



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the meeting of the OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 17TH NOVEMBER 2003 at 6.00 p.m. at The Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Kim HUMPHREYS (Chair)
Councillors Barrie HARGROVE, Stephen FLANNERY (Reserve), John FRIARY, Gavin O'BRIEN, Andy SIMMONS and Neil WATSON.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor James GURLING, Executive Member for Communications & Performance Improvement
Mr Godson Agomuo – Co-opted Voting Member of Overview & Scrutiny Committee [voting Member in relation to Education Matters only]

OFFICER SUPPORT: Shelley Burke - Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Bob Coomber – Chief Executive
Amanda Hirst – Head of Communications and Customer Relations
Lucas Lundgren – Scrutiny Team
Lyn Meadows – Assistant Borough Solicitor
Sarah Naylor – Assistant Chief Executive [Performance & Strategy]

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Linda Manchester and Eliza Mann.

NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMED URGENT

There were none.

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

RECORDING OF MEMBERS' VOTES

Council Procedure Rule 1.17(5) allows a Member to record her/his vote in respect of any motions and amendments. Such requests are detailed in the following Minutes. Should a Member's vote be recorded in respect to an amendment, a copy of the amendment may be found in the Minute File and is available for public inspection.

The Committee considered the items set out on the agenda, a copy of which has been incorporated in the Minute File. Each of the following paragraphs relates to the

item bearing the same number on the agenda.

1. **CALL-IN: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY** [see pages 1-35]

Signatories to the call-in were invited to outline the reasons for the request.

Their concerns were firstly that neither the 4th November 2003 Executive report nor the Communications Strategy [CS] itself made explicit reference to the scrutiny function. Secondly, these Members objected to reference within the Executive report to promotion of the profile of individual Executive Members. Members questioned the legality of this and the appropriateness of Council promotion of individual politicians.

The call-in signatories felt both of these points reflected a lack of clear commitment to the positive promotion of scrutiny as a Council function.

The Chief Executive responded to the signatories. The lack of explicit reference to scrutiny within the Executive covering report and the Communications Strategy was acknowledged and stated to be in error. The explicit reference in the covering report did not form part of the CS protocol, however. He acknowledged the need to give clear and consistent messages to the public, taking into account the role, purpose and outcomes from scrutiny. The CS would ultimately be amended to recognise Council practice and protocols.

The Head of Communications and Customer Relations responded to the signatories concerns. Ongoing proactive development of communications support to scrutiny included timely identification of scrutiny topics/reviews appropriate for communications support/strategy, and liaison with Scrutiny Team. The recent Thames Water item at Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 10th November 2003 had been a pilot for communications support - flyers, web discussion and press releases having been employed to promote the event. The effectiveness of this action would be reviewed.

The Executive Member for Communications & Performance Improvement confirmed that the CS contained nothing to preclude dissemination of scrutiny information or communication of such. He had found the Annual Scrutiny Report an efficient and interesting document and thanked scrutiny Members for their helpful and important suggestions in respect of the CS.

The call-in signatories were concerned that without amendment of the written report and CS document there remained no firm assurance of scrutiny being properly included within the provisions of the CS. There remained an additional imbalance in that reference was not included to Community Councils despite these bodies now having delegated Executive powers. Insufficient examples were given within both the Executive report and CS of what "opportunities for raising the profile of Executive Members" meant in practice. In addition, neither documents had included adequate financial information. The CS protocol must enable a clear distinction to be drawn between Council policy and the political agenda of any individual party or Member.

In response to these points, the Chief Executive reminded Members that Communications Strategy had arisen from the recent Best Value Review of Communications, reports on which had included a great detail of financial information. Mindful of the fine political balance of the Council, propriety remained a priority. In addition, the new constitutional arrangements allowed greater accountability for individual decisions taken by Members.

In response to Member reports of the circulation of publicity material to the public in respect of particular Executive Members within their Wards, the Chief Executive acknowledged that it remained illegal for the authority to put out publicity in support of one particular political party, and that Southwark had not done so in this instance.

The Assistant Borough Solicitor confirmed that the Government Code of recommended practice in respect of publicity acknowledged that it was appropriate for individual Executive Members to be linked with their portfolio.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Executive be asked to re-consider its decision of 4 November 2003 in respect of Item 17 – Building Better Communications: A Communications Strategy for Southwark [Executive Agenda 4/11/03 pages 184-211], addressing the following concerns of Overview & Scrutiny Committee, i.e.
- 2) That the Executive, in conjunction/liaison with the Head of Communications and Customer Relations, be asked to review the Communications Strategy to ensure that the appropriate level/balance of emphasis be given in respect of references throughout the document to Scrutiny/Executive/Community Councils.
- 3) That the Executive be asked to address Overview & Scrutiny Committee's following specific points of concern in relation to the report to the Executive and the Communications Strategy itself, i.e.
 - a) Agenda Page 5: [Report to Executive Committee, 4/11/03, "Building Better Communications – A Communications Strategy for Southwark", paragraph 3]. Delete second bullet point "*Greater recognition throughout the council of opportunities for raising the profile of Executive Members and the council*".
 - b) Agenda Page 13: [Building Better Communications – Corporate Communications Improvement Plan, November 2003: Action identified in relation to effective management of media relations]. Bullet point "*Identify areas of strength, innovation..*" should be clarified to ensure this applies to scrutiny also.
 - c) Agenda Page 14: [Corporate Communications Improvement Plan, November 2003: Action identified in relation to joined up communications and consultation]. Outcome for bullet point "*Continue to support community Councils, scrutiny & decision making..*" refers only to Community Councils and should be amended to explicitly refer to a continuing profile for scrutiny also.
 - d) Agenda Page 18: [Southwark Council Communications Strategy 2003/06]. New paragraph 1.1 to be included making clear reference to the role of both scrutiny and Community Councils within Southwark.

- e) Agenda Page 25: [Protocols section of Southwark Council Communications Strategy 2003/06]. Scrutiny protocols were agreed earlier this year and should be included in paragraph 4.11.
- f) Agenda Page 25: [Protocols section of Southwark Council Communications Strategy 2003/06]. Paragraph 4.11 to include explicit statement that the Council does not promote individual Members or political parties.
- g) Agenda Page 28: [Positive media relations and public affairs section of Southwark Council Communications Strategy 2003/06]. Additional bullet point at paragraph 7.2, stating support for scrutiny function.
- h) Agenda Page 28: [Positive media relations and public affairs section of Southwark Council Communications Strategy 2003/06]. Amend second sentence within paragraph following bullet points at paragraph 7.2 to include reference to “*scrutiny Members*”.
- i) Agenda Page 30: [Action Plan – Communications Framework]. Table to include reference to scrutiny function.

The meeting ended at 6.45 p.m.

CHAIR:

DATED: