

**SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE**

14th November, 2007

Scrutiny Co-ordination  
Committee Members

Present:- Councillor Arrowsmith (Chair)  
Councillor Duggins  
Councillor Ms. Hunter  
Councillor Lee  
Councillor Mutton  
Councillor Ridge  
Councillor Williams (Deputy Chair)

Other Scrutiny Member

Present:- Councillor Nellist

Cabinet Member

Present:- Councillor O'Neill (Cabinet Member (Finance, Procurement and Value for Money))

Employees Present:-

R. Hughes (Head of Corporate Policy)  
J. Jardine (Chief Executive's Directorate)  
J. Parry (Assistant Chief Executive)  
J. Sansom (Finance and Legal Services Directorate)  
C. Steele (Chief Executive's Directorate)  
A. Townsend (Customer and Workforce Services Directorate)  
J. Venn (Chief Executive's Directorate)  
C. West (Director of Finance and Legal Services)

Apologies:- Councillor Maton

65. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Clifford declared a prejudicial interest in the matter the subject of Minute 67/07 below. He left the meeting during the consideration of this matter.

66. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 3rd and 10th October, 2007, were signed as a true record.

67. **Call-Ins Stage 2 – Midlands Bailiff Partnership**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Finance and Legal Services that had previously been considered by the Cabinet Member (Finance, Procurement and Value for Money) (his Minute 14/07 refers) and had been called in by Councillors Nellist, Windsor and Benefield. The report updated the Cabinet Member on the outcome of the

tender process for Bailiff Services for Council Tax and Business Rates and made recommendations as to the successful supplier of the service.

In 2003, Council Tax and Business Rates Bailiff Services were externalised, at that time the City Council did not go through a formal tendering process but operated under Service Level Agreements and Codes of Practice. In late 2006, the City Council were approached by Dudley Council to join in a consortium with Wolverhampton and Sandwell Councils to tender for Bailiff Services; the consortium became known as the Midlands Bailiff Partnership. The partnership was an opportunity to not only embrace services but was also a networking tool to work in a practical way with near neighbours to obtain best practice in enforcement issues. A formal tendering process had taken place with an advertisement being placed in the Official Journal of the European Union on 14th March, 2007 inviting expressions of interest. The expressions of interest were then short listed via a set of selection criteria agreed by the partnership and three organisations were invited to tender for the provision of the Bailiff Services. These tenders were then evaluated and references obtained from other authorities for whom they had worked, Bristow & Sutor were the successful supplier and a report was presented to Wolverhampton's Cabinet Member on 8th October 2007, to appoint them officially from 1st October, 2007 on a three year contract with an option for a further two years.

Councillor Nellist, one of the Members calling in the report, gave a brief overview of the operation of Bailiff Services by the City Council in recent years. He was disappointed that there had been no consultation on the process and that the exercise had not involved comparisons with between internal and external provision of the service. Councillor Nellist asked whether any guidelines existed for Bailiffs to work to and/or to determine at what point they were engaged, he was particularly concerned that a person on the margins of low income could face a larger debt because of the involvement of Bailiffs and that as the Bailiffs were paid first, the Authority was not immediately helped to recover monies. Councillor Nellist suggested that it would be helpful to have statistics on the number of enforcements and how these are progressed, he also suggested that Scrutiny Board (1) consider the establishment of a sub-group of interested Members to consider the approach taken with Bailiffs and draw up guidelines for recommendation to the Cabinet Member.

The Cabinet Member briefly explained that work had started on the partnership arrangements in March 2007, he acknowledged that it would have been useful to bring an initial report forward in April 2007 and apologised that this had not taken place. The Cabinet Member agreed that it was not appropriate to engage Bailiffs on matters relating to potentially vulnerable people whose position had not yet been properly investigated; it was noted that legislation dictated when Bailiffs could be involved and that the City Council made the final decision as to whether or not they were instructed. The officers explained that the Collection Service was being redesigned and the use of external data to establish the likelihood of the debtor being able to pay was being considered.

The Cabinet Member indicated that the suggestion that Scrutiny Board (1) establish a small sub-group to make recommendations on the approach to be taken with Bailiffs would be useful for him. It was noted that there was a duty on Bailiffs to identify potentially vulnerable people and that this could be looked at during the review. In summary it was agreed that those debtors capable of paying should be required to but that the use of Bailiffs should not adversely affect vulnerable people.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee concur with the decisions of the Cabinet Member.**
- (2) That Scrutiny Board (1) be requested to consider the establishment of a sub-group comprising of interested Members to consider the approach taken with guidelines for the use of Bailiffs and make relevant recommendations to the Cabinet Member.**
- (3) That officers be requested to provide statistics on the number of enforcements and how these were progressed to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, Scrutiny Board (1) and Councillor Nellist.**

**68. Call-Ins Stage 1**

The Committee noted that no call-ins had been received yet that week. The deadline for the call-ins for the Cabinet and Cabinet Member decisions made during the week commencing 5th November, 2007, was 9.00 a.m. on Friday 16th November, 2007. Any call-ins received after this meeting and before that deadline would be considered for validity by the Chair of the Scrutiny Co-Ordination Committee in consultation with the Director of Customer and Workforce Services (Paragraph 5.4.5.25.4 of the City Council's Constitution refers).

**69. Developing the Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive that was scheduled to be considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 20th November, 2007. The report set out a draft consultation document to be used for the development of the Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy which the Committee were asked to consider and comment on prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

The Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy was being developed from the Second Coventry Community Plan that had been adopted in July 2004 and had subsequently been revised to cover the period 2005 to 2010. It set out a strategic level in a single plan the key issues that needed to be tackled in partnership by organisations throughout the City.

The development of a Local Sustainable Community Strategy was a Government requirement and would be the subject of national government guidance and inspection. It was the responsibility of the City Council, as the local authority, to ensure that strategy was developed and adopted. The strategy was being developed in partnership with the Coventry Partnership, comprised of public, private, voluntary and community organisations including the City Council, and would set out and provide overall direction for the City setting out a clear focus and priorities that would inform the development of a range of key strategies and organisation plans to help to deliver improvements and activities and needed to achieve the agreed strategic long term outcomes for the City.

The Committee questioned the officer on aspects of the report, in particular the consultation document and whether a more condensed version would be available, the approach to be taken with the consultation and if this included the use of Ward Forums.

The officer confirmed that a more accessible document would be produced in plain English and this would be focused to suit the audience. It was not proposed to utilise Ward Forums for consultations although they may be used to publicise the process. In terms of the consultation process it was highlighted that officers were working to engage with the hard to reach groups in particular young people aged 20 to 26. Contributions from Elected Members were welcomed on the best way to consult.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That the Committee had no comments to be forwarded to the Cabinet on the report.**

**70. Annual Report of Scrutiny**

The Committee considered a report of Scrutiny that detailed the work of the Scrutiny Boards and the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee during the Municipal Year 2006/07. This was presented in accordance with the City Council's Constitution. The report included a brief overview of the highlights of Scrutiny's work during the period:-

- The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee oversaw the process for relocating the tenants of Cygnet and Orwell Courts as part of the implementation of the Swanswell Initiative.
- Scrutiny Board (1) continued to give a high level of priority to the reduction of sickness absence levels.
- Scrutiny Board (2) has held a teenage pregnancy event showing good practice and disseminating significant local research undertaken by Coventry University.
- Scrutiny Board (3) had ensured that prominence was given to the preparations for the new city centre IKEA store.
- Scrutiny Board (4) had played an influential role in the consideration of Phlebotomy Services in Coventry.
- The City Council had hosted a visit from a group of Councillors and employees from Johannesburg who were touring the country to find out more about scrutiny arrangements.

A scrutiny 'Vision Statement' had been developed and four 'Scrutiny Themes' had been agreed by the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee to guide work planning. It was considered that there were two main challenges for the future, to improve Scrutiny's effectiveness and to implement the additional roles for Scrutiny set out in the Police and Justice Act 2006 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill.

The report was scheduled to be considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 4th December, 2007 and at Council on 11th December, 2007.

**RESOLVED that the Committee approve the report as submitted for consideration by Cabinet and Council.**

**71. Report Back on Conference/Seminar – Civic Visit to Belgrade, Serbia on the 50th Anniversary of Twinning Links**

The Committee received and noted a report of the Lord Mayor on the above conference which had been held between 2nd and 5th October, 2007 in Belgrade, Serbia.

**72. Report Back on Conference/Seminar – Civic Visit to Kiel, Germany on the 125th Kielewoche Celebrations**

The Committee received and noted a report of the Lord Mayor on the above conference which was held between 15th and 18th June, 2007, in Kiel, Germany.

**73. Report Back on Conference/Seminar – Local Government Association Annual Conference**

The Committee received and noted a report of the Chief Executive on the above conference which was held between 3rd and 5th July, 2007, at the International Convention Centre, Birmingham.

**74. Outstanding Issues**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Customer and Workforce Services that identified those issues on which further reports had been requested in order that Members could monitor progress. Councillor Mutton, a City Council representative on the West Midlands Joint Committee gave a brief update on the position with Item 1 in the report headed "University of Warwick Science Park and Associated Companies".

**RESOLVED that a further report be made to this Committee once the West Midlands Joint Committee had agreed the way forward.**

**75. Work Programme 2007/08**

The Committee considered the Work Programme for the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee for the remainder of the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

**RESOLVED that officers be requested to confirm if the Community Centre Review would be available for this Committee in December.**

**76. Other Business**

The Committee noted that this was the last meeting of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee that Roger Hughes would be attending before his retirement. The Chair on behalf of the Committee, thanked Roger Hughes for his support to the Committee and Scrutiny in general over recent years and commented on his professional, approachable and friendly manner. The Committee wished Roger Hughes all the best for the future.