

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Scrutiny Management Panel held on Thursday 18 February 2010 at 9.30 am in the Executive Meeting Room, Floor 3, The Guildhall, Portsmouth.

(NB: These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting, which can be viewed at www.portsmouth.gov.uk)

Present

Councillors Les Stevens (Chair)
Cheryl Buggy
Frank Jonas
Andy Fraser (Deputising for Caroline Scott)
Malcolm Hey
Terry Henderson (from 9.40)

Officers

Stewart Agland, Local Democracy Manager
Anthony Quinn, Senior Local Democracy Officer

1 Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paula Riches

2 Declarations of interest (AI 2)

Councillor Les Stevens declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in respect of AI4 as he is a landlord with tenants who are in receipt of Local Housing Allowance.

Councillor Frank Jonas declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in respect of AI4 as he is a landlord in Portsmouth.

Councillor Terry Henderson declared a personal and prejudicial interest in AI4 as he is a landowner in Portsmouth and left the meeting whilst the issue of the Local Housing Allowance was discussed, returning to the meeting on completion of this item.

3 Minutes from the Meeting of 27 November 2009 (AI3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Management Panel meeting held on 27 November 2009 be confirmed as a correct record.

A query was raised in relation to the issue of, "matters arising" not appearing on the agenda. The Local Democracy Manager addressed this advising that it was not good practice and should not be employed in Principal Councils. The panel also asked that the legal position on this be sought from the City Solicitor.

RESOLVED that the City Solicitor formally respond to the panel regarding the appropriateness or otherwise of “matters arising” appearing on agendas

4 Update on status of scrutiny reviews (AI 4)

The panel received an update on the status of scrutiny reviews from the Senior Local Democracy Officer.

The F&R scrutiny panel are due to consider, “Corporate Website & Access Strategy” as part of their work programme. This topic was put back to allow the Website Manager to put in place some new systems to enhance access and availability of information. The Website Manager has recently left the organisation, which could impact, on the implementation of this strategy.

Members sought an explanation on why the Website Manager left post after such a short time and requested that the head of customer, community & democratic services bring this information to their next meeting. They also felt there was a need to have, “Staff recruitment & retention” to be added as a future work programme topic.

The SMP also wanted to know what was being done in respect of, “Stress related sickness absence” and sought to understand what is being done about this at present. The SMP would like a report outlining what is being done to tackle sickness absence and in particular, stress related sickness absence.

1. RESOLVED that the head of customer, community and democratic services bring a brief report to the next meeting of Scrutiny

[TAKE IN REPORT]

Economic Development, Culture & Leisure (EDCL) Scrutiny Panel

The panel heard that Economic Development, Culture & Leisure Scrutiny had just recently presented their report on Twinning to Cabinet who approved the recommendations in their report. The EDCL panel are currently conducting a review into “Expenditure on Properties under the Culture Portfolio”. The panel have drawn up a short list of properties to look at which looks at a representative cross section of buildings across the city.

The Chair of EDCL advised SMP that they would seek to deal with their current review as expeditiously as possible but did not wish to rush through the review, therefore, the review would be likely to carry over to the next municipal year.

Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel (ECYP)

The ECYP scrutiny panel have completed the evidence gathering stage of their review into, “Protection of Vulnerable Children” and are in the process of drafting their recommendations and conclusions to be contained within their final report to Cabinet. The final report is scheduled to go before Cabinet in June.

Finance & Resources (F&R) Scrutiny Panel

The F&R scrutiny panel have just completed their review into, “the City Council’s Use of Consultants”. The final report is now with the Strategic Directors to formulate a response report, which is due to be considered by Cabinet within 8 weeks under the Scrutiny Procedure Rules. The 8-week period will fall during the Purdah period, therefore, the report will be considered by Cabinet at their next meeting after 8 March, which is scheduled to take place on 7 June 2010.

Management Panel outlining the reason for the departure of the website manager

2. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Management Panel receive a report at their next scheduled meeting regarding what is currently being done to tackle sickness absence in particular stress related sickness absence, with a view to adding this topic to the scrutiny work programme for a more detailed scrutiny review.

Traffic, Environment & Community Safety (TECS) Scrutiny Panel

Currently undertaking a review into the work of Trading Standards. This review expects to complete their evidence in March and report their findings to Cabinet at their meeting in June.

Housing & Social Care (H&SC) Scrutiny Panel

Have completed a review into, “Whether to re-commence building council homes”. The report has been signed off and has been sent to an external printing agency to reproduce some maps within the report. Once the report has been returned it will be distributed to the relevant Strategic Directors and Cabinet to formally respond to the recommendations. The report will then be dealt with at the Cabinet meeting in June.

Having declared an interest, Councillor Henderson left the meeting whilst the panel discussed the issue of Local Housing Allowance. Following discussion of this item, Councillor Henderson re-joined the meeting.

Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel (HOSP)

The HOSP have been granted Scrutiny Development Area (SDA) status as one of nine SDA’s nationally. Their review into, “Alcohol Related Hospital Admissions” will involve an innovative approach to scrutiny including work shadowing with partner agencies such as the police, ambulance service, street pastors and staff at accident & emergency. The review will also work closely with support networks such as drug & alcohol prevention groups.

The review is due to run until November 2010.

5 Forward Plan (AI 5)

The Forward Plan will be included as a standing item on all future agendas to enable members to look at the work that is currently going on within the authority and coming up for decision by cabinet or the relevant executive member. This will provide the opportunity for identifying potential areas for pre-decision scrutiny, which will allow scrutiny to be more effective in their role of holding the executive to account.

6 Local Authority Designated Scrutiny Officer (AI 6)

The Senior Local Democracy Officer gave a verbal presentation to the panel in relation to Section 31 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 that comes into force on 1st April 2010.

Under section 31 of the act, all Local Authorities must designate a known "Scrutiny Officer" who will be responsible for;

- Promoting the role of overview & scrutiny and scrutiny panels
- Provide support to overview & scrutiny and members of the panels involved in scrutiny
- Provide support and guidance to members of the authority, members of the executive and officers of the authority in relation to the functions of overview & scrutiny and scrutiny panels

The designated officer cannot be;

- The head of paid service
- The monitoring officer
- The authority's chief finance officer

For the purposes of section 31 of the act, Portsmouth City Council has designated the Local Democracy Manager to be the designated scrutiny officer.

7 Date of next meeting (AI 7)

Thursday 11th March 2010 at 4 pm although members have agreed to change the date of this meeting to an earlier date should the call-in, which has been lodged, be deemed a valid call-in.