

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Thursday, 9 June 2005

Place: Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 8.45 pm

Members Present: Councillors Mrs D Collins (Chairman) Mrs J H Whitehouse (Vice-Chairman) K Faulkner, P Gode, Mrs A Grigg, F Maclaine, Mrs P Richardson and Mrs M Sartin

Other Councillors: Councillors P McMillan, S Murray, Mrs P Smith and C Whitbread

Apologies: Councillors M Woollard

Officers Present: J Scott (Joint Chief Executive), A Scott (Head of Information, Communications and Technology), V Evans (System Support Manager), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), I Willett (Head of Research and Democratic Services) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

11. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that no substitute members were attending the meeting.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no urgent business for consideration by the Committee.

13. ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED:

That agenda item 7 (Terms of Reference – Standard Format) be taken as the next item of business)

14. TERMS OF REFERENCE - STANDARD SCRUTINY PANELS

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reminded the Committee that each scrutiny panel would require a terms of reference to determine the scope of investigations, their priority and reporting deadlines. He drew attention to the terms of reference before the Committee, some of which were tabled at the meeting itself. He advised that each set of proposals would need to be agreed by the relevant Chairman, Lead Officer and Portfolio Holder. The panel considered each description in turn.

(a) Scrutiny Standing Panels**(i) Housing Services.**

The Chairman of the Panel, Councillor Murray presented the proposals. He advised that he had discussed the plans with the Head of Housing Services and the Portfolio Holder for Housing. During these discussions it had been agreed that to deal with the proposed workload, four meetings would need to be arranged over a 12 month cycle. He also drew attention to the work plan for the panel. He reported that the plan determined the priority of reviews and reporting deadlines. The factors used to determine the priority of items was outlined.

It was noted that only one item had been rated as a low priority review. This covered initiatives for reducing the number of Empty Homes in the Private Sector. It was suggested that this item would give panel members the opportunity to apply a proactive approach to scrutiny work. Members also thought that the initiative was important and that it should be undertaken at an early stage. In view of this it was suggested that the priority rating for the item be reconsidered at the Panel's first meeting. Subject to this the terms of reference were agreed.

(ii) Constitutional Affairs.

The Head of Research and Democratic Services presented the proposals. He stated that he would be meeting with the Chairman of the Panel and the relevant Portfolio Holder to discuss the terms of reference and priority order of items in the work plan.

A number of additional items were suggested at the meeting. These consisted of a review of services for members and the recent Parliamentary and County Council elections in the District. It was suggested that this latter review should occur at an early stage whilst the election was still fresh in panel members's minds.

(ii) E-Government and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The Head of ICT presented the draft terms of reference and work plan for the Panel. He advised that he had yet to discuss the proposals with the Chairman of the Panel and Portfolio Holder for ICT and Corporate Support Services.

Attention was drawn to item one of the terms of reference which considered the implementation of the OPDM Implementing e-Government (IEG) Priorities Outcomes. It was noted that part of this priority setting exercise covered the issue of member connectivity. The Head of ICT reported that this particular objective needed to be implemented by March 2006 and could be drawn out as a separate work plan item.

It was noted that the work programme did not allocate time to the Customer Contact Centre. The Head of ICT reported that this was because the contact centre was primarily a service delivery focused initiative rather than an ICT project. Members thought that technological issues around the subject should however be considered by the panel and that provision in the work programme be allocated accordingly. It was agreed that the report on the Contact Centre due to be produced in July 2005 be submitted to the panel.

RESOLVED:

That the terms of reference for the Standing Panels on Housing, Constitutional Affairs and E-Government and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) be agreed subject to the following amendments:

(a) Housing Standing Panel

That the priority status of work plan item 14 (initiatives for reducing the number of Empty Homes in the Private Sector) be reviewed during the Panel's first meeting and reported back to the Committee.

(b) Constitutional Affairs Standing Panel

That the proposals include an urgent review of Member Services and the recent Parliamentary and County Council Elections

(c) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Standing Panel

That the terms of reference provide for a review of the Council's Corporate Contact Centre.

15. TERMS OF REFERENCE - TASK AND FINISH PANELS

The committee considered the terms of reference and work programmes for tasks and finish panels.

(a) Externally Funded Leisure and Youth Provision

The Chairman of the Panel, Councillor Mrs Grigg presented the proposals. She advised that she had discussed the proposals with the Head of Leisure Services and the Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services. The factors used to determine the priority of items were outlined.

(b) Member Training Panel

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported that the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group had recommended that any changes to the Member Training programme be formulated this year and implemented in 2006 and that the panel should consider proposals for a planned Audit Seminar on the new Overview and Scrutiny arrangements. The Group thought that this timescale should give the Panel time to identify the implications of the new arrangements for training and allow them to feed such information into the review.

(c) Traveller Issues Panel

The Joint Chief Executive (Community) outlined the terms of reference for the task and finish review. He stated that relevant Portfolio Holders, Head of Service and the Chairman of the Panel would be meeting to discuss the proposals.

It was agreed that the words 'and make recommendations in respect of ' be added to the first sentence of the terms of reference. It was also agreed that wording be added to the terms of references for all panels to ensure that recommendations were formulated and reported back on each item.

- Outstanding information.

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reminded the Committee that outstanding terms of references would be chased up.

RESOLVED:

That the terms of reference for the Task and Finish Panels on Member Services, Travellers Issues and Externally Funded Leisure and Youth Provision be noted subject to the first sentence of the proposals for the panel on traveller issues being amended to read:

'To continue the work of the former Policy Working Group 2 and make recommendations in respect of:....'

16. LIAISON WITH CABINET

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported that under the new Overview and Scrutiny procedural rules there must be a discussion with the Cabinet regarding its plan for each Council year. This was to ensure that there was no duplication of effort between Overview and Scrutiny and that Cabinet was aware of OSC work to ensure proper use of Member/Officer time. With this in mind, Members were asked to consider the Cabinet plan covering the period June to September 2005 and the OSC work plan for 2005/06.

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported that the Cabinet had considered its forward plan at its meeting on 6 June 2005. He drew attention to the document and advised that officers were taking steps to turn the four monthly plan into a twelve monthly programme. He advised that this would involve converting the key decision list into a forward projection of the year. It was also reported that the new expanded plan would be reviewed on a four monthly basis and would allocate time to unplanned urgent work.

In response to the Executive work plan a Member noted that the review of EFDC funded traffic schemes linked to the work of the Task and Finish group on the establishment of a Register of Local Interests. It was suggested that Members should be consulted about this review of traffic schemes and agreed that this would be investigated.

It was also reported that the item on the appointment of Alternative Management Contract should read under the column 'decisions taker' Council not Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Cabinet work plan be noted.

17. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2005/6

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reminded Members that this Committee was requested to manage the performance of panels. It was noted that a standard item would be placed on each agenda on the progress made by panels. This would involve a verbal progress report being given to the Committee by panel Chairman. It was noted that such reports would allow the Committee to identify where progress was being made or slower than expected.

Attention was drawn to the items in the work plan which would be dealt with by this Committee. The Committee considered the priority order in which they would be dealt with and reporting deadlines.

In relation to the London Underground Liaison, the Joint Chief Executive (Community) reported that a further liaison meeting had been arranged for September 2005.

With regard to the scrutiny of outside bodies, it was suggested that an item be put on the next agenda on the Local Strategic Partnership and progress made with the implementation of the LSP strategy. It was stated that the item should particularly consider the Council's involvement in these matters. To support this item it was also suggested that a briefing paper on the work of LSP action groups be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

A member suggested that a reserve list of topics for the work plan be established to allow new suggestions to be added to the plan on an ongoing basis.

In addition, a member also proposed that an item be placed on the next agenda on the administration of the 'PICK' system. It was suggested that the item should address how items were selected for the current programme and the process for submitting future reviews. In relation to prioritising reviews it should consider how the 'PICK' system worked and how it could be applied in the future.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the issues in the work plan to be dealt with by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
- (2) That consideration be given at the next meeting to the following:
 - (a) OS work plan – operation of PICK system both in relation to current plan and future request
 - (b) The Local Strategic Partnership – Progress report on LSP plan, work of LSP action groups and Council's involvement in such work; and
 - (c) Highways Local Service Agreement
- (3) That a reserve list of topics for the OS work plan be established
- (4) That the review item on use of consultants proposed by Councillor McMillan be included on the reserve list.

18. MATTERS REFERRED TO STANDING PANELS

It was noted that two reports were submitted by officers to the Overview and Scrutiny Agenda Planning Group. These were the Best Value Performance Indicators for 2004/05 and 2005/05 Ethnic Monitoring – Housing Register and Allocations. It was noted that these had been referred to the Finance and Performance Management and Housing Standing Panels.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 7 July 2005. Further meetings would take place on:

1 September 2005
6 October 2005
10 November 2005
8 December 2005
2 February 2006
2/16 March 2006
6 April 2006.

CHAIRMAN