
To: All Members of the County Council
All Chief Officers

From: COUNTY SECRETARY'S
DEPARTMENT
Ask for: Adrian Service
Ext: 25564

**RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY 1 JULY 2004
MINUTES**

ATTENDANCE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

D Clayton, G M Cook, P V Goggins, I H Laidlaw - Dickson (Chairman), D B Lloyd, J R Morton, S Pile, H M Saunders, R J Smith.

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

D Beatty (Resources) and A M R Searing (Efficiencies and IT).

Also in Attendance

R Mays

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed J R Morton who had replaced S Quilty as a Member of the Committee to his first meeting of the Committee.

MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 March 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PUBLIC PETITIONS

None

QUESTION

Paul Goggins asked the Deputy Leader of the Council, **David Beatty**, the following question:

“As the Audit Committee is no longer deemed to be a scrutiny committee, should not such scrutiny issues as Risk Management, Review of Contracts, etc. now be transferred to the Resources Scrutiny Committee?”

Answer:

“Under the terms of the County Council’s constitution, the Audit Committee is a Scrutiny Committee and despite changes in the allocation of the Chairmanship, it will remain so, unless or until a proposal is made to change its status.

The Audit Committee will therefore continue to review the adequacy of internal control systems, to look at the running of contracts and to ensure there are effective systems to review Risk Management.

As I understand it, there is nothing in the remit of Resources Scrutiny Committee - or indeed any other Scrutiny Committee - to prevent them from scrutinising in detail the risks associated with services within their purview, subject only to the agreement of members of the Scrutiny Committees to add such specified studies to their programmes of work.

Meanwhile the Administration will discuss with the County Secretary, whether there might be good reasons to alter the status of the Audit Committee in view of the comments by the Allowances Panel on the level of responsibility carried by the Chairman of the Committee. As an aside I would say watch this space”

Councillor Goggins asked the following supplementary question

“The answer does not surprise me and on this basis can we wait for Chairman of other Scrutiny Committees to change?”

Answer :

“As this is a hypothetical question I need not say any more.”

PART I ('OPEN') BUSINESS

1. MONEY ADVICE UNIT - PROGRESS REPORT ON INCREASING BENEFITS TAKE UP

[Officer contact: Gary Vaux Tel: 01992 556370]

1.1 The Scrutiny Committee considered an updating report on the progress made by the Money Advice Unit in encouraging eligible Hertfordshire residents to claim benefit entitlements. The Committee noted that this work was in furtherance of the promise contained within the Council’s Best Value Performance Plan to “help people to help themselves and make it easier for people to get the information and advice they need from us”

1.2 The Scrutiny Committee in recognising that the Money Advice Unit undertake this work in partnership with other outside organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Pensions Service invited people concerned to make presentations.

Verbal presentations were given by and questions were posed to :-

- Heather Day, manager of Hertford CAB
- Carole, a service-user (parent of a disabled child)
- Rosemary Davies, a Department of Works & Pensions, Pensions Service Officer based at Stevenage

- 1.3 Heather Day advised on Hertford Citizens Advice Bureau's involvement with the Money Advice Unit in endeavouring to encourage more local people to claim eligible benefit entitlements. She stated their work involved liaison with, obtaining information and getting training for their staff to complete claim forms etc from MAU, quarterly meetings, keeping up to date with other Citizens Advice Bureaux. She stated that telephone contact with MAU was excellent and messages left were always responded to. Grant money obtained from HCC was mainly used to undertake home visits to prospective claimants. In Hertfordshire 793 claimants that had been assisted, 555 had been successful in obtaining attendance allowances amounting to £688,000 in total. Given that the District of East Hertfordshire had a high number of senior citizens, she felt that there was still many eligible persons not receiving all they were entitled to and more work was needed.
- 1.4 Carole, a mother of a child with disabilities advised that she had herself unsuccessfully applied for disability living allowance for her child and after her paediatrician had suggested she consult the MAU for assistance in completing the application forms and supplying the precise medical information required she had been successful in obtaining financial assistance.
- 1.5 Rosemary Davies stated that the Pension Service had been established in 2002 and outlined how their work had developed to date. She stated that it was their intention to work more closely in the future with the Money Advice Unit on a joint benefits take up campaign.
- 1.6 In response to a question, the Head of the Money Advice Unit estimated that based on national trends, where upto 70% of people are eligible for tax / pension credits, between 15,000 to 20,000 additional Hertfordshire residents could be eligible for such benefits. He stated that whilst the Works & Pensions Service had data on all Hertfordshire pensioners and had sent them information on pensions credits that were claimable there was resistance from these people to respond to the Works & Pensions Service staff and make such claims. He stated that initiatives using an alternative approach to these pensioners was being pursued.
- 1.7 The Executive Member for Resources commented on the invaluable service provided by Citizens Advice Bureaux and that vulnerable people tended to be happy to contact them for independent advice and felt that District / Borough Councils should bear this in mind and not reduce their future financial support of CABs'. He felt that local authorities acted as a safety net for people who were not happy to contact government agencies such as the Pensions Service.

1.8 Conclusions

1. That the report be noted and the guest speakers be thanked for their contributions.
2. It is noted that between 15,000 to 20,000 Hertfordshire residents did not claim pensions credits which they are entitled to.
The Committee welcomes the proposed joint take up campaign by the Money Advice Unit and the Pensions Service.
3. That the Money Advice Unit be congratulated on their effective relationship with the Pensions Service, Citizens Advice Bureaux and Hertfordshire District / Borough Councils.
4. The Committee asked the Executive Member for Resources to: -
 - a) encourage the Hertfordshire District / Borough Councils to sustain, and if possible improve, financial support of Citizens Advice Bureaux in their districts, and to ask County Councillors who are also District / Borough to promote to their district / borough councillors colleagues the services provided by Citizens Advice Bureaux.
 - b) invite the Head of the Money Advice Unit to make a bid for additional funds in the Budget for 2005 / 2006 to enable other projects to be undertaken to further benefits take-up.
 - c) request the Finance Director to undertake some research into the suitability of the number of children in receipt of Disability Living Allowance for use as an additional indicator in the Childrens Personal Social Services Formula Spending Share to reflect the number of children with disabilities and if appropriate lobby for a review of the methodology.
5. That the Money Advice Unit urge the Department of Works & Pensions to include a note providing information when sending out application forms to people enquiring / applying for benefits as to where prospective claimants could obtain local independent advice.

Gary Vaux
Lorraine
Allen

Gary Vaux

2. HERTS TOGETHER - LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY STRATEGIES IN HERTFORDSHIRE

[Officer contact: David Hughes Tel: 01992 555210]

- 2.1 It was suggested that a checklist should be prepared stating the number of strands contained in each of the Local Strategic Partnerships established by the 10 District / Borough Councils in Hertfordshire and how they compared and complied with Herts Together.
- 2.2 The Committee noted the possible benefits that could flow from effective community strategies and partnership arrangements currently involving 70 partners comprising of businesses, authorities and organisations in Hertfordshire.

- 2.3 It was noted that Herts Together was headed by a Board chaired by Michael Janes and comprised of representatives of the 10 District / Borough Local Strategic Partnerships plus representatives of other organisations.
- 2.4 An Action Plan for the implementation of Herts Together is due to be adopted in December 2004 and the Community Strategy Panel with an amended remit will be involved to monitor and take forward the Action Plan. A copy of the Community Strategy Panel's new remit will be circulated to Resources Scrutiny Committee members.
- 2.5 The Executive Member for Resources drew attention to the work undertaken by the Best Value Performance Plan Panel prior to Herts Together being adopted by the Council on 18 May 2004 and the overall achievement of getting 70 partners to agree such a document. He felt that the document had limited Adult Care Services provision within it, which could be expanded. Finally he highlighted the possible importance of Herts Together to secure more funds for Hertfordshire services / facilities through LPSA 1, LPSA 2 and a high CPA assessment for 2004.

Caroline
Tapster

2.6 Conclusions:

1. The Committee welcomes the report and recommends that the Community Strategy Panel advise the Executive Member for Partnerships on what has been successful to date for the Herts Together and what future success criteria would be.
2. That the Assistant Chief Executive be requested to prepare a check list capable of identifying where District Plans are consistent with Herts Together.

Anne Fisher

Anne Fisher

3. BEST VALUE REVIEW MONITORING UPDATE

[Officer contact: Geoff Brown Tel: 01992 555370]

- 3.1 A revised Appendix 1 containing amended costs and efficiency savings relating to the Best Value Reviews of Reprographics, Corporate Communications, Fire Service procurement and Services to Schools was circulated at the meeting.
- 3.2 Dave Golledge, Head of Support Services, Business Services advised on the progress made with the Reprographics BV Review in particular the introduction of the SHARP system had assisted in removing the resistance to central procurement.
- 3.3 James Odling – Smee, Head of Corporate Communications advised on the progress of Corporate Communications BV Review proposals. He stated that the idea to ask the Cabinet Office to remove the legal requirement to advertise temporary road closures and restrictions had suffered a set back when a MORI Survey findings had shown that 40% of Hertfordshire residents found out about temporary road closures through reading local newspapers.

The Committee alike many officers were surprised about this fact and felt this should be analysed further. He advised that an alternative approach would be followed to promote the proposal involving demonstrating that a high number of Hertfordshire residents became aware of temporary road closures / restrictions by the internet.

- 3.4 The Committee questioned the desirability of replacing all county boundary road signs and suggested a better approach would be to gradually introduce the 'new design' road signs as and when the existing 'old design' road signs were damaged or needed replacing.

3.5 Conclusions:

1. That with the exception of reprographics, corporate communications and personnel reviews, progress on individual best value reviews be referred and considered by the appropriate service Scrutiny Committee.
2. That the report on best value review of reprographics implementation be noted and the savings arising therefrom be welcomed.
3. That the report on best value review of corporate communications implementation be noted and recommend to the Leader of the Council that replacement of road signs be given a low priority unless involving replacing damaged signs.
4. That the Executive Member for Environment be recommended to lobby H M Government to revise current statutory regulations to allow a simpler notification process for temporary road closures and restrictions, which do not require advertisement in local newspapers
5. That the Corporate Director for People & Property be requested to appraisal schemes throughout the authority to all Resources Scrutiny Committee members.

Committee
Administrators

Caroline
Tapster

James
Odling – Smee

Alan Warner

4. COUNTY COUNCIL REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITOR

[Officer contact: Andrew Nightingale Tel: 01992 555331]

- 4.1 The Finance Director advised that the monthly budget figures for March 2004 would become available in the next few days and would be reported to the Cabinet meeting on 12 July 2004. He stated that there was now an expectation of a revenue underspend of £7.2 m and capital underspend of £ 25.6 during the financial year 2003 / 2004.
- 4.2 The Executive Member for Resources stated that the Cabinet at its next meeting would consider and would determine which budgetary provisions contained in last year's budget would be carried forward into the current's year's budget.

4.3 Conclusion:

The Committee noted the report.

5. COUNCIL PROMISES AND LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT MONITOR REPORT – ‘TRAFFIC LIGHT’ MONITOR

[Officer contact: Geoff Brown Tel: 01992 555370]

- 5.1 The Committee's attention was drawn to the supplementary information circulated after the dispatch of the Agenda which gave details of the current progress with five promises which were directly relevant to this Committee.
- 5.2 A detailed breakdown of the cashable efficiency savings that to date had been achieved in accordance with the Council's promise 24 were circulated at the meeting.

5.3 Conclusion:

The Committee noted the report.

6. SCRUTINY UPDATE AND WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2004 / 05

[Officer contact: Adrian Service Tel: 01992 555564]

- 6.1 The Head of Scrutiny advised that the main conclusions reached at the last Scrutiny Monitoring Panel meeting concerning future scrutiny were for each Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise items in greater depth, have fewer items at each meeting and consider scoping reports prior to starting scrutiny exercises.
- 6.2 He advised that the Community Services Scrutiny Committee had expressed their concerns over the service received from property contractors which had resulted in a number of under-spends on building maintenance work and had asked that this issue be considered for scrutiny. He stated that this issue had been brought to the attention of the Chairmen of other Scrutiny Committees' and they did not share this concern.
- 6.3 The Committee Chairman advised that there was already a procedure in place to consider performance of contractors which involved the Property Panel being advised of under performance or unsatisfactory performance and on this basis the Committee did not feel this issue needed to be scrutinised.
- 6.4 The Chief Executive referred to the recently issued MORI Survey in particular the increasing level of satisfaction with Local Government services and stated it was proposed to submit a report on the main conclusions of the Survey to a subsequent meeting.
- 6.5 The Chief Executive advised that further work was being undertaken by the officer Performance and Planning Group chaired by Geoff Brown, on how we were dealing with complaints and the systems used.

6.6 Conclusion:

The Committee agreed the Work Programme as presented.

Caroline
Tapster

Adrian Service

7. ITEM REFERRED TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL

The item on the Money Advice Unit was selected to be reported to the County Council at its meeting on 20 July 2004.

Ron Coxall
Adrian Service

**Andrew Laycock
County Secretary**