Unconfirmed Minutes - subject to amendment/approval at the next meeting of the Policy & Resources Select Committee

**Policy and Resources Select Committee**

14th April 2011 – At a meeting of the Select Committee held at 10.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

**Present:** Mr Britton (Chairman)

Mrs Arculus  Mrs Field  Mr Smith  
Mr Burrett  Mr Jones  Mr Stevens  
Mr Coleman  Mrs Millson  Mr Waight  
Mr Crow  Mr O’Brien  Dr Walsh

In attendance by invitation: Mr Blampied (Vice Chairman of Adults’ Services Select Committee), Mr Brown (Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources), Ms Goldsmith (Leader)

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Richards and Mr Watson

**Declarations of Interests**

1. In accordance with the Code of Conduct the following declarations of personal interest were made in relation to item 4, ‘Revised Scrutiny Arrangements 2011-12’ – Dr Walsh as a member of Arun District Council and Mr Burrett as a member of Crawley Borough Council.

**Minutes**

2. Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Select Committee held on 3rd March 2011 be approved as a correct record, and that they be signed by the Chairman.

**Revised Scrutiny Arrangements 2011-12**

3. The Committee considered a report by Head of Legal and Democratic Services (copy appended to the signed minutes).

4. The report was introduced by Debbie Allman, Service Manager (Non Executive Support), who reminded the Committee of the changes agreed to scrutiny arrangements by the County Council in February 2011. Phil Edwards, Service Manager (Executive Support) also assisted with answering questions.

5. Mrs Allman explained that the changes were driven by:

   - a desire to focus and continuously improve the scrutiny function
   - the need to undertake the work with a reduced officer resource from 1 April

and summarised the key changes which were around:

   - Enhancing the opportunities for all members to work together and be involved in policy development (rather than have double running of key areas through cabinet and scrutiny) – with scrutiny reserving the right to preview if needed;
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- Allocating the scrutiny of cross cutting issues through one place which enabled a wider cross section of members to be involved in those activities (rather than just having a host select committee with one or two other members being invited to join that meeting);

- Streamlining reporting lines for policy development and cross cutting issues - being more responsive in terms of time taken (by not having to report back to a scheduled meeting of the parent committee before being seen by the Cabinet).

- A different way of working, including an increased need to prioritise work (and thus enhance the role of the business planning groups (BPGs)) and ensure that the reduced resources do focus on the overall highest priorities

6. She added that the purpose of bringing the report to the Committee was to:

   - Highlight the enhanced role of Policy and Resources Select Committee in the new arrangements (as set out in paragraph 7 of the report)

   - Enable a discussion about how those arrangements were now implemented – particularly in terms of allocating task and finish groups (TFGs) for cross cutting scrutiny issues and policy development

   - Consider what liaison arrangements would be helpful between the service select committees; Policy and Resources Select Committee, and the Cabinet in taking forward a prioritisation of policy development issues.

   - Provide a backdrop/context to item 5 on the agenda where the Committee was being asked to look specifically at the select committees’ work programme and allocation of TFGs for 2011/12.

7. The Committee made comments including those that follow. Members:

   - Raised concerns that with reduced resources it would be difficult to get the same outcomes without more radical changes to the scrutiny process. This could include, for example, reducing the number of Select Committees. Members queried whether radically reducing the number of Select Committees would disenfranchise a large number of members in the scrutiny process. Other councils had drastically reduced the number of their Select Committees with a negative impact on their scrutiny process. With the number of important issues to be considered by the County Council it would be hard to make such drastic reductions. **Debbie Allman, Service Manager (Non-Executive Support), told the Committee that the changes to scrutiny were an on-going process and there would be a further review in the autumn of this year, informed by consideration of the practical efficacy of the new model, to monitor progress and to consider any further options. This new model would be allocating policy development and cross cutting work to TFGs, which all members would have the opportunity to participate in. As currently a number of members sat on more than one committee, a reduction in the number of Select Committees could give rise to more members having greater capacity to get involved in specific areas of work through the TFGs.**
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- Commented that the select committees’ BPGs would have to be much sharper in deciding on what was put on committee agendas or identified as cross-cutting/policy development work to prevent this Committee from becoming overloaded with its new task of assigning TFGs. Mrs Allman replied that increased communication between the BPGs and the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members would be useful in order to establish the priority of policy development items which would produce the best outcomes.

- Commented that it would be necessary to see how new arrangements worked and developed before making further decisions on changes. Mrs Allman commented that the autumn review would be subject to wide consultation and would aim to engage with members generally. If any other members would like to be more involved in or join the member review group this would be warmly received. The Leader commented that the review would be an opportunity for a full debate and to see what outcomes were reached in the best interests of the County Council.

8. Resolved – That the Committee:

i. agrees the definitions of policy development and cross-cutting scrutiny work set out in paragraphs 9 and 10 of the report, to aid the allocation of topics to TFGs;

ii. endorses the involvement of the Committee’s Business Planning Group (BPG) in allocating work to the TFGs; e.g. in terms of filtering proposals and dealing with unexpectedly arising priorities;

iii. recommends regular discussion between the Select Committee BPGs and the relevant Cabinet Members to consider the allocation of policy development work to TFGs via this committee;

iv. agrees the general approach to the terms of reference of TFGs suggested in paragraph 12 and Appendix 2 of the report;

v. recommends all the Select Committees to review the membership and composition of their BPGs in light of their new enhanced role.

Select Committee Work Programme for 2011/12

9. The Committee considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (copy appended to the signed minutes).

10. The report was introduced by Debbie Allman, Service Manager (Non Executive Support), who reminded the Committee that the new work plan was based on the reduced resources and revised scrutiny arrangements as discussed in the previous item. The BPGs had had a more active involvement this year in developing the work programme and had also looked at cross cutting and policy development work that can be assigned to TFGs. There was an approximately 25% reduction of issues covered compared to last year.

11. She highlighted Appendices 2 (draft Select Committees’ Work Programme) and 3 (List of potential policy development and cross-cutting items of work) and also reminded members of the addendum circulated earlier in the week which had identified the possibility of setting up a TFG to assist the Cabinet Member for Education and Schools in
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developing a policy in relation to encouraging state funded schools in West Sussex to become Academies.

12. The Committee made comments including those that follow. Members:

- Expressed concern over the number of items considered as cross-cutting or policy development work, and that they would be too many to manage, especially as they were all of high importance. Mrs Allman agreed that this would be a challenging task for the Committee and that it would need to prioritise. A constant review by the Committee, assisted by its BPG, could help to ensure all important items were discussed and allocated appropriately throughout the year.

- Commented that caution would need to be taken if the Committee was to judge which items were of highest priority as these were issues that have been decided by each individual Committee, and were all considered as high priority. The individual BPGs would be best placed to make these decisions. The Leader highlighted that, as discussed under the previous item, increased open dialogue between the Cabinet and Committee Chairmen/BPGs; should increase transparency and allow appropriate policy development items to be prioritised for discussion.

- Commented that many of the individual items on the list for cross-cutting work included overlapping issues that ought to be considered by the Committee’s BPG for grouping together. Other items on this list could also be considered by the Joint Scrutiny Steering Group for joint scrutiny with the participating boroughs and districts. Mrs Allman advised that the Steering Group was scheduled to meet in July 2011 and therefore it would be timely to highlight which items could be taken forward to the Group at that meeting.

13. Resolved - that the Committee:

i. notes the revised arrangements used for work programme planning this year;

ii. endorses the outline Select Committee work programme for 2011/12 and supports its approval by the County Council;

iii. while endorsing them in principle, as part of this year’s work programme for approval, requests that the topics to be considered as cross-cutting scrutiny matters and policy development work be reviewed by the BPG in liaison with Leader/Deputy Leader for policy development, and reported back to the Committee next time before the allocation of TFGs begins;

iv. agrees on the establishment of a TFG to look into the ‘Direction of Travel for the West Sussex County Council Academies Policy’ with the Cabinet Member for Education and Schools;

v. highlights three potential topics to be considered by the Joint Scrutiny Steering Group:
(a) Preparing for an ageing population
(b) Gypsies and Travellers- scrutiny of access to public services
(c) Health & Wellbeing Hubs.
Scrutiny Annual Report

14. The Committee considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (copy appended to the signed minutes).

15. The report was introduced by Debbie Allman, Service Manager (Non Executive Support), who highlighted key parts of the report including that 93% of recommendations by the Select Committees had been accepted by the Cabinet. She also confirmed that 64 external witnesses had been called upon, of which 17 were for Adults’ Services and seven Select Committee meetings had been webcast. Once approved, the report would be published on-line, on the Centre for Public Scrutiny website and in Staff Connections.

16. The Committee welcomed the good work that had been undertaken and congratulated the Scrutiny Team and members for their work. It asked whether the number of external witnesses was low considering that there were 40 Committee meetings in the year and whether the BPG should be actively seeking to invite more witnesses to meetings. **Debbie Allman commented that the BPGs should routinely take into account whether external witnesses would be beneficial when planning agenda items.**

17. Resolved – That the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2010-2011 be approved for publication.

West Sussex Big Society Fund for Members

18. The Committee considered a report by Executive Director Finance and Performance (copy appended to the signed minutes).

19. The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, who emphasised that the fund was to be member driven and designed for individual members to come forward with applications for relatively small amounts of money.

20. While supporting the proposed Fund criteria, the Committee noted that the Fund would run in addition to the Community Initiative Funding that is provided through County Local Committees (CLCs), and raised concerns that the decision to approve or decline funding would be made solely by the Cabinet Member, which did not appear to support the localism that the Big Society promotes. Mr Brown pointed out that the reason he would make decisions relating to allocation of fund monies, was because the Committee’s BPG had specifically requested that the Committee no longer be asked for its advice, as had been the case with the previous Members Priority Fund.

21. The Committee suggested that CLCs may be in a better position to manage the fund and have input into the decisions, due to their localism and transparency, although careful consideration would have to be given about their workload. However, there was a difference of opinion between members as to whether CLCs should be solely responsible for managing the Fund and making grants from it, or whether allocations should be made, as the paper envisaged, by the Cabinet Member, but with the benefit of recommendations from the CLCs. **The Cabinet Member commented that localism is highlighted through the single member applying for the fund and that a CLC may not necessarily know what is a priority in one particular division.**
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22. Resolved- that having considered the proposed criteria and arrangements, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources be asked to consider the comments raised by the Committee as outlined above, including a possible role for the CLCs.

Forward Plan of Key Decisions

23. An extract from the Forward Plan, April 2011 to July 2011 (copy attached to the signed minutes) was circulated.

24. Resolved – That the Forward Plan be noted.

Date of the Next Meeting

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Committee would be held on 26th May 2011 at 10.30 a.m. at County Hall, Chichester.

The meeting finished at 12.40 p.m.

Chairman.