all the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their work in developing and bringing forward the proposals. This meeting was a chance for the Policy and Finance Committee to give initial consideration to proposals, which would then be given further detailed consideration at the next meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee. It was anticipated that final recommendations would be submitted to Full Council in December so that any revised arrangements are in place for the next Municipal Year.

Responding to questions, the Chairman of the Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised that:-

- It could be appreciated that Policy and Finance Committee Members would need some time to consider the proposals in detail. A key driver had been the objective of achieving an overview and scrutiny function that is sufficiently flexible, able to respond to all possible situations and capable of developing methodologies for Policy Committees.
- The review had identified that Policy Committees sometimes passed items of work to Overview and Scrutiny Committees as if they are Sub-Committees of a Policy Committee. Currently, the movement of items of business through the committee system was somewhat circuitous and there is possibility for policy decisions to be delayed. This may be exacerbated for a balanced Council with similar arrangements.
- An underlying theme to the proposals was that Policy Committees should be able to both create and monitor policy. A Committee system needed to align well with the officer structure.
- The term 'development control' was intended to reflect the actual activity of the current Planning Services Committee. Feedback

associated with the CPA process pointed to there being value in committee titles being as descriptive as possible, particularly as an aid to assisting public understanding. The use of acronyms should be minimised.

- Development of the proposed Committee structure had included an analysis of current appointments and whether it would be possible for Members to retain an interest in areas to which they are presently appointed. Account had been taken of the need for the pro-rata rules to be applied.
- The intention was that the proposed Review Committee would be able to determine its own agenda, primarily from looking outwards. Some initial work would no doubt need to be undertaken around matters that were outstanding from any previous structural arrangement. Members not appointed to a Review Committee would be able to ask that Committee to look into any matter, as would members of the public.
- The proposed splitting of the work of current Policy Committees should help address current workload issues.

During discussion, reference was made to the particular value of changing the ethos whereby the overview and scrutiny function is seen as something that Policy Committees can refer difficult items to. It was observed that the suggestion that Policy Committees should not be restricted to only appointing their own Members to Sub-Committees was a useful feature of the proposals.

The Chief Executive advised that background work, such as the redrafting of the Council's Constitution to reflect any changes to the Committee/officer structure, could be undertaken once any changes are agreed by Full Council. Costs associated with adjustments to the Committee structure are likely to be minimal. Costs associated with organisational review would be included in a report due to be considered by Full Council at its meeting on 27 October 2005. At this point in time, the inclusion of grounds maintenance under the terms of reference of the proposed Leisure, Tourism and Heritage Committee was a reflection of the need to look at aspects such as parks and open spaces. Whilst woodlands and countryside was included within the proposed terms of reference for the Environmental Services Committee, this could be revisited in the context of the workload of that Committee.

The Chairman thanked all those in attendance. It was confirmed that the Chairman of the Finance and Procedure Overview and Scrutiny Committee and officers would be happy to answer any questions Members may have prior to further consideration at the next meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee. All Members of the Council would be furnished with a copy of the presentation.

The meeting closed at 8.31pm.

Chairman

Date