1128 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 21 November 2014, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Arising from minute 1126, members queried the outcome of the third planning inquiry, and asked for details of the legal costs incurred by the Council. The Director of Growth and Localism did not have details of the costs immediately available but confirmed that he would provide members of the Committee with the figures by email shortly. He advised that the Secretary of State had dismissed the appeal and the Council had not sought to recover its costs.

1129 MEMBER REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES

The Communities and Democratic Services Manager introduced the report which had been produced at the request of the Committee following some recent issues experienced by member representatives on outside bodies. The Committee heard that the purpose of the item had not been to review the outside bodies themselves, nor the merits of member representation on each, but to focus on the responsibilities of the role, and associated issues.

The Committee noted comments received from a number of members in advance of the meeting who had provided the Committee with observations, suggestions and details of their own experiences whilst representing the Council on an outside body. These comments included a suggestion that members should have information available to them, at the time of their appointment to an outside body, detailing the expectations of the role, both in terms of responsibilities and time commitment, as well as anything else particular to...
that body. It was also suggested that each member representative could prepare an ‘end of year report’ at the end of each municipal year to feed back to members and officers about the work of the body itself, as well as the work carried out by the member representative in their role. Members considered these suggestions, and discussed members’ experiences on this subject generally.

The Committee heard from Cllr N Legg and the methods he had used to feed information back to the Council from the bodies on which he was the Council’s representative (Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Norfolk Rivers Internal Drainage Board). There followed some discussion about other methods of feeding back to members and officers, with some members expressing concern that reporting updates to full Council was not always appropriate or worthwhile. Other options were considered with the Chairman suggesting that members could instead feed back relevant information to the Policy Committees. The Director of Growth and Localism pointed out that often information from outside bodies would be relevant to more than one Policy Committee, for example the Internal Drainage Boards’ work could be relevant to both the Growth and Localism Policy Committee and the Environment Regulation and Planning Policy Committee. Cllr Y Bendle advised members that she worked alongside Council officers as the representative on the Health and Wellbeing Board, and regularly fed back on the work of this outside body to the Housing and Public Health Policy Committee.

Cllr S Thomson informed the Committee about her role and responsibilities as a director of the Whitlingham Charitable Trust, and referred to recent high profile issues regarding car parking at the park.

Cllr T Lewis referred to paragraph 3.13 of the report which outlined the position for members if there was conflict between their role on the outside body and their role as a member of the Council and there followed some discussion on this point. The Communities and Democratic Services Manager confirmed the Councillor’s overall role on the outside body, as outlined at paragraph 3.3 of the report, giving guidance that members had to make a balanced judgement, possibly withdrawing from decision-making at the Council if there was a conflict with the outside body. Members were also advised that, provided they had acted ‘properly’, the Council’s insurance cover would indemnify members in their role on outside bodies.

In the interest of aiding future member representatives on outside bodies to fully understand their role the Chairman suggested that a questionnaire be distributed to all members who currently served as representatives on outside bodies, in order to gather information relating to their experience on that body, including questions to clarify

- The role and expectations
- Number of meetings attended
- Time spent on work for the outside body
- Expenses paid by the outside body
- Process for reporting back to the Council
- Any other information of interest/relevance

The Director of Growth and Localism confirmed that information collated during this exercise would be analysed and used to provide training and information for members as part of the member training plan being prepared for the new term, with detail relevant to each particular outside body being passed on to the next representative appointed by Council.
Cllr K Weeks suggested that a review of each outside body be carried out to assess whether it was beneficial for the Council to continue to appoint a representative. He indicated that representation on some outside bodies may no longer be necessary or appropriate.

RESOLVED:

To recommend that officers:

1. Seek information from all members appointed to outside bodies by way of a questionnaire to enable a better understanding of each representative’s role and its requirements.
2. Establish a training mechanism for members appointed to outside bodies in the next term which would give clarity and guidance about the role.

1130 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME, TRACKER AND THE CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted that as a result of Scrutiny Committee’s review of the Market Town’s Initiative, and its subsequent recommendation, a Conference-style event would be taking place in February 2015.

Members noted the Work Programme.

(The meeting concluded at 11.00 am)

Chairman