



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON PARTNERSHIP

AGENDA ITEM: 3

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON PARTNERSHIP HELD ON FRIDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2001 IN MEZZANINE ROOM 3, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.05 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.50 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr T J Fowler (in the Chair)

Mr M C Appleyard, Mr D C T Graves, Mr D Green, Mr W Lidgate, Mr D J Rowlands.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Anita English, Bucks Infrastructure Group
Catherine Johnstone, Buckinghamshire Community Action
Janice Campbell, Head of Community Care for Adults

DISTRICT COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

Mrs J Kverndal and Mrs J Woolveridge, South Bucks District Council.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Mr C Jones and Mrs C S Willetts.

Mrs V Letheren was substituted by Mr D Green for the duration of the meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were declared.

1 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 October 2001, copies of which had been circulated, were confirmed.

2 PRESENTATION ON COMPACTS

The Chairman welcomed all the guest speakers to the Committee. Anita English, Chairman of the Bucks Infrastructure Group (BIG), and Catherine Johnstone of Buckinghamshire Community Action gave a presentation regarding the establishment of a Compact in Buckinghamshire.

Members were informed that work was proceeding to establish a Compact in Buckinghamshire. This would help to establish effective partnerships and provide clear guidance governing relationships between the Council and the voluntary sector. The process would involve the formation of a steering group that would meet monthly and would include representation from both statutory and voluntary organisations. Members of the steering group would work together over the course of a year to look at funding issues, agree joint objectives and draw up a set of principles that would form the basis of the code of practice. The steering group for the Compact in Buckinghamshire was likely to consist of 4 representatives from the voluntary sector, 3 from Primary Care Trusts and further representatives from District Councils and the Health Authority. Representatives from other organisations could be called in as and when required by the steering group.

BIG had resulted from an organisation called the Way Forward Group, which had been established four years ago. The Way Forward Group had originally been formed to look at the possibility of developing a Compact in Buckinghamshire, and to address problems in the voluntary sector. The Way Forward Group had disbanded but chief executives and chairman of voluntary groups had continued to meet, eventually calling themselves the Bucks Infrastructure Group.

Members were further informed that BIG had recently been given a mandate by the local voluntary sector to take the lead in developing a Compact for Buckinghamshire. The Government was providing £300 million in funding next year via the Active Communications Unit for those authorities who could provide evidence of successful Compacts that had developed into local strategic partnerships. Members noted that the Government was particularly targeting areas of social exclusion and deprivation. The Government's objective was to increase the utilization of independent organisations by increasing capacity in voluntary sector work.

Members noted that it was important to have an overall vision and build on successful services that already existed, rather than duplicating services. The Committee was informed by Anita and Catherine that they felt services currently provided needed to be coordinated in order to make the best use of resources, and that a Compact was a way through which this could be addressed. It was acknowledged that there was a complicated funding structure in Buckinghamshire, with some service agreements being provided under different portfolios or through the District Councils. There were a number of historical agreements and some inequity of funding. The Compact would decide on who the critical partners were in a relationship and could look at funding implications and monitoring arrangements. The Compact would be based on a holistic vision that would involve key players including those from

the District Councils. The Compact would assess the situation at a county level to see where local services could be best provided.

Some discussion took place around the issue of whether there should be a Cabinet Member or 'Champion' tasked with being the focal point for all County Council funding of voluntary organisations. Also, the possibility of a specific Officer to deal with this issue was raised.

Anita and Catherine emphasised the view that the voluntary sector was being asked to behave in a more businesslike way and to increase its working capacity but to do this it needed the security of core funding backed up by political support. Historically, the voluntary sector had needed to spend a great deal of time in obtaining funding and preparing bids. This was not a good use of limited resources.

The Chairman thanked Anita and Catherine for their valuable contribution to the meeting.

3 PARTNERSHIPS – THE VIEW FROM BUCKS COUNTY COUNCIL

The Chairman welcomed Janice Campbell, Head of Community Care for Adults, to the meeting.

Janice introduced her presentation by outlining three major types of relationship that existed between the statutory and voluntary sector:

- 1 Specialist services provided by voluntary organisations
- 2 Services provided by voluntary organisations of a higher intensity than those provided by the statutory authority
- 3 Services offered by voluntary organisations that were on the periphery of those provided by the statutory authority (historically funded)

Janice reinforced the view that arrangements needed to be formalised between the voluntary and statutory sector and suggested that a Compact could enable this process to happen through the development of written agreements. Janice had only recently become aware of the work to develop a Compact in Buckinghamshire and would shortly be attending a meeting with senior management to examine links with voluntary organisations, funding regimes and representation on the Compact.

A new post of Head of Integrated Commissioning had been created to work across Adult Services and Health in an effort to develop a coordinated approach to voluntary sector provision. It was hoped that service agreements could be streamlined with funding being issued via pooled budgets and with only one set of primary monitoring arrangements being used. It was acknowledged that this could be difficult due to the fluctuating nature of the Social Services budget, but that wording could be included to indicate that the service agreement was subject to 'overall available resources'.

Members were informed that as a result of the Best Value Reviews, funding to some voluntary groups was being ceased. Discussions had taken place with stakeholders and those that did not fit the required brief were given an opportunity to amend their services accordingly. Only those who were unable to amend their services were having funding removed. Groups that indicated they would be willing to change could be provided with an improvement plan and aided by training, which could be facilitated by either the statutory authority or another voluntary organisation.

Members were keen for Janice to come back to the Committee with some ideas regarding recommendations that the Members could take forward to aid the formalising of arrangements between the voluntary and statutory sector. Janice agreed to discuss this with the other members of her team and report back in January.

Members further expressed the view that it would be useful to invite a speaker from a council that already had a Compact in place to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman thanked Janice for attending the meeting and providing Members with such useful information.

4 MEETINGS WITH VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Members were reminded that there had been a suggestion at a previous meeting of the Committee that they visit District Councils and voluntary organisations to find out their views on how they could work with the County Council.

The Chairman had written to Members in October explaining the purpose of the meetings, and had also written to District Councils and voluntary organisations seeking to assess how keen they would be for such visits to take place. The Chairman reported that he had received positive responses so far.

It was agreed that the letter to Members would form the basis of a structured document to assist Members in carrying out the interviews, and that the apportioning of the visits would be included as an agenda item at the next meeting to be held on 11 December 2001.

5 DATE OF FURTHER MEETINGS

11 December 2001
25 January 2002
22 February 2002
22 March 2002 [to avoid Good Friday]
26 April 2002
31 May 2002
28 June 2002
26 July 2002
27 September 2002
25 October 2002
29 November 2002

All meetings to commence at 10.00am.

MR T J FOWLER
CHAIRMAN