

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 7 June 2016 at 10:00 am in the Elisabeth Room, Endeavour House, Ipswich.

Present: Councillors Mary Evans (Chairman), John Field (Vice Chairman), Trevor Beckwith, Mark Bee, Peter Beer, Kathy Bole, John Burns, Sandra Gage, Michael Gower, Len Jacklin, Robin Millar and Graham Newman.

Also present: Councillors Sandy Martin and Bill Mountford

Supporting officers present: Theresa Harden (Business Manager, Democratic Services) and Linda Pattle (Democratic Services Officer).

1. Election of Vice-Chairman

The election of the Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the 2016/17 Municipal Year was deferred until after the next meeting of the County Council.

2. Public Participation Session

There were no applications to speak in the Public Participation Session.

3. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jessica Fleming (substituted by Councillor Mark Bee) and Councillor David Ritchie (substituted by Councillor Michael Gower).

4. Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations.

5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. The Council's approach to consultation

At Agenda Item 6 the Committee considered a report providing members with an opportunity to consider the County Council's approach to consultation and to identify good practice which would help to inform future consultation exercises.

The Chairman welcomed the following County Council officers:

Julian Brown, Business Development Specialist
Allan Cadzow, Service Director for Children and Young Peoples Services
Dave Collins, Group Commander, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service
Simon Higgins, Head of Strategic Communications and Customer Service
Mark Sanderson, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

The Committee heard evidence from officers of the County Council's Communications and Business Development Teams, and considered case studies from Children and Young People's Services and the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service. Allan Cadzow gave a presentation about the consultation on a review of Children's Centres carried out in 2014, and Mark Sanderson gave a presentation about a consultation on the 2015–18 Integrated Risk Management Plan carried out in 2016.

A paper was circulated at the meeting, showing a Consultation Stakeholder Engagement Matrix in relation to the Integrated Risk Management Plan for Suffolk Fire and Rescue Services.

Recommendations: The Committee agreed:

- a) To endorse a review and refresh of the County Council's corporate guidance on consultation and engagement.
- b) To recommend that officers from Communications and Business Development should develop a "centre of excellence", supported by a set of clear, concise corporate protocols for officers undertaking consultation or engagement activity, which should include;
 - i. what constitutes 'consultation', 'involvement' and 'engagement' and the circumstances in which these should and should not be used;
 - ii. the key principles of consultation, practice and case law;
 - iii. details of the knowledge and resources available within the corporate centre, what can be provided and advice on the circumstances in which this should be referred to;
 - iv. highlighting good practice and the benefits of planning at the earliest stage, (ie deciding upon purpose, type of activity, costing delivery options and evaluation; as in the commissioning cycle - analyse, plan, do, review);
 - v. the need to consider, at analysis and planning stage, whether the exercise will be engagement, involvement or consultation;
 - vi. the need to be clear, when the Council is undertaking an exercise on behalf of, or in partnership with, other organisations, who will be responsible for final decision making;
 - vii. advice on how consultation activity should be costed on a full cost basis;
 - viii. advice on stakeholder mapping, including consideration of which councillors and local forums may have an interest. Notification of relevant town/parish councils, Ipswich Area Committees and appropriate bodies for Lowestoft should form part of the stakeholder group.
 - ix. a system which requires Directorates to contribute to and update a central log of consultation and engagement activity.
- c) To recommend to the Corporate Management Team that staff training and communications should be developed to raise corporate awareness of the

refreshed guidelines (once complete) and to provide officers involved in this activity with a sound understanding of the principles and pitfalls of consultation and engagement.

- d) To request an information bulletin on the current status and membership of the Suffolk 1000, an overview of what the forum had been or would be involved in and details of how vulnerable and hard to reach groups were represented on this forum.
- e) To endorse work taking place to improve access to County Council information for speakers of languages other than English (including promotion of plain English and use of google translate).
- f) To ask the Head of Strategic Communications and Customer Service to give consideration to whether commercial opportunities existed in relation to consultation activity.
- g) To seek an information bulletin on progress at its meeting on 20 December 2016.
- h) To request that all councillors receive further information about the arrangements for public consultation/engagement on devolution proposals.

Reason for recommendation:

- a) Members were pleased to hear that it was intended to refresh the corporate guidance on consultation and engagement, and that the outcome of the current scrutiny would contribute to that review.
- b) The Committee considered that there was a need for greater clarity in the guidance offered to directorates and service areas, and members highlighted the following points in particular:
 - i) There appeared to be a lack of recognised definitions within the authority to assist officers in understanding the differences between public 'consultation', 'involvement' and 'engagement'. Members considered these definitions to be important, because the different labels created different expectations among members of the public who took part.
 - ii) Members were aware of a number of different sources of advice about carrying out consultations, such as the Cabinet Office Principles, and advice from the Consultation Institute, and considered it would be helpful if these could be brought together in a set of key principles for County Council officers conducting formal consultation exercises.
 - iii) The Committee heard that on consultation activity the Head of Communications worked closely with the Consultation and Engagement Manager who was a member of the Business Development team. These officers, together with the Monitoring Officer and members of the Communications and Legal Services teams, provided a valuable source of advice and support to directorate staff undertaking consultations and engagement. Members were aware that these corporate resources were limited and therefore not all consultations could be handled centrally, but they wished to highlight

the importance of making staff aware of the resources available from the centre.

- iv) The Committee saw parallels between planning a consultation and undertaking a commissioning exercise, in that a good consultation required officers to be clear about: the reason for undertaking the work; whether it would be a consultation or an engagement exercise; whether it would be more cost-effective to do the work in-house or commission it from an external source; and the measures by which they would retrospectively judge how successful it had been. The case study presented by the Fire Service demonstrated the benefits of beginning planning at the earliest stage to ensure that the activity was done well.
- v) The Committee recognised the importance of being clear to the public and stakeholders from the outset as to how their contributions would be used. Members were aware that the authority's reputation could be damaged if people gained the mistaken impression that the Council had asked for public opinions when a final view had already been taken, or had sought the views from the public which were then not taken into account.
- vi) Members were aware that sometimes the County Council commissioned or organised consultations on behalf of, or in partnership with other organisations. In those cases the final decisions might not rest with the Council and if so, this should be made clear to participants in order to avoid creating misunderstanding among members of the public.
- vii) The Committee heard that the estimated costs of the Children's Centres Consultation given in Evidence Set 2 took account of the time devoted to it by the Consultation and Engagement Manager, but did not attempt to cost the considerable amount of time spent on it by other officers. Members considered that consultation work should be costed on a full cost basis in order to help inform future decision-making about the use of internal or external resources and to provide clarity about the real cost of consultation activities.
- viii) Members acknowledged the importance of ensuring that the appropriate people were invited to contribute to a consultation and recognised that identifying the relevant stakeholders was a key task which required the expert knowledge of the directorate staff as well as advice from the centre. They saw benefit in regarding all county councillors as stakeholders (not only those deemed to have a local interest) and they emphasised the importance of ensuring district, borough, town and parish councils and the Ipswich Area Committees were aware of relevant consultations taking place.
- ix) The Committee heard that officers were currently unable to say how many consultations are underway at any one time (partly because of the lack of clear definitions of 'consultation', 'involvement' and 'engagement'). Members considered that a central log would be a useful tool which would help to ensure that different parts of the authority were not carrying out conflicting or overlapping work.

- c) The Committee appreciated that planning and carrying out a successful consultation could be a complex task. Members considered that there would be value in using central resources to develop staff training and communications to raise corporate awareness of best practice.
- d) The Committee discussed the need in some cases to target certain groups to ensure that their views were taken into account during a consultation. Members were particularly interested to hear about efforts to illicit responses from vulnerable or hard to reach groups. They were aware that a forum called the Suffolk 1000 was regularly consulted and they wished to know more about its composition.
- e) Members were pleased to hear about work taking place to improve access to County Council information for speakers of languages other than English as they recognised the importance of ensuring that consultations could be easily understood by all.
- f) The Committee was mindful of the limited central resources available, but considered that there might be opportunities to use the expertise and information available within the council to generate income.
- g) The Committee wished to review progress in implementing its recommendations.
- h) The Committee was aware that Ipsos Mori was currently carrying out a telephone survey about devolution, commissioned by the County Council on behalf of the leaders of Suffolk authorities. The Committee also heard that it was expected that a statutory public consultation would take place in June or July 2016. Members considered that all councillors would wish to be informed of current and proposed consultations on devolution proposals.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: None declared.

Dispensations: None noted.

7. Information Bulletin

The Committee received the Information Bulletin at Agenda Items 7a and 7b.

8. Key Decision Forward Plan and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

At Agenda Item 8 the Committee considered the Key Decision Forward Plan and the Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme.

Decision: The Committee agreed:

- a) That the next meeting would take place on 29 June 2016 (not 30 June as originally scheduled) and would consider the provision of Library Services and Supporting Economic Growth.
- b) To request for its meeting on 28 July 2016 an Information Bulletin item providing an update on changes to adult care legislation and case law.
- c) That on 29 September 2016 when it considered a Highways Contract progress update it would request further information about actions taken by Suffolk Highways to address staff vacancies within the organisation and what impact this had had.

- d) To consider waste management at its meeting on 20 December 2016.
- e) To request an Information Bulletin item about air quality management sites.
- f) To ask officers to arrange a workshop in relation to the November 2015 pre budget scrutiny.

Reason for decision:

- a) The date of the next meeting was changed because a meeting of the full Council had now been scheduled for 30 June 2016.
- b) The Committee had considered the impact of changes in adult care legislation and case law at its meeting on 2 July 2015. At that meeting members had agreed to reconsider the issue in twelve months' time because Part Two of the Care Act was due to come into force in April 2016. However, the government had deferred the implementation of Part Two, so members agreed that scrutiny at this stage would not be appropriate. They considered that an Information Bulletin update would suffice.
- c) The Committee was concerned to note that in the Information Bulletin at Agenda Item 7a there was a statement that at Suffolk Highways 39 posts remained either vacant or filled with temporary personnel. Members wished to know what actions were being taken to deal with this problem.
- d) Members were aware that recently there had been changes to the opening hours of household recycling centres and some district and borough councils had introduced charges for the collection of green waste. The Committee wished to know how these changes affected Suffolk's aspiration to create the greenest county.
- e) The Committee wished to be informed about areas of the county where there were concerns about air quality.
- f) In 2015 members had participated in a pre budget scrutiny workshop and had found it very helpful. They therefore wished to repeat the process in 2016.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: None declared.

Dispensations: None noted.

9. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 1:07 pm.

Chairman