

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (TRANSITIONAL)
HELD ON TUESDAY 26 JANUARY 2016 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT:
Councillors

Kraujalis, J.T. (Chairman)
Pearson, A. (Vice-Chairman)

Cooper, Miss J.	Hoare, M.W.A.
Dudson, Miss M.J.	Johnson, T.B.
Foley, D.	Sutherland, M.
Gamble, B.	

5. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received for Councillors Mrs. A. F. Bernard and G. Burnett.

6. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations

No declarations of interests or party whip declarations were received.

7. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November, 2015, be approved.

8. Review of Scrutiny Function – Update

Members received a presentation from the Head of Governance which provided progress updates on the actions agreed at the previous meeting, as detailed below:

All Committee Members be issued with a copy of the existing ‘scrutiny toolkit’ to consider and review content

Members commented that although the existing toolkit was a few years old it was a good starting point for developing an updated document which was relevant for the new scrutiny structure. It was also commented that resource capacity of both Members and Officers needed to be taken account of, with better focus being concentrated on fewer, more high profile issues.

Two or three groups of Committee Members to visit other local authorities before the next meeting to see areas of best practice and report back their findings

Visits had not yet been undertaken, however contact had been made with the West Midlands Scrutiny Network and Staffordshire County Council to establish what could be arranged.

Additionally, links to a number of webcasts of other councils' scrutiny committees had been sourced for Members to watch.

Information on the functions and roles of Parliamentary Select Committees to be circulated to all Committee Members for consideration. Councillor Sutherland to contact Amanda Milling MP for more detailed information

The Head of Governance advised that this information had been recently updated by the House of Commons so would be circulated to Members soon.

Councillor Sutherland reported the following findings from his research:

- Availability of staffing resource was far greater than could be expected at a local level;
- Committees had a primarily fiscal focus – want to know what is being delivered for the funding being given;
- All committees had strictly timed structures;
- Have greater clout to be able to call witnesses to support reviews/inquiries.

Members commented that at district level it was difficult for scrutiny committees to be able to request witnesses to attend as there were no statutory powers in place unlike at county level.

A Member suggested that customer contact data (if collected) could be used to determine future work programme items if it was there were issues which were being regularly reported to the Council.

The Head of Governance also provided additional information which covered the following:

- The role of Select Committees;
- Select Committees staffing;
- The role of staff;
- The inquiry process;
- Strengths of the Parliamentary model;
- The strengths of local authority scrutiny;
- 'Lessons' for local authorities;

Andrew Coulson from the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) be invited to give a briefing to the Committee on the role and purpose of scrutiny

The Head of Governance reported that as an alternative, an offer had been received from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) to provide some support to the Council's scrutiny process as this was something which they received national funding for.

The Head of Governance then took Members through a brief presentation which had been produced by INLOGOV and focussed on how to develop a work programme, how reviews should be undertaken and recommendations/actions tracked and monitored.

The Chairman to conduct online research into best practice at other local authorities

The Chairman reported the following findings of research he undertook of what arrangements were in place at other Staffordshire borough and district councils:

- All councils apart from one were Conservative controlled (the other operated as a 'hung council');
- Structures at all but one of the councils were broadly similar to the arrangements in place at this Council, although one of those authorities had recently reduced its number of scrutiny committees;
- A few of the councils had members of the opposition group as committee chairmen (all other councils' chairmen were from the controlling group);
- The call-in process was rarely used by all councils.

The Head of Governance then circulated a pack which contained examples of agendas etc. from each of the Staffordshire councils for Members to take away and review.

Members noted that scrutiny had achieved little over the last five years, but going forward wanted it to be more proactive in holding the executive to account and providing a community benefit.

Officers to review constitutions of other local authorities to research what different models of scrutiny are used

The Head of Governance reported that the research looked at all local authorities in the West Midlands and found that this Council operated a similar scrutiny model to 45% of the authorities researched and was broadly in line with the average for frequency of meetings held and number of councillors per committee.

Chairmen of the new Scrutiny Committees to report back to the January 2016 meeting on experiences so far of the revised structure

The Chairmen of the Scrutiny Committees and other Members commented that the role of Cabinet Members in attending the meetings needed to be better clarified and defined. Whilst the Cabinet Members could provide useful updates on meetings they had attended, there was also a risk that they could 'take over' the meeting and direct the outcome.

The following suggestions were made:

- Cabinet Members could be allocated a slot on each meeting agenda to provide a work update and then leave the meeting;
- Cabinet Members be invited to attend part of the scrutiny induction session to help them better understand their role in the process;
- Cabinet Members could be involved in part of the agenda pre-meeting between the Committee Chairmen and lead Officers.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) Members be emailed with the links to the webcasts of other councils' scrutiny committees to watch.
- (B) A small working group comprised of Councillors Kraujalis, Foley, Hoare and Sutherland meet with the Head of Governance to review and suggest changes to the existing Scrutiny Toolkit.
- (C) A copy of the Toolkit be issued to the Centre for Public Scrutiny for their comment.
- (D) Representatives from the Centre for Public Scrutiny be invited to attend the scrutiny induction session after the May 2016 elections in order to provide additional input into the process.
- (E) Further consideration be given to the role of Cabinet Members attending meetings of the Scrutiny Committees.

9. Feedback and Updates from Chairmen of the New Scrutiny Committees

Better Jobs & Skills Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Miss Cooper, Chairman of the Better Jobs & Skills Scrutiny Committee, reported that the Committee had received an update from Staffordshire County Council on recent changes to the bus network in the District, opportunities which may arise out of the Buses Bill to be introduced in Parliament in 2016 and issues with passenger numbers on the 154 bus service.

Community Safety Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Miss Dudson, Chairman of the Community Safety Scrutiny Committee, reported that Members had received presentations from the Staffordshire North & Stoke-on-Trent Citizens' Advice Bureau on their 'Victims Gateway' programme (with a further update to be provided in six months time), Staffordshire Police on their Transformation Programme (with a further update to be provided in March 2016), and Environmental Protection on implementing changes arising from updated Anti-Social Behaviour legislation. The Committee also requested that training and an update be provided on child sexual exploitation issues, and that all Councillors receive 'Prevent' training.

Customers & Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Councillor T. Johnson, Chairman of the Customers & Corporate Scrutiny Committee, reported that clarification was still required as to which Scrutiny Committee would have responsibility for scrutinising matters relating to the West Midlands Combined Authority. Furthermore, the first meeting of the Community Engagement Review Task & Finish Group had been arranged for 8 February.

Health Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Gamble, Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee, reported that the Committee had received information on the latest indices of multiple deprivation

for the District, a presentation from the Cannock Chase Clinical Commissioning Group, an update from Healthwatch and a presentation from the Royal Wolverhampton Trust regarding its ongoing redevelopment of Cannock Hospital. Additionally, a working group was also being set up to review the local impact of changes to Staffordshire County Council's social care provision.

Housing Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Foley, Chairman of the Housing Scrutiny Committee, reported that the Committee had received an update on the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and a presentation on a review of Void/Empty Council houses.

The meeting closed at 5:20pm

CHAIRMAN