

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Scrutiny Committee**
held on Tuesday, 1st September, 2009 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor A Thwaite (Chairman)
Councillor J Narraway (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors G Baxendale, S Conquest, J Crockatt, M Davies, P Edwards,
A Richardson, D Stockton, D Topping and S Wilkinson

Apologies

Councillors A Arnold, G Barton and D Bebbington

24 OFFICERS PRESENT

John Knight Head of Planning
Janis Grant Head of Performance and Policy
Diane Moulson Member Development Officer
Mark Nedderman Senior Scrutiny Officer

25 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2009 be approved
as a correct record.

26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D Topping declared a Personal interest in respect of item 11
Strengthening Local Democracy – DCLG Consultation, on the grounds that the
he was a member of the Cheshire Fire Authority, one of the bodies referred to in
the consultation document.

27 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no questions.

28 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

John Knight Head of Planning and Policy attended the meeting and gave a
presentation on the Local Development Framework (LDF) process.

The LDF system introduced a spatial planning approach, which [provided the
basis for guiding future development within the Borough](#). Unlike the former
Structure Plan/Local Plan system, the LDF process involved all stakeholders at

all stages of the process. The LDF consisted of a folder of planning documents, which would provide a single source for all the Council's planning policies.

The folder contained the following documents:

- Local Development Scheme
- Statement of Community Involvement
- Annual Monitoring Report
- Core Strategy
- Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD)
- Area Action Plans
- Proposals Map
- Supplementary Planning Documents

To date the Council had achieved progress in the following areas:

- The Local Development Scheme had been adopted Feb 2009, comprising the Core Strategy, Site Allocations DPD (from 2010), Area Action Plans for Congleton Town Centre and Middlewich Canal Corridor (from 2011) and various Supplementary Planning Documents
- Work was underway on the Core Strategy evidence base
- Undertaken a public consultation on Alsager Town Centre SPD
- Produced a draft Statement of Community Involvement

The draft Core Strategy timetable was follows:

- Issues and Options consultation (jointly with Sustainable Community Strategy) – end 2009
- Consultation on Preferred Option – Spring 2010
- Publication of draft Strategy for consultation November 2010
- Independent Examination – September 2011
- Binding Report – January 2012
- Adoption – April 2012

Further presentations were due to be given to the Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee and Sustainable Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be received and noted

29 2008/09 PERFORMANCE OUTTURN/ PERFORMANCE INHERITANCE

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Policy and Performance containing an overview of performance for Cheshire East. The report provided out-turn measures for 2008-09 re-configured to Cheshire East from the four demised authorities.

The Head of Policy and Performance attended the meeting and gave a presentation on:

- Out-turn performance data for 2008-09
- Baseline figures for Cheshire East
- Inherited areas for improvement.

The presentation was set in the context of:

- The new National Comprehensive Assessment Framework
- The introduction of a new national Indicator set in 2008-09
- A national Place Survey carried out in September – November 2008
- LGR data being re-aligned to new organisation boundaries.

The Government had introduced a set of new national indicators from 2008/09, which had replaced the previous Best Value Indicators. Performance against each of these indicators was being used to benchmark and monitor performance nationally, particularly in relation to the new Comprehensive Assessment agenda.

The new CAA regime provided areas with a scored assessment and would also highlight red flag (for areas of concern) and green flag (for areas of exemplary performance).

The Audit Commission had applied a framework for the delivery of CAA and its initial analysis of how the Council and partners understood and addressed local communities and their needs, and had produced an “emerging thoughts” document.

The Audit Commission had consequently identified some ‘red tags’, which may become red flags for final assessment in the following areas:

- Understanding our diverse communities
- Health inequalities, in particular teenage pregnancy
- Dealing with recession
- Affordable Housing
- Understanding an ageing population

RESOLVED – That the Head of Policy and Performance and Senior Scrutiny Officer be requested to meet with Councillor Paul Edwards to analyse the data

presented to the Committee with a view to submitting suggestions to the next meeting on the best way of presenting Performance Monitoring Information to future meetings of this Committee and other Overview and Scrutiny Committees

30 MEMBER TRAINING

The Committee considered the future training needs of all members involved in Overview and Scrutiny building upon the series of training sessions provided for Scrutiny Members during the shadow year.

Since then, Members had received training on the basic principles of Overview and Scrutiny at a training session facilitated by North West Employers Organisation on 27 April 2009.

Members now recognised that further training was required to refresh knowledge already gained from previous training sessions and to gain specific skills to develop techniques, such as scoping and questioning, to improve performance.

RESOLVED – That the Chairman and Vice Chairman and Councillor G Baxendale be requested to meet the Member Development Officer and Senior Scrutiny Officer to discuss training needs for Overview and Scrutiny Members and bring forward to the next meeting, proposals for a training programme for the remainder of the current Municipal year

31 WORK PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT

The committee reviewed the work programme 2009/2010 which had been amended by the Committee on 13 July 2009. The Committee was advised that as the Work Programme consisted of a large number of topics, it was now appropriate to refine the list into an active list of matters rated sufficiently high to carry out review work, those which could be retained on a reserve or pending list for possible further action and those which should now be deleted.

RESOLVED – That consideration of the work programme be referred to a mid point meeting on a date to be agreed to divide the list of items into an active list and pending list.

32 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS PROGRESS REPORTS

The Chairman reported on the Task and Finish group set up to investigate the funding and role of voluntary organisations. The group had now had two meetings to scope the review and was due to hold another meeting to consider baseline financial information on the Voluntary Sector. Plans were in place to hold a conference with leading voluntary organisations towards the end of September to discuss initial thoughts in relation to the review.

The Members group set up by the Resources Portfolio holder to review IT service provision for members had now determined its terms of reference which were, to provide elected members with the equipment, support and training required for them to undertake their roles in a safe supported environment.

Initial proposals for out of hours support were currently under review.

A knowledge analysis exercise had been carried out with Members. This process would lead to a number of training sessions being offered to Members. In addition, a review of printer facilities was being undertaken, to ensure that hardware was standardised for all Members. The group was looking at proposals to provide all members with an encrypted laptop or desktop PC for Council use only in future.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and noted.

33 START TIME OF MEETINGS

On 1 April 2009, the Council had approved a Calendar of meetings for the 2009/2010 municipal year. The calendar had been subject to consultation with the Leader of the Council, Committee Chairmen and Management Team. The meetings listed for Cabinet and Council had been approved previously by Council on 9 December 2008.

A small number of Members had indicated that they were facing difficulties balancing their Council duties with employment arrangements, particularly in relation to morning meetings, as these meetings could easily run beyond lunchtime.

The Leader of the Council had therefore asked the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to look into this issue, with a view to making recommendations in respect of the 2010/11 calendar.

The majority of the Council's meetings currently began at 2.00pm, the only exceptions being Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Licensing and Standards Committees

Attendances at committee meetings had on the whole been good with an average attendance rate during the period May to August of just over 80%.

The Scrutiny Chairs Group (SCG) had discussed the matter on 3 August 2009 and had concluded that in view of the number of visitors that would be required to give evidence at future meetings, it was important that O&S committees continued to meet during the day. However, the SCG did consider that start times should be left for individual committees to decide.

RESOLVED –

(a) That, the Leader of the Council be informed that this Committee recommends that subject to individual Chairmen having discretion to start meetings earlier in the day to meet specific requirements, meetings of all committees should begin at 2.00pm with effect from the beginning of the 2010/11 Municipal year.

(b) That wherever possible, the Borough Solicitor be requested to take note of the meeting arrangements of outside organisations such as the Fire and Police Authorities when compiling the meetings schedule for subsequent years.

34 STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY - DCLG CONSULTATION

Note: Councillor D Topping left the meeting prior to this matter being considered.

The committee considered a report of the Borough Solicitor relating the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) consultation document 'Strengthening Local Communities'

The Department of Communities and Local Government had embarked upon a consultation exercise in England only, which was focussed on promoting local democratic renewal by strengthening the capacity of local government. This particular consultation formed part of a much wider reform package and built upon themes originally presented in the Building Britain's Future programme which set out the Government's plans to reform democracy, overcome the recession and build the next generation of Public Services.

The consultation contained three main sections under the following headings:

- Local Government at the Centre of Decision Making
- Strong Local Government Operating in the Local Interest
- Local Authorities Tackling Climate Change

Of particular interest to the Committee, were the proposals contained in Chapter 1 to increase the range and power of Overview and Scrutiny Committees by:

- **Broadening** the number of bodies which can be subject to scrutiny committees: not limited to those responsible for health, crime and disorder or council functions, nor just those responsible for priority targets set out in the LAA
- **Enhancing** the powers, which these committees have. Officers and board members could be required to appear in front of the committee
- **Enabling** scrutiny committees to make reports and recommendations to a wider range of bodies for their consideration, and these bodies could be required to have regard to the recommendations and formally respond to Scrutiny Committees

Members were generally supportive of measures to extend the range of opportunities available to scrutinise a wide range of organisations that provided services to the public, but wished to seek assurances from Government that Local Authorities would be given sufficient resources to be able to carry out this enhanced role effectively.

RESOLVED – That

- (a) The Resources Portfolio Holder be informed that this Committee welcomes proposals to increase the range and power of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, but would urge the Government to ensure that sufficient ring fenced funding is provided to Local Authorities to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny function is fully supported by dedicated staff and to provide additional training opportunities for members;

- (b) That Government also be requested to introduce a new set of Performance Indicators for new organisations, which will be subject to Local Authority Scrutiny.

35 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered items contained in the current Forward Plan.

RESOLVED –That the contents of the Forward plan be noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 1.30 pm

Councillor A Thwaite (Chairman)