

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

Monday, 25th March, 2013

Present:- Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Shenton – in the Chair

Councillors Miss Baker, Cairns, Eastwood, Mrs Heames, Loades, Matthews, Olszewski, Sweeney, Miss Walklate and Mrs G. Williams

In attendance Cllr J. Williams
Officers Mark Bailey (Head of Improvement and Partnerships)

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Mrs Johnson.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2013 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. CO-OPERATIVE STRATEGY 2013-2015

The Head of Business Improvement and Partnerships presented a report on the Co-operative Strategy 2013-2015. The strategy set out the details around the aim of the Council to become a Co-operative Council, which was also reflected as a key priority within the Council Plan. The strategy brought together a number of areas of existing work and reflected a range of legislative and policy changes and the development of the Big Society Concept by the current Coalition Government Nationally. It was envisaged that further consultation would take place with partners and other stakeholders and an updated strategy would be presented to Cabinet after the summer. A Member argued that it needed to make clear as to how the development of Co-operative Council would make things better in the Borough.

A Member stated that it was important to understand in detail the voluntary resources available in the Borough to a high level of detail. He commented that the Local Area Partnerships needed to have more of a skill base and that the Council should make a recommendation to the LAP Chairs. He added that it was important to ensure that the utilisation of resources was correct and that the correct level of staffing resources was allocated for each role with the appropriate skill set to deliver any action plan or changes from the strategy. Careful risk assessments should also be carried out.

A Member argued some Local Area Partnerships were stronger than others. He suggested that the Chairs of the LAPs should be invited for half a day to encourage collaborative working with the Council. This would enhance the understanding of how the Council was evolving and improving. He added that there would be benefit in the Parish Councils attending.

A Member stated that NBC should engage with the CVS and see what was happening in different sectors in the Borough, including the voluntary and community sectors. A Member commented that the document set out the framework for the development of the Co-operative Council and that details of action would be added later in the process.

In response to the points raised the Head of Business Improvement and Partnerships stated that the points were pertinent, but the strategy was currently only in draft and could be developed further as more was known. Appropriate actions would have to be developed and implemented and he agreed it was important to carry out risk assessments. It was a challenge to develop communities to take on more from the Council and other partners. The LAPs needed to develop further and it was important to maximise resources. Whilst he believed in the notion of partnership working, it needed to be effective and deliver positive outcomes.

RESOLVED:

A) That the Committee notes the contents of the strategy.

B) That the amendments and suggestions suggested by the Scrutiny Committee, as detailed in the minutes, are recommended to be incorporated into the strategy.

C) That the Local Area Partnership Chairs' and Parish Councils' be invited to a meeting with the Council.

5. PEER CHALLENGE

The Head of Business Improvements and Partnerships introduced a report on the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge which had previously been received by the Council's Cabinet. He stated that through the Council's Membership of the Local Government Association, they were entitled to a free of charge Corporate Peer Challenge. The Council had accepted the offer from the LGA with the main part of the work taking place between 10 and 12 October 2012. A review team from the LGA had met with a mix of Officers and elected Members. The Cabinet Report in paragraph 1.5 contained the questions and area of focus of the review team. They were also asked to consider the Council's approach in the developing Council Plan to become a co-operative Council. Appendix A to the report was effectively the action plan that had been devised as a consequence of the peer challenge review. There was a considerable amount of work to be completed, requiring significant resources, which would have to be carefully managed.

Cllr John Williams stated that the review team had recommended further improvements to the scrutiny process including more pre-decision scrutiny and greater holding of Members and Officers to account. It was evident though that Scrutiny was already trying to do this.

A Member commented that it was very important for the Council to listen to people's views and to have key priorities. Talking to Members and involving them all in the decision making process and policy development was an important part of the democratic process. The role of a modern day Councillor was continuing to develop.

A Member stated that he thought all Councillors should be involved in the implementation process of the action plan.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Committee consider the action plan again later in the year, if good progress is not apparent over the coming months.

6. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

The Committee considered the calendar of meetings which had been previously considered by Full Council on 27 February 2013.

A Member stated that there were currently insufficient Officers available to help service the meetings of the Council. In response the Head of Business Improvement and Partnerships stated that he was aware of the situation and Committee Services were clearly pressured. This had been as a consequence of a number of factors including sick leave, maternity leave and the increase in the number of meetings. He was looking to rectify the problem by re-directing some resources and exploring other options to help resolve the situation.

A Member stated that there needed to be more focus at meetings, concentrating on the most important elements. It was important to get the most out of meetings when they were held rather than increasing them in number. The Chair stated that not everything was being reported to scrutiny that was on the forward plan, as it was not necessary, particularly when there were briefing sessions and the Co-ordination Committee having oversight of the work plans.

A Member stated that the work taking place in member development was enabling members to work at home without having to come into Civic Offices. The paperless way of working was clearly the way for the modern councillor to work.

There was a discussion about the calendar of meetings. A Member suggested that Thursdays should be avoided. It was requested that the Active and Cohesive Scrutiny Committee meeting taking place on Thursday, 19 December be changed to Monday, 16 December. The Member Training scheduled for the 16 December should be switched to the 19 December.

7. WORK PLANS FOR THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES AND THE HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the work plans for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Health Scrutiny Committee.

Members agreed to add Community Centres to the work plan of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee.

There was a discussion about Kidsgrove Sports Centre. The Head of Business Improvement and Partnerships stated that a report could be commissioned for the next Active and Cohesive Overview and Scrutiny Committee which could address some of the financial issues.

There was a discussion about Universal Credit. It was requested that Councillors be given a briefing on the subject before the next full Council meeting and receive appropriate documentation.

A Member stated that there were many changes taking place in Health. There was a new Interim Chief Executive in place at Stafford Hospital. Over the last two years

there had been more recognition of the role that the districts could play in health scrutiny.

A Member commented that the surplus of funds at the UHNS needed to be scrutinised to ensure that best use of the funds was made. There was accountability sessions every twelve months which scrutiny needed to consider how they could use them to be most effective.

RESOLVED:

- A) That the Community Centre review be added to the work programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee.
- B) That a briefing to all Members be given on Universal Credit before the next meeting of Full Council.

8. **FORWARD PLAN**

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan, 15 February 2013 to 15 March 2013 be noted.

9. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business within the meaning of section 100 (4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Meeting Closed 8.45pm.

COUNCILLOR MRS ELIZABETH SHENTON
Chair