

Monday 19 March 2007
at 6.00pm



Scrutiny Committee

MEMBERSHIP:-

Councillor Mrs BANNISTER (Chairman) Councillor MARSDEN (Deputy Chairman),
Councillors Mrs GOODALL, LACEY O.B.E, TESTER and Miss WOODALL.

(An apology for absence was reported from Councillor Taylor).

26 Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2007 were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

27 Declarations of Interest.

None were received.

28 Community Enforcement Team Task Group – Final Report.

The Committee considered the report of the Task Group on the outcome of the review into the work of the Community Enforcement Team.

The Assistant Director of Amenities and Contract Manager introduced the report as Lead Officer and reported that an initial survey had been undertaken to inform the scope of the review. This had been agreed as the actual and perceived effect on the community at large of the enforcement team's activities.

The Members of the Review Board, Councillors Mrs Goodall and Stanley presented the report to the Committee. It was noted that Councillor Mrs Goodall had replaced Councillor Warner as a Board Member in November 2006.

The scope of the review had focussed on the following areas:

- History of the Community Enforcement Team
- The work and priorities of the Team
- Performance in meeting priorities
- Links with external agencies, community organisations and the public
- Contribution to the Joint Agency Group (JAG)
- Profile and Public Relations
- EBC Website

Councillor Mrs Goodall reported on the morning she had spent with the Senior Community Enforcement Officer on a tour of her area, which included Devonshire and St Anthony's wards and the Kingsmere part of Sovereign, to further her understanding of the work of the Team. Several unlicensed cars were identified and over 30 shopping trolleys were found abandoned, mainly in the Kingsmere area. It was noted that cars without a valid tax disc were reported to the DLVA and that DLVA officers intended to visit Eastbourne to target identified problem areas.

The Committee discussed the team's enforcement statistics and it was suggested that given the significant work undertaken in identifying un-taxed vehicles within the Borough, was there any scope to receive a contribution from the income this must generate for the DLVA. The Assistant Director agreed to pursue this with the DLVA in consultation with the Chairman.

The Senior Community Enforcement Officer attended the meeting and identified the need for positive PR through the local press on the team's successes in dealing with environmental crime and anti-social behaviour. It was noted that the team supported comprehensive pages on the Council's website and was in the process of developing an information document for distribution.

Councillor Mrs Goodall reported on a recent positive press article which had appeared in the local paper and Councillor Marsden suggested that a monthly report could be sent to the local paper.

The work of Community Enforcement was prioritised and its performance was recorded and reported as one of the Council's "Hot 13" performance indicators. Details of the team's performance for the period 1 January to 9 February 2007 was set out in appendix 1 to the report. Councillor Stanley stated that work priorities were focussed on meeting the set objectives and the team performed well in this regard. He made reference to the high profile proactive work which cut across so many areas of the Council's services.

The Board Members had interviewed the Senior Community Enforcement Officer to gain a greater insight into the workings of the team. It was clear that the team had developed significantly since it began in April 2005 in terms of understanding and developing the role and had achieved acceptance by enforcement officers within the Council and external agencies.

It was established that the team had developed strong working links with Community Groups across the Borough, the police and the PCSO service. A summary of the responses received following consultation with external groups and council officers on the work of the team was attached as appendix B to the report. The team also made an effective contribution to the work of the Joint Agency Group (JAG).

The Board Members thanked the Senior Community Enforcement Officer for her assistance in conducting the review and for her work to develop an effective team which made a significant contribution to the community.

On behalf of the Committee, Councillor Marsden thanked the Officers and Councillors that took part in the review for their efforts.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Committee supports the outcome of the Review Board's findings to the effect that:

(1) It is agreed that the Community Enforcement Team makes a very useful contribution to the community at large in terms of its activities and achievements.

(2) The team is successful in deterring anti-social behaviour and is foremost in responding to environmental crime.

(3) Every opportunity should be taken by officers and members alike to promote the activities of the Community Enforcement Team to the benefit of the community.

29 Service Review of Highway Management Agreements (Eastbourne and Hastings) in East Sussex – Final Report.

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Transport and Environment, East Sussex County Council regarding the results and recommendations of a Service Review of Highway Management Agreements.

A Best Value Review of Transport in East Sussex conducted in 2004 had recommended a review of the highway management agreements with Eastbourne and Hastings Borough Councils. The agreements had remained essentially unchanged since their commencement in 1994. During this period the provision of highway services had changed significantly with a more customer focussed joined up service delivered from Network offices.

Mr D Foden, Deputy Network Manager, presented the report and advised that the main objective of the review was to evaluate the effectiveness of the agreements and to consider any changes that may be required to the current arrangements.

The review had considered whether the agreements should be retained in their existing form, retained and amended to reflect current practice or rescinded.

Extensive consultation was undertaken with Borough staff, Network Managers, and ESCC officers directly responsible for each of the highway operation area covered within the agreements.

The results determined that the Boroughs provided a generally good service in most areas of highway activities although there were a number of inconsistencies with the application of County policy. The preferred option was to retain the current arrangements and to revise the agreements and Code of Practice to reflect current practice.

The review report and action plan were set out in appendix 1 to the report and detailed a number of areas identified for early consideration and action.

It was noted that the report would be presented to County Scrutiny Committee on 20 March 2007.

The Committee supported the option to maintain the agreement given the local knowledge and experience of Borough highway officers, particularly for ensuring a speedy response to the public. It was also important to maintain local Member involvement in decision making on highway issues.

With reference to financial considerations, Mr Foden advised the Committee that both capital and revenue budget allocations for highway works may effectively reduce in future years and a more flexible management fee arrangement would be sought to accommodate potential budget changes.

In response to a comment regarding the time taken to install parking restrictions, Mr Foden advised that as a non-statutory function, funding for this area was limited and all requests were prioritised. The current budget was sufficient to install approximately 7 sets from over 100 requests made. Mr Probyn advised the Committee that the civil parking scheme would provide an opportunity to deal with outstanding requests and that his department was working closely with the consultants on this issue. As part of the scheme a parking Manager would also be appointed.

The Chairman thanked Mr Foden for attending the meeting and for his work on the review.

RESOLVED: That the recommendations and results of the final report for the Service Review of Highway Management Agreements (Eastbourne and Hastings) in East Sussex be noted.

30 Draft Strategic Audit Plan 2007-2011

The Committee considered the report of the Principal Auditor regarding the draft Strategic Audit Plan for 2007-11. The initial draft had been revised to ensure that that the plan was achievable and matched the resources available. The number of proposed audit days had been reduced by cutting back on the number of days given to particular audits where appropriate and by taking out all low risk audits over the four year period.

Progress against the plan would be monitored closely as it was difficult to estimate precisely the number of days required to complete an audit, particularly for areas which had not been audited before.

Councillor Tester raised some concerns regarding the removal of all low risk audits from the plan although it was acknowledged that any spare capacity identified would be used to address the low risk audits in order of priority.

With regard to training, the Committee was advised that although the 30 days provided for professional training was unlikely to be used for this purpose, the plan included an allocation of days to cover attendance at one off training events.

The Committee was advised that where an audit highlighted problems areas within a service, an action plan was provided which recommended actions the service should take to make improvements. The audit team would also undertake follow up work to ensure that the work had been completed.

A robust checking system was in place and in cases where appropriate action had not been taken a report would be submitted to Corporate Management Team. Should any further action be required a report would be made to the Audit Task Group.

NOTED.

31 Quarter 2 Performance Indicators – 2006/07.

The report was submitted to Members on 27 February 2007. No questions were received and the Committee was advised that the next report would be circulated on 4 June 2007, prior to the next meeting on 2 July 2007.

NOTED.

The meeting finished at 6.55 pm.

**Councillor Mrs Bannister
Chairman**