

CORPORATE RESOURCES

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 SEPTEMBER 2002 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Guest (Chairman), Councillors Bain, Mrs Bowman, Mrs Bradley, Mrs Fisher (as Substitute for Councillor Joscelyne), Jefferson, Mallinson (J) and Mrs Styth

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors Bloxham, Firth, Fisher (L) and Mrs Geddes were also in attendance as Executive Members in relation to specific items on the Agenda.

CROS.101/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Joscelyne.

CROS.102/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest or declarations of the Party Whip relating to any item on the Agenda.

CROS.103/02 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 August 2002 were circulated. The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy updated Members on a number of matters contained in the Minutes.

RESOLVED - That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 August 2002 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CROS.104/02 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

There were no matters which had been the subject of call-in.

CROS.105/02 CUSTOMER CONTACT BEST VALUE REVIEW

(a) Site Visits

The City Solicitor and Secretary circulated a note of a visit by Members of the Committee and Members of the Executive to Newcastle City Council and Derwentside District Council to discuss Customer Service Centres. He set out the main points of interest gained from the visit and noted in particular the services which were provided at the Newcastle Call Centre, the staffing arrangements, the support systems which were available and in particular the support which had been received for the concept from the Chief Executive and trades

unions.

With regard to the visit to Derwentside, the City Solicitor and Secretary again highlighted the services which were provided at the One-Stop Shops and Call Centre and highlighted the lessons which Carlisle could learn from the Derwentside experience, in particular the requirement that the Customer Service Centre and Call Centre facilities should not be under-resourced that staff needed to be well trained, dedicated and have the right approach to customer services, and that Customer Service Centres should also receive proper and adequate support together with strong political and managerial leadership.

Members discussed the notes in some detail and commented on their impressions of both the Newcastle Customer Service Centre and the Derwentside Customer Service Centre and Call Centre. Members noted that the Customer Service Centre at Newcastle had been impressive in both the style of layout of the Centre and the first impression for visitors, and had successfully provided information which had been requested. The impression endorsed the view that the selection process used in the selection and appointment of staff to work in a Customer Service Centre and the provision of support systems were important element in making the Centre a success.

With regard to the visit to Derwentside, Members commented that whilst a Call Centre had been established, the main telephone switchboard had been retained and it was noted that if the calls were transferred from the switchboard to the Call Centre then it would not be able to cope as the software provided for the Call Centre was not adequate at the present time. Members commented further that both Newcastle and Derwentside Councils had been honest about the processes which they had followed in developing the Customer Service Centres and the pitfalls and problem areas which they had experienced and felt that Carlisle could learn from this. Members agreed that the trip had been very successful and noted that the Customer Service Centre in Newcastle had cost approximately £½ m to establish.

RESOLVED - (1) That the notes of the visit to Newcastle and Derwentside Councils to discuss Customer Service Centres be received.

(2) That it be noted that the Chairman of the Committee had sent letters to both Councils expressing the Committee's thanks for their help and hospitality.

(b) Customer Contact Best Value Review - Update

The Head of IT reported (Financial Memo 2002/03 No 48) on progress with the Customer Contact Best Value Review. He drew Members' attention to recent work which had been carried out to consult with staff and a focus group of customers on proposals to improve the service, an Internet Survey of Staff on the overall review together with the completion of an Action Plan for improving the service.

The Head of IT added that the Audit Commission had also confirmed that the Council's Customer Contact Best Value Review would be included in their programme of inspections for Summer/Autumn 2002.

The Head of IT added that a number of pieces of work which had been commenced as part of the Review would continue after the completion of the Review including the Customer Contact Policy which would be subject to constant revision and the implementation of a Language Line Translation Service. The Head of IT further commented that the costs associated with the implementation of the Customer Service Unit particularly the Customer Contact Centre were currently being reviewed and work was still being carried out to

finalise those costs.

With regard to the question of the Call Centre within the Street Scene Operation, the Head of IT had concluded that whilst the situation presented an anomaly it was proposed that for the time being the operational efficiencies outweighed the benefits of incorporating the operation into the Central Customer Contact Centre and the Call Centre at Carlisle Works should continue subject to a number of provisos as set out in his report.

The Head of IT also circulated a copy of the Best Value Review Team's Final Report on Customer Contact for Members' information and comment.

In response to Members' questions, the Head of Personnel Services commented on the provision of Customer Care training and added that the Council's Training Budget was a fixed resource and the Training Unit would need to consider any bids for Customer Contact Training submitted as part of the Training Needs Analysis by Departments and Sections. Once the requirements had been highlighted, the Training Section would then co-ordinate the provision of training. He noted however that currently whilst the Training Unit provided training on Customer Care, it was in the main provided for Receptionists and Counter Staff and not delivered to senior managers within the Authority.

Members also commented on the difficulties which could be experienced by Departments and Units in allocating staff resources to the new Customer Contact Unit and commented particularly on the problems which could be experienced by smaller sections and of the difficulties which might be caused to professional and technical staff.

The Head of IT commented on the proposals to resource the Contact Centre and added that the staff savings would arise as a result of Units no longer having to carry out their existing Customer Contact duties and those savings would be used to resource the new Centre. He also added that the Customer Contact Centre would carry out functions previously carried out by Departments, thereby releasing spare capacity.

RESOLVED - (1) That the work that had been carried out to date by the Customer Contact Best Value Review Team be noted.

(2) That the work which will carry forward following the conclusion of the Customer Contact Best Value Review as set out in Financial Memo 2002/03 No. 48 be noted.

(3) That the arrangements for the Carlisle Works Call Centre to continue as a separate operation from the Central Customer Contact Centre subject to the provisos set out in Paragraph 4.3 to Financial Memo 2002/03 No 48 be noted.

(4) That the final Best Value Report on Customer Contact be approved in principle for submission to the Executive and Council subject to the issue of final costings which the Executive and Council would need to consider.

(5) That should the final Best Value Report on Customer Contact be not approved by either the Executive or the full Council, it be referred back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

(6) That the Committee's appreciation for the work carried out by the Head of IT in leading the Best Value Review Team and all the Members of the Best Value Review Team in

carrying out the work of the Customer Contact Best Value Review be recorded.

(7) That the Committee's appreciation for the work carried out by the Senior Committee Clerk in preparing the comprehensive notes of the Committee's visit to Newcastle City Council and Derwentside District Council to discuss Customer Service Centres be recorded.

CROS.106/02 COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS

Pursuant to Minute OSM.66/02, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive reported (TC.136/02) on the introduction of a new Inspection regime entitled "Comprehensive Performance Assessments". He informed Members that the aim of Comprehensive Performance Assessments was to measure the performance of Council's and pass a judgement on that performance and give each Council a grading and also to remove a perceived weakness of Best Value which would enable the political and managerial effectiveness of local authorities to be measured.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive informed Members that the assessments would enable the Audit Commission to form a judgement of every English single tier authority by the late Autumn of 2002 with a similar judgement for district councils being prepared by late 2003.

He set out for Members an introduction to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and described the process, which would be followed by the assessment teams together with actions, which could be taken by the authority to prepare for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process. He added that Overview and Scrutiny Committees would become involved in the process at the self-assessment stage.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive in particular drew attention to the need to develop practical partnership links, particularly with the County Council, and highlighted the need for Members and Group Leaders to be involved.

Members in consider the report noted the need to link the Service Plans for individual units with both the City Vision and Corporate Plan and for those links to be understood not just by Chief Officers but by all Members of the City Council and all members of staff.

Following some discussion it was –

RESOLVED – That the report be received and noted.

CROS.107/02 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted a revised work programme for the committee. He drew attention in particular to the special meeting of the Committee which had been arranged for 9 January 2003 to consider the Executive's budget proposals and on the slippage in the work programme for consideration of the IT Services Service Plan which had been caused as a result of the Head of IT's involvement in the Customer Contact Best Value Review.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.

CROS.108/02 SICKNESS ABSENCE AND ILL HEALTH RETIREMENT

Pursuant to Minute CROS.93/02 the Head of Personnel Services reported (TC.177/02) on the draft Action Plan to enable the Council to improve performance in relation to staff absence and ill health retirement. He set out for Members a definition of the indicators for sickness absence and ill health retirements and reminded Members that the Council was currently in the bottom quartile in respect of both indicators.

With regard to sickness absence the Head of Personnel Services commented that controlling and monitoring absence was an integral part of the day to day management of any group of employees and he added that the management of absence required a range of actions and strategies which would ultimately lead to an improved culture where absence was seen as the exception and attendance as norm. He added that there were four key areas for action:

- Appropriate absence management policies and procedures based on best practice

- Comprehensive management information to enable managers to apply policies and procedures in an efficient, effective, equitable manner leading to better performance

- Manager's who are sufficiently trained and confident to apply policies and procedures pro-actively within their areas of responsibility and,

- Adequate and appropriate specialist personnel support for managers to deal with the management of absence.

The Head of Personnel Services then set out an Action Plan with the aim of improving the overall performance of the Council by introducing improvements to each of the above critical areas and building on the measures already in place.

With regards to ill health retirement the Head of Personnel Services commented that the administration of the Council's Pension Scheme already provided a degree of control over the ill health retirement process which was aimed at preventing abuse given that there was a requirement for two doctors to certify that the employee is permanently incapable of discharging the duties of their employment or comparable employment with the authority and also to certify that the infirmity will persist until the employee's 65th birthday.

He added that the opportunities which were open to the Council to influence the level of ill health retirement were limited and related to measures which the Council could put in place to influence the general health of employees in the long term by provision of health education, provision of facilities to encourage healthy lifestyles etc. and the redeployment of employees unable to carry out the duties of their original post to new jobs which they are able to perform irrespective of their health problems.

The Head of Personnel Services further commented that the pursuit of health promotion activities would require additional resources from the Personnel Section and at the present time the section's commitments on organisational review LSVT and externalisation of Leisure would not permit the section to provide any resources to pursue health promotion activities at the current time. He added that the Council's current efforts to find alternative employment for employees with medical conditions impacting on their employment had an impact on the overall absence levels within the authority as it delayed the termination of the employee's employment.

In response to Members' questions the Head of Personnel Services commented that whilst the management of absence was a Performance Indicator which fell within the purview of the Personnel Section, it was not possible for the Personnel Section to control the level of absence and the section's role was to influence and train managers to recognise the problems of absence management.

The Head of Personnel Services further commented that the Best Value target of 6.8 days absence per employee by 2004/5 was a national target which had been set centrally and was not a City Council estimate of what the position might be.

Members further commented that management of absence needed to be recognised and owned by the manager's of business units and also questioned the Head of Personnel Services on the numbers of individuals involved in long terms absences.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report TC.177/02 be noted and the Action Plans contained within that report for the management of sickness absence and ill health retirement be endorsed.

(2) That the Head of Personnel Services submit a progress report to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the position with regard to sickness absence and ill health retirement in three months.

CROS.109/02 FORWARD PLAN – ITEMS RELEVANT TO THE CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reported (TC.163/02) highlighted items in the Forward Plan of Executive decisions for the period 1 September – 31 December 2002 which were of relevance to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – That the issues within the ambit of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee contained within the Forward Plan of Executive decisions for 1 September – 31 December 2002 be noted.

CROS.110/02 MONITORING OF RURAL POLICY

Pursuant to Minute CROS.86/02 the Head of Economic Development informed Members that the Carlisle Parish Councils Association had been invited to send a representative to the meeting to consider this item relating to the Monitoring of the Rural Strategy but had indicated that they would prefer to consider the items first as an Association prior to attending the next round of Council meetings when the rural policy was to be reviewed which was likely to be in February/March 2003.

The Head of Economic Development reported (EDU.15/02) setting out an overview of the actions which were being taken to implement rural policies by both the City Council and other agencies. He informed Members that there was potentially a wide range of funding options available through the Market Town Initiative, which could be available to help implement the Longtown Action Plan. The various projects would however be at different stages of development and would be implemented at different stages during the life of the Plan. He added that the Action Plan should facilitate a more strategic relationship with other funders although there were issues to be considered including the period available to access funds which was must shorter in some areas covered by the Action Plan than others.

The Head of Economic Development added that the Rural Development Programme was in its last year of operation pending the start of the Rural Action Zone funding regime and he added that the Rural Development Programme would be encouraged to act as a pump primer for potential Rural Action Zone projects.

In response to Members' questions he informed the Committee that there were four projects in the City Council's area ear-marked for funding as part of the Rural Development Programme, which included the project at Longtown, Brackenhill Tower and the Lanercost Priory.

With regard to the Brampton Action Plan, the Head of Economic Development added that no further round of Market Town Initiative had been announced and should Brampton wish to pursue the development of an Action Plan, they would need to explore other options principally using the vital Village Programme as a capital list to draw down matching funds.

The Head of Economic Development further commented on discussions which were being held with Carlisle Councils for Voluntary Service and Voluntary Action Cumbria with a view to organising a dedicated event for Carlisle to provide information and help with funding issues.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

CROS.111/02 BEST VALUE REPORT ON RISK
MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY
ARRANGEMENTS

The Director of Environment and Development reported that he had anticipated that an Action Plan in respect of Risk Management and Health and Safety arrangements would have been submitted to this meeting, however the further information which was required to support the Action Plan was not yet available. He informed Members that since the last meeting of the Committee the Best Value Review Team had agreed the consultants report but had highlighted the need for further work to be carried out in producing the information for benchmark and targets and that information was not yet available. He added that whilst the timescales were important there was the need to produce a risk register in the authority and the Review Team had started to prepare that register with the work being funded from existing budgets. He added that work also needed to be carried out to define the Authority's risk culture and he would report further on that to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That it be noted that the Director of Environment and Development is to submit a report to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Corporate Resources with regards to the Risk Management and Health and Safety Action Plan, the Risk Register and the Authority's Risk Culture.

CROS.112/02 ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW

SUB-COMMITTEE

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of the Organisational Assessment Best

Value Review Sub-Committee held on 7 August 2002, a copy of which are referred to as Appendix I to these Minutes, be received.

CROS.113/02 DISABLED/ETHNIC MINORITY EMPLOYEES – PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy reported (TC.172/02) on the authority's performance in employing disabled/ethnic minority employees. He set out the definitions of both Performance Indicators and added that both indicators were likely to be included in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and would influence the outcome of the Council's assessment. He added that both the indicators were now defined as measuring the authority's employment as against a make-up of the local population whereas previously the percentages had not been compared to the local population.

He added that the Council was currently in the bottom quartile for both indicators and he set out the Council's performance on those indicators for the last two years, together with the targets for the forthcoming two years.

The Head of Corporate Policy set out for Members a table showing the comparative performance of the Council against both the family group and the other Cumbrian authorities and detailed for Members the collection and monitoring arrangements for information both on the numbers of disabled employees and the number of employees from minority ethnic communities.

The Head of Corporate Policy also set out the Council's existing policy with regards to recruitment of disabled and ethnic minority employees.

The Head of Personnel Services was in attendance at the meeting and Members questioned him on the Performance Indicators on disability and ethnicity. In response to Members' questions he informed the meeting that consideration had previously been given as to how to target groups to encourage job applications from either disabled or ethnic minority groups, and he questioned whether it was the right policy to target individual groups in the district or whether given the low numbers of ethnic minority populations there were in Carlisle, whether adverts should be included in special publications in areas where there were a high level of ethnic minority populations.

He added that with regards to disabled employees the Council did not target particular groups of disabled people for applications but did guarantee that applicants who were disabled and met the essential criteria of individual posts would be entitled to an interview. He added that all posts were advertised in the local press but that advertising was not targeted at particular groups.

The Head of Personnel Services further commented that the base line disability data for Council employees was collected by means of a staff survey which asked individuals to declare whether they were disabled within the terms of Disability Discrimination Act. He added that the survey which had been carried out in 1997 had resulted in very few individuals declaring themselves to be disabled and there was some discussion as to the reasons why a low number of staff had declared themselves to be disabled and the possible option of the Council providing staff with further information on what the results of the survey were to be used for and carrying out a further survey of staff on this matter.

Members in considering the matter felt that there was need for the Council to be pro-active in encouraging both existing staff to declare themselves to be disabled, if that were to be the case, and in encouraging disabled people to submit applications for vacant posts and in

that regard it was felt that assistance could be sought from both the trades unions and the local press.

The Head of Policy added that the base line data for the number of disabled people and ethnic minority populations within the City Council's area would be updated as a result of the 2001 Census.

RESOLVED – That the Head of Personnel Services report back to the next meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a draft Action Plan for the Council to improve performance in relation to disability and ethnicity. The Plan to include timescales, targets, any costs involved and proposals for funding the same.

CROS.114/02 AREA WORKING – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reported (TC.166/02) on the issue of Area Based Working for the City Council. The Town Clerk and Chief Executive set out four basic questions for Members to consider as part of the Area Working debate:

What would an Area Based structure do?

How would it operate?

What would it look like?

Advantages and disadvantages of area involvement for Carlisle.

The Chairman felt it appropriate to consider this item in greater detail at the next meeting of Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

There was some discussion as to how the views of the Political Groups on the Council could be fed into the Area Working Review and it was felt that the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee should give further consideration to the report prepared by the Town Clerk and Chief Executive for the current meeting (TC.166/02) to enable the Committee to focus on the key issues prior to the matter being opened up to other members of the Council in the form of a larger workshop.

RESOLVED – (1) That report TC.166/02 Area Working Overview and Scrutiny Review be considered further at the next meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the matter be placed towards the start of the Agenda for that meeting.

(2) That in view of her previous experiences of neighbourhood forums, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive invite Georgina Ternant, the Raffles SRB Project Manager, to attend the next meeting of the Committee for the item on Area Working.

(3) That the Town Clerk and Chief Executive collect other information on the links between Council's and other agencies and partners who are employed in joint working in particular the work of the Copeland Joint Neighbourhood Forum.

CROS.115/02 BUDGET 2003/04 TO 2005/06 GRANT
DISTRIBUTION SPENDING REVIEW AND BUDGET
TIMETABLE

Pursuant to Minute EX.211/02 the City Treasurer reported (Financial Memo 2002/3 No. 29) on the Government's proposals for the revision to the Grant Distribution System and the affects of those various options on Carlisle. He informed Members that it had been anticipated that a further report would be submitted on the content of the consultation document, however, further information was presently awaited and would be submitted to the Executive once it was available and prior to any response being issued to the Government.

The City Treasurer also reported on details of a briefing circular summarising the outcome of the local government spending review for the three year period 2003/4, 2005/6 and set out a draft timetable to progress the various stages of the budget through the Council's democratic process.

He drew Members attention to the special meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee arranged for Thursday, 9 January 2003 at 10.30 am to consider the Executive's budget proposals.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be received and noted.

(2) That it be noted the City Treasurer would circulate any new information on the Government's options for the revision of the Grant Distribution systems and the effect of those options on Carlisle prior to the Council's response being issued to the government.

(3) That the draft budget timetable as set out in Financial Memo 2002/03 No. 29 together with the inclusion of the special meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 January 2003 be noted.

(The meeting ended at 4.50 pm)