

## **CO-OPERATIVE & COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2012 at 6.00pm in the Scrutiny Meeting Room, Civic Offices, Telford**

**PRESENT:** Councillors A. McClements, N. England, T. Hope, A. Jhawar, J. Loveridge, G. Reynolds, K. Tomlinson.

Also attending: Cllr. S. Davies, Cabinet Member Neighbourhood Services & Co-operative Council; F. Mercer, Policy & Strategy Manager, and D. Byle, Project Officer, Co-operative Council Delivery Team; S. Jones, Scrutiny Officer.

#### **CCSC-1 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

#### **CCSC-2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllr. J. Greenaway.

#### **CCSC-3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

#### **CCSC-4 CO-OPERATIVE COUNCIL UPDATES**

The Chairman welcomed members to the first meeting of the Committee of the municipal year and welcomed new members to the group. The Cabinet member and officers had been invited to the meeting to provide a short update on the Co-operative Council work-streams, to answer questions and to help the Committee identify areas of work where scrutiny could add value through its work programme. The Co-operative Council Update Cabinet report had been circulated to members prior to the meeting by way of background information and a short summary presentation was tabled at the meeting. The key points highlighted from the presentation were:

- The essence of being a Co-operative Council was to develop a new relationship with residents, partners and local organisations so that there was collective involvement in the planning, running and resourcing of services so that people get what they need at the right time and the right place.
- The Co-operative Values (Ownership, Openness & Honesty, Involvement, Fairness & Respect) developed by the Co-operative Commission's Values &

Communications Sub-group had been endorsed by Council in May. The values underpinned how the Council and its employees would behave, and work would be done over the next 12 months to embed and bring the values to life, starting with employees and then moving outward. The Commission Sub-group had recognised that there was a role for scrutiny to be involved in reviewing and monitoring progress.

- The presentation summarised the key achievements to date on the implementation of the Adopter projects and the recommendations of the Co-operative and Employee Commissions which were set out in more detail in the Cabinet report.

There was then a discussion and questions about the report during which the following points were made:

- Referring to the suggestions for the work programme, shown in Appendix 1 of the report circulated as Appendix B, the Chairman suggested that should the Committee choose to include a review of the Employee Commission in the work programme, this could be joined up with reviewing how the Co-operative Values are being embedded with employees across the organisation. Cllr. McClements also suggested that as the Committee had already met members of the Employee Commission who were very positive and committed, a review should also hear from staff who had not joined the Commission to hear their views. Officers pointed out that it had been a specific recommendation of the Commission's Sub-group that scrutiny should provide an independent view on the implementation of the Co-operative Values.
- Cllr. Hope asked whether the Environmental Action Team project would be rolled out to other wards. Cllr. Davies explained that this was a match-funded scheme with the Town & Parish Councils (TPCs). All TPCs had been invited to express an interest and three had initially come forward. Teams had been set up in Madeley, Great Dawley, St. George's and Priorslee. Further announcements would be made about the extension of the scheme and solutions were being sought for smaller TPCs less able to resource a scheme. Cllr. Davies invited members who were also elected onto Town & Parish Councils to raise this locally and contact him with any expressions of interest.
- Replying to a question about how local people had been involved and how they had influenced projects, Cllr. Davies gave some specific examples such as the devolution of Ward Co-operative Fund (previously known as Your Money, Your Projects) to local level, the Street Champions and Snow Wardens projects, and the extensive consultation involving over 3,000 people on the budget proposals.
- Cllr. Davies explained that the Street Champions were volunteers involved in environmental projects. In Brookside, volunteers had been involved in delivering materials which helped to engage more people locally as well as saving money. In the Nedge, volunteers were taking responsibility for looking after green space which engaged local people and helped to save money on the Council's maintenance contract. Cllr. Tomlinson asked whether there was scope to expand

the Street Champions' role – or to develop a similar project – as a co-operative “Neighbourhood Watch” type scheme as these had lapsed following the move of the police contact to Shropshire. Cllr. Davies replied that this was a good idea but would depend on having the necessary resources.

- There was a lengthy discussion about how members could explain to residents what being a “Co-operative Council” meant. It was suggested that the best way was to give practical examples of co-operative working of which there were numerous examples such as litter-picking schemes, the projects discussed earlier, the small business loans fund though which £75k had already been lent to small local businesses, the involvement of external people in the Co-operative Commission, and the development of a new settlement with the community and voluntary sector. The co-operative movement was not new, and the present context for co-operative working was reduced budgets and the need to work with TPCs, partners and residents to encourage collaborative working and self-help to mitigate the impact of cuts. It was also about people seeing what the Council is doing and there were regular press releases and updates in Your Voice.

The network of Co-operative Councils had grown from 13 original members to 21 and was on the increase with some large authorities such as Lambeth, Liverpool, Newcastle, Oldham, Stoke and Sunderland as members. Within the network, Telford & Wrekin was in a minority of Councils which had positively branded itself as “Co-operative”. Other authorities had adopted co-operative ways of working without using the “co-operative” banner – it was about the reality of how they work and what they do for local people and not about whether people recognised the co-operative label.

The Cabinet member said that the Co-operative Commissioners wanted to see how the Council is delivering on its values after 12 months, what difference it has made, and how the Council is held to account for its performance. It was suggested that scrutiny could usefully carry out an independent review, and perhaps find out how other authorities in the Co-operative network are looking at this, or opportunities for Telford & Wrekin to share its good practice with other authorities as an exemplar of co-operative working.

- Regarding the Supporting Families task force, this was about targeting early intervention support at the most troubled families to prevent breakdown and crisis which may then require expensive interventions. The approach was based on research which showed that peer support and peer mentoring could be more effective than intervention solely by professionals. The aim was for professionals to work with and support residents who could help break down barriers and support struggling families. Many of these families were already known to the Council, and the challenge now was to identify local volunteers with whom the Council could work to support them.

There was a discussion about volunteers, and Cllr. Hope wanted to find out what training and support the Council provided to volunteers. Cllr. Reynolds informed members that she was the Commission Councillor on the Civic Pride and

Volunteering and the Employee Volunteering working groups which were overseeing the implementation of the Commissions' sub-groups' recommendations. Cllr. England was the Member sponsor on the Employee Commission's Social Responsibility sub-group. Both these groups were involved in volunteering and would be looking at the issues raised by Cllr. Hope. The Commissions' working groups made two-weekly reports to the Senior Management Team and to Cabinet in Update reports. Information was also available on the intranet. Additionally, Cllr. Davies told members that the Co-operative and Employee Commissions would meet again on 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> October respectively to monitor progress on implementing their recommendations and to take stock of their future roles. Scrutiny members were invited to attend the meetings to hear the discussions and ask questions, and may wish to offer an independent view on the future role of the Commissions.

Details of the governance arrangements and member/officer leads for the Commissions' working groups would be circulated to the Committee after the meeting, and the Project Officer offered to help members scope work around the Commissions should this be included in the work programme.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet member and officers for attending the meeting and providing information to the Committee.

## **CCSC-5      2012/14 WORK PROGRAMME**

This part of the meeting was for members to agree topics for the work programme in the light of the previous discussion.

The Scrutiny Officer summarised the key points in the report on the 2012/14 Work Programme which had been circulated as Appendix B. Members noted the decisions made by the Scrutiny Management Board on 4<sup>th</sup> July regarding the allocation of suggestions and resources to the Scrutiny Committees and the recommendation that the Committees should focus on a small number of topics to review in-depth so that scrutiny remains focused and has greater impact. Appendix 1 of the report set out the suggestions with comments and issues for the Committee to consider and the Chairman's preferred topics.

The Chairman invited views from the Committee on her recommended topics and method of scrutiny which were:

- The welfare benefit reforms which was strongly recommended for in-depth review.
- The Employee Commission incorporating how the Co-operative Values were being embedded with employees as an in-depth review and including hearing the views of staff in outreach locations and satellite offices.
- First Point for Business and changes to the leisure concessions policy as update reports at a Committee meeting.

Members agreed with the inclusion of these items in the work programme and made the following points during the discussion:

- Cllr. Reynolds suggested the review of the Employee Commission should include looking at the concentration of employee members from across the Council, representation of staff in outreach locations and issues for staff without PCs or Council log-ins and whether there were disadvantages pockets across the organisation.
- Cllr. Hope wanted to look at support for volunteers, particularly around environmental projects, and it was agreed that members could in the first instance receive reports of the Civic Pride & Volunteering working group which was working with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust to create a model of best practice for volunteers. It was agreed the Committee would review reports on this on-going work before deciding whether this would be added to the work programme for further scrutiny as members should be mindful of duplicating work that is already being done.
- The Chairman noted that work was on-going to develop a Customer Care Strategy and Action Plan, and this could be something the Committee might want to monitor in future but in the light of other priorities suggested that should not be included in the work programme at this stage.
- The Scrutiny Officer noted the suggestion to look at Social Deprivation could potentially overlap with work agreed by the Children & Young People (CYP) Scrutiny Committee on the impact of early intervention programmes, Strengthening Families and Family Connect, and members of this Committee could attend the CYP meetings rather than duplicate work.
- The suggestion about funding for the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) was discussed and it was agreed that a review could not focus on one organisation but would need to be a broader review of funding for the voluntary sector. Work was on-going by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) working group to implement the Commission sub-group's recommendations to develop a revised approach to how the Council works with and spends with the VCS. It was therefore agreed that this would not be included in the work programme, although the Committee could receive the group's reports. It was also agreed that the CAB and other relevant organisations would be consulted as part of the review of the welfare reforms.
- Regarding the Welfare Benefit reforms, the committee noted that the options for the Telford & Wrekin Council Tax support scheme would be developed by mid-August, and agreed that a meeting would be held at the beginning of September early on in the consultation period to review the options. The Scrutiny Officer would circulate date options to the Committee.
- The Commercial opportunities (possible new income streams) had been put forward as a suggestion, but the Chairman felt that this may be a matter for the Scrutiny Management Board as the future direction of the Council as a more commercially driven organisation was a key strategic issue, and individual ideas for income streams could come from service area within the remit of the other Scrutiny Committees. This was therefore not included in the work programme.
- The suggestion about working with Town & Parish Councils was discussed, but this was not included in the work programme because there was already on-going work on the development of the Parish Charter and review of the Parish Forum.
- The Scrutiny Officer explained to Cllr. Tomlinson that suggestions about Alley

Gating and the Adoption of Unadopted Estates had been allocated to the Housing, Economy & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee to consider for the work programme.

- The suggestion to look at support for victims of Domestic Abuse had been allocated to the Scrutiny Management Board as this was the designated body for scrutiny of the Safer Communities Partnership, and the topic would fit within the scope of this wider work. Cllrs. Tomlinson and McClements had taken part in an earlier review of support for Domestic Violence which highlighted issues including support for the children of victims and the need to work with private landlords on security issues and wanted to see these picked up as part of the review. Cllr. Tomlinson expressed the strong view that this highlighted the need for scrutiny to follow-up on previous work.

At the end of the discussion, it was agreed the Scrutiny Officer would draft a work programme based on what had been agreed to circulate to the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

The meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.

**Chairman:**.....

**Date:**.....