

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

23rd July, 2008

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Members

Present: - Councillor Arrowsmith
Councillor Charley
Councillor Clifford
Councillor Crookes (Deputy Chair)
Councillor Duggins
Councillor Maton
Councillor Mutton
Councillor Ridge (Chair)

Cabinet Member

Present:- Councillor Sawdon (Cabinet Member (Culture, Leisure and Libraries))

Other Scrutiny

Members Present:- Councillor Harvard
Councillor Skipper

Employees Present: -

G. Aylott (Customer and Workforce Services Directorate)
L. Bull (Acting Director of Community Services)
S. Chishty (Finance and Legal Services Directorate)
C. Steele (Chief Executive's Directorate)
J. Teahan (Community Services Directorate)
A. Townsend (Customer and Workforce Services Directorate)
A. West (Chief Executive's Directorate)

21. **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

22. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

23. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th July, 2008 were signed as a true record.

24. **Cultural Services Inspection Report**

With reference to minute 16/08, the Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Community Services that had previously been considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 30th June, 2008 (their minute 33/08 refers) and had been called in by Councillors Skipper, Mutton and McNicholas. The report sought the endorsement of the Cabinet to an action plan developed to respond to the Audit Commission's report on Cultural Services in Coventry.

The Cultural Services inspection had been undertaken by the Audit Commission and fed into the City Council's overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The report was based on an initial assessment undertaken in July, 2007 when a judgement on the current level of services was made and a further visit in March, 2008 when a final judgement on prospects for the future was made. The report assessed the City Council as providing a fair service with promising prospects for improvement and recognised that the City Council was committed to improving the provision of leisure and culture and was working well with partners to agree how cultural services would improve people's lives in the future.

The Committee questioned the Cabinet Member and Officers on aspects of the report, in particular why some of the criticisms of the city council relating to the use of technology and benchmarking were not reflected in the Audit Commission recommendations and the City Council's Action Plan that responded to those recommendations. The Cabinet Member explained that the Audit Commission report was based on an inspection that had taken place in two parts, during the second inspection it had become apparent that many of the areas identified for improvement at the initial inspection had been addressed; although this was reflected in the recommendations the report itself had not been revised.

The Committee went on to question the Cabinet Member and Officers on the use of new technology within Culture and Leisure and the use of benchmarking in the service. The Cabinet Member briefly outlined several areas where new technology was being utilised, both by the City Council and partner organisation providing cultural/leisure services, this included the use of hand held technology by parks staff to make reports more quickly, the introduction of new systems at the Belgrade Theatre and the introduction of a web portal with partners to jointly promote cultural activities. Officers were working to use benchmarking more in theatres, benchmarking had already been introduced in sports facilities. Some work was required to understand the figures that the Audit Commission used to benchmark authorities against, in some instances this included services such as crematoriums within culture and leisure which meant that in some cases like was not being compared with like. Members referred to the recent introduction of a revised pricing structure and questioned any effect this had had on participation rates. The Officers explained that as the pricing structure had only been introduced in April, 2008 it was still too early to identify any trends and highlighted that the summer season was still to come. It was noted that the pricing structure had been benchmarked against other local authorities and the Audit Commission had complimented the City Council on its structure.

Members suggested that the contribution that culture made to other agendas such as health and crime was not always fully understood. The Cabinet Member agreed with this comment and emphasised that there would be a cultural input to all aspects of regeneration in particular the proposals for the city centre.

The Committee requested that a report detailing the use of new technology in Culture and Leisure and reviewing the effects of the revised pricing structure would be submitted to this Committee in November, this would demonstrate any trends over the summer season.

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- (1) Concur with the decisions of the Cabinet.**

- (2) **Request Officers to prepare a report setting out the use of new technology within Culture and Leisure and reviewing the effect of the revised pricing structure in November, 2008.**

25. **Call-Ins Stage 1**

The officers reported on the following call-in that had been received: -

Implementing The Older People's New Homes for Old Policy

The report had been called in by Councillors Nellist, Field and Windsor.

The reason for the call-in was, "to further explore option five and the implications of retaining and modernising the existing homes".

The Committee noted that the deadline for call-ins for Cabinet and Cabinet Member decisions made during the week commencing 14th July, 2008, was 9.00 a.m. on Monday 28th July, 2008. Any further 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 4.5.25.4 of the City Council's Constitution refers).

RESOLVED that the call-in detailed above be considered in detail by the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee at an additional meeting on 13th August, 2008, and that the relevant Cabinet Member be requested to attend.

26. **Report Back on Civic Visit – Civic Visit to Kiel, Germany for 126th Kieler Woche**

The Committee received and noted a report of the Lord Mayor on the above conference which had been held between 20th and 23rd June, 2008 in Kiel Germany.

27. **Outstanding Issues**

There were currently no outstanding issues.

28. **Work Programme 2008/09**

The Committee considered and noted their Work Programme for the 2008/09 Municipal Year.

29. **Meeting Evaluation**

The Committee briefly discussed the meeting to evaluate its effectiveness and commented on the fact that the report by the Audit Commission had not been updated between the two inspections of Cultural Services although their recommendations had been updated (minute 24/08 above refers); Members were concerned this would cause problems in monitoring issues raised in the report.

30. **Other Business**

Attendance Records

The Chair raised a proposal to introduce a process to monitor members departure from Committee meetings. The proposal was agreed in principle.

Scrutiny Substitutes

The Chair suggested Members should take more responsibility for substitutes and brief them on pertinent issues and matters they wished to be raised on their behalf. The Committee agreed this approach.