

Corporate Affairs Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 20 January 2010

Present:

Mr C Jordan (Chairman)
Mr M Brindle
Mr S Clancy
Mrs D Clarke
Mr B Collins
Mr J Dobson
Mr R Hanton
Mr M Hemsley
Mr M Langwade
Ms J Mickleburgh
Mr A Proctor
Mr R Smith
Ms J Toms
Mr A White
Mr T Williams

Substitute Members Present:

Mrs D Irving

Cabinet Members Present:

Mr B Borrett Corporate Affairs and Efficiency

Deputy Cabinet Members Present:

Mr J Herbert Corporate Affairs

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr S Dorrington (Mrs D Irving substituted), Mrs C Walker and Mr I Mackie.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2009 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Matters of Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

5. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

6. Local Member Issues/Member Questions

There were no local member issues or Member questions.

7. Cabinet Member Feedback on Previous Review Panel Comments

There was no Cabinet Member Feedback.

8. Shared Services

8.1 The Panel received the annexed report (8) from the Shared Services Working Group.

8.2 Mr Smith, Chairman of the Scrutiny Working Group, thanked officers for their support in preparing the report and advised Members that the timescale for reporting was set as being one committee cycle so as to contribute to the current programme of action outlined in the Organisational Framework 2009-12 Report by the Leader, September 2009. As such, the views of the Working Group were a result of a 'quick dive' into this subject area and should be read in that context.

8.3 The Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services advised that a further report could be brought back to the Panel and it would be up to Members to decide whether they wished to look at other areas.

Resolved:

8.4 That the Shared Services Working Group be asked to produce a report, including a programme of work, to be presented to the next meeting of the Corporate Affairs Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting on 17 March.

9. Forward Work Programme: Scrutiny

9.1 Members considered the outline programme for scrutiny and were advised that both the Sickness Absence and Constitution Scrutiny Working Groups would report back to the Panel at a later date.

9.2 The Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services said that Breckland, Broadland and Great Yarmouth Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) had already been scrutinised by the Panel and further LSP Reviews would be programmed into future Panel meetings.

Resolved:

9.3 Members agreed the scrutiny topics listed and reporting dates.

10. Duty to Respond to Petitions

10.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (10) by the Head of Democratic Services which set out the legal requirement for the Council to respond to petitions and also provide a facility for our residents to create and submit on-line petitions.

- 10.2 The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that officers had been working to an implementation date of 1st April 2010 which was the date set out in the draft order issued by the Government. However, last week the minister announced that the duty to promote democracy was to be shelved and in the same announcement stated that the Government would, at the end of February this year announce a revised implementation date for the duties relating to petitions. The DCLG could not give any indication of when the new date would be but had confirmed the implementation would not be 1st April 2010. In addition, it appeared likely that the duty to have an on line petitions facility would be phased in some time after the duty to respond is enacted. This was due to the fact that the vast majority of Councils had not made provision for this facility - unlike the County Council which has arrangements in place.
- 10.3 The Head of Democratic Services put forward two suggestions:
- That the Council could continue to work toward implementing both the revised petitions scheme and the on-line facility to the original timescale of 1st April.
 - That consideration of a scheme is deferred until the Government has issued the final regulations and guidance.
- 10.4 Ms Toms, Mr Brindle and Mrs Clarke all expressed concern that 5000 signatures would be required for each petition as this could leave members of the public disenchanted. The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that Government guidance suggested that the number of signatories should not be greater than 5% of the population (which would equate to 40000 signatories for Norfolk).
- 10.5 Following discussion, Mr Dobson proposed that implementation of the scheme should be deferred and that this should also be referred to the Constitution Working Group to ensure that provision for this is included in the Constitution. Mr White seconded the proposal.

Resolved:

- 10.6 To defer the implementation of the scheme until the Government has issued the final regulations and guidance.
- 10.7 To refer the Duty to Respond Petitions scheme to the Constitution Working Group for inclusion in the Constitution.

11. 2010/11 Member Learning and Development Programme

- 11.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (11) by the Head of Democratic Services which set out a suggested Member Learning and Development Plan for 2010/11.
- 11.2 The Head of Democratic Services said that personal development planning (PDP) sessions had been made available to all Members and these would enable Members to identify what additional personal development they required. There would also be continued IT training for Members which would be available year on year.

- 11.3 Mrs Clarke expressed her thanks to all the Officers involved in the post-election training programme which had proved incredibly helpful, especially to new Members.

Resolved:

- 11.4 To agree the list of proposed areas for “other member development needs” as set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report.

12. Service and Financial Planning 2010-13

- 12.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (12) by the Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services which provided the latest information on the revenue budget proposals and capital funding bids.
- 12.2 In response to questions, the Head of Corporate Accounting and Exchequer Services advised:
- The Government would announce the Finance Settlement 2010/11 today and this would be debated in Parliament in early February.
 - Future reports would include a glossary of terms such as ‘cost neutral changes’. He advised that this referred to funds being moved between services and this had no impact on the overall cost to the County Council or Council Tax.
 - That the £0.590m funding shortfall for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be included in the Cabinet Budget Report which was due to be published today.
 - If the Cabinet decided that they wished to proceed with the Carbon and Energy Reduction Fund then funding for this scheme would be found through increased borrowing.

Resolved:

- 12.3 To note the prioritised bids for capital funding, as set out in the report.

13. Corporate Affairs Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring Report for 2009/10

- 13.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (13) by the Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services which provided details of the revenue budget 2008/09 update, reserves and provisions and the capital programme 2009/10 update.
- 13.2 In response to questions, the Head of Corporate Accounting and Exchequer Services advised:
- Performance information had not been included in the report because updated information had not been available in time to present to the meeting. However, this information would be included in the report being presented to the 17 March Panel meeting.
 - County Council election costs would be met through the Organisational Change Reserve. This had been agreed by County Council as part of the approval of the 2009-10 budget.

- The 2010-11 Budget Report to be received by the Cabinet on 25 January would propose an increase to the Organisational Change Reserve to meet the estimated costs arising from the Organisational Review.

Resolved:

- 13.3 To note progress against the Organisational Objectives set out in the County Council Plan that are covered by the Corporate Affairs Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

14. Draft Interim Disability Equality Scheme 2009-12

- 14.1 Members received the annexed report (14) by the Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services which set out the proposed arrangements for the development of the Council's second Disability Equality Scheme, involvement of disabled people and action plan.
- 14.2 In response to questions, the Corporate Equalities & Diversity Manager advised Members that the Interim Disability Equality Scheme had been produced in response to what disabled people and community groups had requested and consideration would now be given to how the pilot group could influence service improvement. Full engagement has taken place with all partners across the County. It was likely that there would be national interest in the pilot as work of this kind was very innovative and the County Council would be one of the first authorities to work with its residents in this way to improve equality and access for disabled people.
- 14.3 Members noted that the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Works would require £0.130m capital funding for three years from 2010-13 and questioned whether this would enable the authority to achieve what it should be achieving. In response, the Director of Corporate Affairs and Cultural Services advised that this related to DDA work required on Council owned buildings and the authority was now reaching completion of DDA compliance.

Resolved:

- 14.4 To note the work undertaken to refresh the County Council's Disability Equality Scheme and pilot.
- 14.5 That a progress update report on implementation of the pilot be received, prior to the final evaluation report.

15. Efficiency Savings Programme

- 15.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (15) by the Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services which provided a review of the progress against the Council's 2009-2010 efficiency targets developed within the budgeting process.
- 15.2 The Interim Head of Efficiency advised Members that the figures shown were assessed as cashable efficiency savings. Further work was planned to identify the non cashable savings being made by services. Members agreed that there had clearly been some good work done so far and that this should be carried forward.

The meeting closed at 10.55am.

Chairman



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