

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**THURSDAY 11 MARCH 2004 AT 2.00 PM**

PRESENT: Councillors Jefferson (Chairman), Councillors Boaden, Bradley, Dodd, Guest, Joscelyne (as substitute for Councillor Prest) and E Mallinson.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Prest arrived part way through the meeting and observed the remainder of the meeting.

OSM.09/04 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Prest (who arrived part way through the meeting) and Councillors Rutherford and Martlew.

OSM.10/04 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2004 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

OSM.11/04 MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The following minutes were submitted:

- a. Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 23 January 2004 and 12 February 2004

With reference to Minutes COS.19/04 & COS.26/04 on the Sheepmount Project, the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered a number of issues, one of which was the tendering process, assessment of risk and scrutiny of major projects.

Members commented that in relation to major projects, a great emphasis should be placed on the planning for these projects which would include addressing the issues raised by the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – (1) That the minutes of 23 January and 12 February 2004 be noted.

(2) That this Committee echos the comments of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the importance of planning for and assessing the risks and implications of major projects.

- b. Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings - 22 January and 9 February 2004

RESOLVED - That the minutes of 22 January and 9 February 2004 be noted.

- c. Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting – 11 and 19 February 2004

RESOLVED – That the minutes of 11 and 19 February 2004 be noted.

OSM.12/04 EXECUTIVE RESPONSE – EX.043/04

The Executive on 1 March 2004 (Executive Decision EX.043/04) had considered a reference from this Committee and had agreed with the Committee's decision to hold joint sessions where a call-in has been requested by more than one Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Executive had also agreed that, when dealing with future references from Overview and Scrutiny Committees, more details would be provided in the Executive responses.

RESOLVED – That the Executive's response be welcomed.

OSM.13/04 EXECUTIVE RESPONSE – EX.044/04 – supporting communities best value review final report

The Executive on 1 March 2004 (Executive Decision EX.044/04) had considered a reference from this Committee on the progression and completion of the Supporting Communities Best Value Review.

The Executive wished to draw this Committee's attention to the following comments on the Supporting Communities Best Value Review Improvement Plan –

- (a) That the content of the Improvement Plan document be reviewed with a recommendation that plain English be used.
- b. Clarification is sought on the commitments included in the Improvement Plan as part of the Sure Start initiative as it was the Executive's understanding that the City Council had resolved not to take on accountable body status unless there was certainty on an exit strategy.

Members commented that they did not agree with the Executive's suggestion that the content of the Improvement Plan document needs to be reviewed with recommendation that plain English be used. Members of this Committee and the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the Improvement Plan and had not identified this as an issue.

Members were confused by the Executive's statement on accountable body status as they understood that the City Council had already agreed to take on accountable body status for Sure Start. It was suggested that it would be difficult to implement any of the Executive's suggestions as the Supporting Communities Best Value Review final report had now been approved by the City Council.

RESOLVED – That the comments of the Executive be noted but it be emphasised that the City Council had approved the Supporting Communities Best Value Review final report.

OSM.14/04 WORK PROGRAMME FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager submitted the Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees for 2003/04 and there was discussion on the following specific items in the programme:-

- a. Local Plan Review – a member commented that the last meeting of the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been considering the Plan. It had taken substantial amount of time and it had not been possible to complete the detailed scrutiny of the plan. Members of that Committee had felt that the Plan was being pushed through, with some elements of the Plan requiring more Member consideration.

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager commented that he understood that Members and Officers may have been out of step regarding progress with and member input to the Review and the amount of further time required for scrutiny.

Members also raised concern that other Members had not had the opportunity to look at and comment on the Local Plan. Given the importance of this Plan for the whole of the Council, they felt that there should be an opportunity for wider member input. Members commented that under the old Committee system, a working group would have spent a great deal of time going through the plan. The members involved would have had a background knowledge that current members may not necessarily have and they would have consulted their political groups to get opinions from a wide spectrum of Members. Members suggested that one option would be to have a presentation to all members of the Council on the Local Plan.

The Executive Director suggested that she could meet with the Overview and Scrutiny Manager, the Head of Planning Services, the Local Plans Officer and the Chair of the Development Control Committee to identify the gaps in consultation on the local plan and how these could be addressed to ensure full consultation with elected members and other interested parties.

- b. Centre for Public Scrutiny Conference - The Overview and Scrutiny Manager advised that he and the Chairman were the Committee's nominated representatives to have input to the Centre for Public Scrutiny. He advised that a national conference was being held in Manchester and he sought approval of the Committee that if the Chairman was unable to attend the Conference, the Vice Chairman should be able to attend in his absence.
- c. Housing Strategy – The Executive Director advised that responsibility for scrutiny of the Strategy lay with the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee and it had been reported to this Committee in the past. The Executive on 29 March 2004 would be considering a draft Housing Strategy and she suggested that to ensure full and proper consultation on this Strategy which will be of great importance to the whole Council, all three Overview and Scrutiny Committees should have the opportunity to have input. This could be done in a joint meeting of all 3 Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Executive Director and the Overview and Scrutiny Manager meet with the Head of Planning Services, the Local Plans Officer and the Chair of the Development Control Committee regarding the Local Plan process, to identify any gaps in consultation on the current Local Plan review and determine how these gaps could be addressed.

2. That the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue their consideration

of the Local Plan.

3. That the group of officers consider how the Local Plan review consultation process should be conducted in the future.
4. That approval be given for the Vice Chairman to attend in the Chairman's absence if necessary, the centre for public scrutiny conference to be held in Manchester.
5. That this Committee supports the idea that in addition to scrutiny by the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a joint meeting of all three Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be held to consider the Housing Strategy, at a date to be set at a suitable time in the process.

OSM.15/04 MONITORING OF AND CHANGES TO THE FORWARD PLAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager presented Report LDS.15/04, informing Members of changes to the Executive's Forward Plan for 1 February to 31 May 2004. Members referred to the Customer Contact Centre funding options item, which had been removed from the Plan. The reason given was "further work need to be done with Capita on the options to make a judgement on whether or not procurement savings can be used to part fund the Customer Contact Centre as described in their outlined proposals. Only when this work is completed will we know whether or not a proposal can be put to members."

Members stated that they did not understand this reason for removal of the item from the Plan and officers present were not able to give any explanation of this reason.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Manager advise the Executive Director (J Gooding) that this Committee was requesting clarification of this reason and that this clarification should be sent to Members of this Committee in writing.

(2) That the report be noted.

OSM.16/04 QUALITY OF REPORTS TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

At the last meeting of this Committee (Minute reference OSM.03/04) it had been agreed that the quality of officer reports to Overview and Scrutiny Committees be an item on the agenda for this meeting, at which time the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees could comment on reports they had received.

The Overview and Scrutiny Manger explained that some reports, which were being written by officers for consideration at the Executive, but were also being considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committees in their scrutiny role, did not give a complete picture to Overview and Scrutiny members. He advised that this had been discussed at Corporate Management Team and with individual Business Unit Heads and they had been made aware that Scrutiny may have needs in terms of the extent of information contained in Executive reports which also go to Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Members commented that it was not just reports going to the Executive which they were concerned about. They commented that there was a lack of uniformity in reports and suggested that officers should identify best practice in report writing and learn from these reports.

In response to Members' questions, the Executive Director explained that the need to ensure a high quality of report writing had been raised at Corporate Management Team and was being discussed with individual Business Unit Heads. Members also commented on the following problems in relation to reports being submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committees:-

- a. The section on background papers was often not filled in and Members were therefore not able to get a full picture of the information which had led to the report.
- b. Officers should be reminded that reports should be objective looking at all the options, identifying alternative ways of addressing matters and outlining potential problems. Reports should not just reflect officers' opinions but should be unbiased and objective.
- c. Members do not like being asked to make decisions on the basis of verbal reports.

The Chairman of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised that in the past the Committee had agreed that verbal reports should not be accepted, that there should be clarity in reports and that there should not be any holding reports. He suggested that these principles should be emphasised throughout Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Executive Director advised that she was willing to take these concerns to the Corporate Management Team and raise them individually with Business Unit Heads. In response to Members' questions, she advised that training would be provided for officers where necessary. Members commented that in light of this commitment from the Executive Director they would let her progress the matter and the Committee would reconsider this matter on 3 June 2004.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Executive Director be asked to raise this Committee's concerns about the quality of reports at the Corporate Management Team and with individual Business Unit Heads and identify and put in place training if necessary.

(2) That this matter be put on the agenda for consideration by this Committee on 3 June 2004.

OSM.17/04 SUBJECT REVIEW – EVENING AND LATE NIGHT ECONOMY IN CARLISLE

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager submitted report OS.04/04, detailing the way forward for the evening and late night economy subject review and outlining the initial questions which the review team will need to consider. He explained the distinction between evening and late night economies.

The focus of the review would be a matter for the Members of the group undertaking the review to determine, but it was the intention that the review would be based on the report of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Common Select Committee on "The Evening Economy and Urban Renaissance" and on the Government's response to that report.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee were asked to agree on the composition of the group to carry out this review, based on the membership of the Infrastructure and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committees and, if possible, to set a date for the first meeting of this group.

Members commented that the review could cover a number of areas which crossed the

areas of responsibility of each of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, although they were predominantly within the remit of the Community and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

It was suggested that the process should start with a joint workshop of all three Overview and Scrutiny Committees in order to identify in more detail the areas the review should really look at to put a local perspective on it. The review could then be progressed by a task group comprised of three or four Members from each of the Community and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

This larger workshop style meeting would provide an opportunity to gather input and the review could then be progressed by a smaller task group taking it forward.

The Executive Director offered to be involved in organising and facilitating the initial workshop meeting.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Manager, in conjunction with the Executive Director, arrange a workshop session, to which all Overview and Scrutiny Members could be invited, to try to focus the review on to issues relevant to Carlisle.

2. That after this workshop session, the Infrastructure and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committees be asked to nominate three or four representatives to join a task group to take forward the review on the basis of the issues identified at the workshop session.
3. That it be noted that the task group would refer everything back to the parent Overview and Scrutiny Committees for any decisions required.

(The meeting ended at 3.20pm)