

**Committee:**                   **Scrutiny Committee for Social Services and Health**

Date:                           25 October 2002

Title:                           Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Social Services and Health held at 10.00 am at Pelham House, St Andrews Lane, Lewes, East Sussex

Subject:                       Minutes

Attending:                   Chartier Garvican Mrs Leigh Lock McPherson Webb Whetstone

Chief Officer's representative - Chris Parsons, Head of Financial Support, Social Services  
Lead Officer - Bernardine Bacon, Scrutiny Lead Officer  
Legal Adviser - Andrew Ogden, Deputy Director of Legal and Community Services

## 18. MINUTES

18.1 RESOLVED – to approve the minutes of the last meeting held on 12 September 2002 as a correct record.

## 19. PERSONAL INTERESTS

19.1 Councillor Garvican reported that his wife held a senior locum position with Eastbourne Downs Primary Care Trust. He was satisfied that this did not give rise to a prejudicial interest in the items on the agenda.

19.2 Councillor Webb reported that he had a contract with Tenby House, Hastings as a relief mental health worker. However, he had not been employed for several months and was satisfied that the interest was not prejudicial.

## 20. REPORTS

20.1 Copies of the reports referred to below are included in the minute book.

## 21. PUBLIC RELATIONS SUPPORT TO BEST VALUE AND SCRUTINY

21.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Legal and Community Services.

21.2 The Committee saw a need to explore how reviews could be made more relevant to the people of East Sussex to encourage the media to report them. The review programme should be re-considered with a view to including more topics which affected directly a significant proportion of the public.

21.3 The Committee also felt that there would be real benefits from involving the Public Relations Office in reviews much earlier than tended to happen at present. It ought to meet with the Project Board at the project initiation stage to help in identifying issues of potential interest to the media and the stages in the review process when there might be particular opportunities to engage media interest. The Public Relations Office ought also to meet with the Board at the end of a review to agree how its recommendations could be promoted. During reviews there should be regular contact between the Public Relations Office and the Project Board Chairman and the Project Manager.

21.4 There was also a need to give greater attention to which sectors of the public would be affected by reviews and how the work being undertaken could be communicated to them. For this particular Committee, there may be scope for using doctors' surgeries/health centres and Citizens' Advice Bureaux to communicate with sections of the community.

## 22. QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT (APRIL TO JUNE 2002) – COUNCIL PLAN 2002/03

22.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive.

22.2 It felt that it was unsatisfactory to have a monitoring report at this stage of the year which only covered the first quarter. The Lead Officer would email members with any significant new information following the second quarter's monitoring and providing information on specific issues raised by members.

22.3 The Committee considered that the practice of the Cabinet and the County Council amending or deleting targets when circumstances changed was entirely inappropriate, since this meant that the Cabinet could not be truly held to account. It felt that once targets were set they should remain in place for the period of the Plan. It recognised that circumstances changed and that there may be good reasons why a target could not be met. However, this should be the subject of a footnote explaining the reasons rather than a reason to alter/ delete the target. The Committee believed that in some instances the target set had been inappropriate. A target should not be set, achievement of which was outside the Council's control.

22.4 RESOLVED – to ask the Cabinet to review the present practice of amending or deleting targets when situations changed, taking account of the points made in paragraph 22.3 above.

## 23. FORWARD PLAN : NOVEMBER 2002 TO FEBRUARY 2003

23.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 November 2002 to 28 February 2003.

23.2 There were no items on the Forward Plan which the Committee particularly wished to consider before they were submitted to the Cabinet.

## 24. LESSONS LEARNT ABOUT SCRUTINY AND BEST VALUE FOLLOWING JOINT REVIEW OF SOCIAL SERVICES

24.1 The Committee considered a report by the Scrutiny Lead Officer.

24.2 To aid the monitoring of implementation of recommendations from review reports it was important that targets should be SMART.

24.3 Whilst Project Board members who were not members of the Scrutiny Committee were invited to attend meetings when monitoring reports were considered, attendance was often very patchy which made effective monitoring more difficult. The Committee would await with interest the outcome of the current experiment involving Councillor Slack undertaking the monitoring of implementation of a review which he had chaired.

24.4 The Committee did not think that it had always been given sufficient support in relation to the implementation of the recommendations of reviews.

24.5 There was a feeling that the timing of reviews had sometimes not been ideal. Mr Ogden pointed out that there was more flexibility over this now that the Government's requirements in relation to Best Value reviews had been relaxed.

24.6 The Committee agreed with the suggestion of the Lead Officer that, rather than waiting for a detailed position statement (which often delayed the start of reviews), what Project Boards needed to assist them in scoping reviews was a short, high level analysis of the state of the service, in particular its strengths and weaknesses.

## 25. SCRUTINY AND BEST VALUE REVIEWS

25.1 A schedule of Best Value and Scrutiny Reviews as at October 2002 had been circulated with the agenda.

25.2 In relation to Field Work and Assessment (Adults), the Lead Officer suggested that in the light of the work being undertaken to achieve service improvements the Committee may wish to work with the Department and monitor the steps being taken to put improvements in place, rather than a Best Value review being undertaken.

25.3 RESOLVED – to support this approach and to ask the Assistant Director of Social Services (Adults) to submit a position statement to the next meeting of the Committee when consideration could be given to any particular service areas the Committee may wish to monitor.

## 26. VISIT TO SOCIAL SERVICES ESTABLISHMENTS

26.1 The Committee agreed that it would be valuable to hold another day of visits to Social Services establishments and that this should be arranged for Friday, 22 November.