

CORPORATE RESOURCES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, 18 APRIL 2002 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Guest (Chairman), Councillors Bain, Mrs Blackadder, Mrs Bradley, Jefferson, Mrs Parsons, Mrs J Prest and Ms Watson (as substitute for Councillor Mrs Styth)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Mrs Geddes, Stevenson and L Fisher attended as Executive Members, in relation to specific items on the agenda

CROS.42/02 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The Chairman commented that this was Mrs MacKay, the Committee Clerk's, last meeting prior to the commencement of maternity leave. He passed on to her the best wishes of the committee.

CROS.43/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Styth.

CROS.44/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest or Declarations of the Party Whip relating to any item on the agenda.

CROS.45/02 MINUTES

RESOLVED – (1) That the Minutes of the meetings held on 8 and 24 January be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

(2) That the Minutes of the meetings on 28 February, 7 March and 3 April 2002 be noted.

CROS.46/02 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

CROS.47/02 REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME

The City Treasurer submitted Financial Memo 2002/03 No. 3 setting out the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel, which had been established by the Council to advise on and review the scheme of Members' Allowances. Mr Bill Swarbrick, Chairman of the Panel, attended the meeting and outlined the following recommendations of the Panel:

(a) That there be no change to the Basic Allowance which shall remain at £3,700* (including

£200* telephone allowance).

(b) That there should be no changes to the current Special Responsibility Allowances* as set out in the existing 2001/02 Scheme.

(c) That there be no change to the Dependant Carer's Allowance of up to £4.50* per hour.

(d) That the City Council consider the issue of provision of information to Members and particularly whether a second telephone line should be provided.

(e) That it be noted that the issue of travel and subsistence, other allowances and pensions is awaiting Government legislation and is not currently a matter that the Panel can advise on.

*As previously determined by the Panel all of the allowance will be index-linked to the Council's annual salary increase for staff in any given financial year.

Mr Swarbrick advised that the Panel had met with Group Leaders and the Town Clerk and Chief Executive in relation to the recommendations and that the main focus of the debate had been over telephone allowances. The Panel were recommending that the Council carry out a comprehensive review of the provision of telephone lines.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive added that a comprehensive review would be undertaken of telephones and the electronic transmission of information and that if there were implications for telephone allowances, they could be examined as part of that report. He concurred with the recommendation that until this comprehensive review is undertaken, telephone allowances should remain as at present.

Members commented that the issue of particular concern to Members in relation to telephone allowances was the fact that they were now being taxed on this allowance and therefore the allowance was not covering the cost of line rental. They suggested that this should be examined as part of the comprehensive review. In addition, the review should also look at the Council having ownership of any second lines and therefore meeting installation or de-installation costs.

The Chairman then thanked Mr Swarbrick for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the following comments of the Committee on the Panel's recommendations be passed on to the City Council:

"It was noted that the City Treasurer would be carrying out a comprehensive review of telephones and the electronic transmission of information. Allowances should be looked at as part of this comprehensive review, in particular, implications for Members of taxation on the telephone allowance and the Council having ownership of any second lines installed".

CROS.48/02 COUNCILLOR MENTORING SCHEME

There was submitted a copy of a decision, PF.007/02, made by the Corporate Resources Portfolio Holder, to introduce a voluntary Mentoring Scheme for Members, with mentoring to be provided by both Officers and Members.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Mrs Geddes, the Corporate Resources Portfolio Holder, and Principal Personnel Officer attended the meeting.

The Principal Personnel Officer then gave a presentation on the Councillor Mentoring Scheme, giving a brief outline of what the Mentoring Scheme was, how it would work and benefits for Officers for Members of being

involved in the scheme.

Councillor Mrs Geddes and the Principal Personnel Officer then answered various Members' questions in relation to specific aspects of the Councillor Mentoring Scheme. During discussion, Members made the following comments on the scheme:

- (a) Independent Members of the smaller groups may find it difficult to benefit from mentoring in Committee meeting situations, as they are often the only Member representing their group and therefore can not have a mentor Member alongside them. The involvement of an Officer in this area was seen as inappropriate.
- (b) Members expressed doubts about what value the Scheme would add to current mentoring schemes in place within each of the Groups. The Portfolio Holder and the Officer involved suggested that it would formalise and standardise information available with every new Member having a specific quality of information. Mentors would be properly trained and this would benefit the Member receiving the mentoring.
- (c) There would be formal training for Officer and Member mentors, although this was not to a specific qualification standard. The Officer involved suggested that if Officers or Members did want to achieve an accreditation level for any training, this may have to be undertaken in their own time.
- (d) Any Officer involvement in the Mentoring Scheme would be voluntary but that the mentoring would be undertaken within Council time. Members expressed concern that this was not necessarily the best use of an Officer's time and that Officers are already fully committed with existing workloads.
- (e) Members suggested that in addition to the Mentoring Scheme, there could be training sessions for all Members on procedures in committee and City Council and that the A – Z of Carlisle should be updated.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the presentation by the Principal Personnel Officer and the Portfolio Holder be noted and the comments of the Committee as detailed above be addressed by the Principal Personnel Officer in the implementation of the scheme.

CROS.49/02 RISK AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW

- UPDATE

Further to Minute reference OSN.24/01 when the Best Value Review of Risk and Safety Management was scoped by the Management Committee, the Director of Environment and Development submitted report EN.052/02 providing an update on progress with the review. He advised that consultants had been appointed to assist the review team and he submitted a project plan. He then gave a verbal update on progress with each of the following elements of the review – challenge, compete, compare and consult.

The Director advised that Members of the Committee would need to take part in the review by beginning to identify the key risks facing the authority. He suggested that this could be done in the form of a workshop, with the Risk Management Consultant facilitating the workshop. The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reinforced the importance of Member input into this stage of the process.

Members welcomed the proposal to hold a workshop and suggested that it should also involve the Officers who are on the review team. In response to a Member's question the Director advised that presentations to all Members of the City Council had been built into the project plan at a later stage.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive added that Risk Management was a cultural issue which would have to become a dimension of every employee's job. He added that it would need to feature highly in the Corporate Plan, appear in Business Plans of Service Units and in job descriptions of staff. The Organisational Review would examine where the focus of risk management would fit at a strategic level.

RESOLVED – (1) That the project plan as detailed in report EN.052/02 be approved.

(2) That the Director of Environment and Development and the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy, in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee, arrange a workshop session, to be facilitated by the Risk Management Consultants, involving Members of this committee and Officers on the Best Value Review team, to identify the key risks facing the authority.

CROS.50/02 PROPERTY SERVICES BEST VALUE INSPECTION

The Director of Environment and Development submitted report EN.047/02 containing the Audit Commission Inspector's report on the Property Services Best Value Review.

The Property Services Manager attended the meeting and outlined the recommendations in the Inspector's report, commenting that they raised a number of corporate issues, as well as issues specific to the Property Services team.

In light of the Inspector's report, a revised Best Value Action Plan was submitted for consideration by Members.

Councillor Stevenson attended the meeting as the Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder, and advised that the Executive and the Council had taken on board the comments in the Inspector's report. He added, however, that the DTLR had commented very positively on the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan.

Members echoed the comments of the Portfolio Holder in relation to the work on the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan and expressed their confidence in the Officers in the Section. They commented that the Inspector's report had really highlighted that property should be looked at as a corporate resource.

Members then referred to the Revised Best Value Action Plan and specifically recommendation R11 – "Ensure that the views of occupiers and staff are consistently identified and properly taken into account in operational property matters". They questioned the deadline date for Customer Satisfaction Surveys of 1 March 2005 and suggested that this should be brought forward as consultation with customers and Customer Satisfaction Surveys were crucial. Officers acknowledged these comments and undertook to bring forward the implementation of Customer Satisfaction Surveys and undertake them as a matter of some urgency.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Best Value report from the Audit Commission Inspector's be noted.

(2) That the Best Value Action Plan be agreed, subject to the amendment of the deadline date in respect of R11 on Customer Satisfaction Surveys.

CROS.51/02 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted a revised work programme for the committee. He commented that workshops could be held for each Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss work programmes for 2002/03.

RESOLVED – That the work programme for the committee, as approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, be noted.

CROS.52/02 EXECUTIVE RESPONSES TO MATTERS RAISED BY THIS COMMITTEE

Developing a Local Strategic Partnership Strategy

Further to Minute reference CROS.27/02 an excerpt from the Minutes of the Executive (Minute EX.075/02) was submitted. The Executive had referred to the fact that a decision had been taken by the City Council on the development of a Local Strategic Partnership.

RESOLVED – That the decision of the Executive be noted.

CROS.53/02 THE FORWARD PLAN – ITEMS RELEVANT TO CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted report TC.080/02, highlighting items in the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for 1 April – 31 July 2002, which are of particular relevance to this committee.

RESOLVED – That the issues within the ambit of this committee contained within the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for 1 April – 31 July 2002 be noted.

CROS.54/02 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2001/02

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted a draft Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees for 2001/02. He outlined the contents of the report and summarised the progress of Overview and Scrutiny Committees since their introduction. He then asked Members to consider the contents of the report and give any views which could be incorporated into the report, prior to its submission to the City Council.

Members welcomed the report and commented on improvements which had been achieved in the working relationship between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

RESOLVED – That the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2001/02 be referred to the City Council.

CROS.55/02 CUSTOMER CONTACT BEST VALUE REVIEW – UPDATE

Further to Minute reference CROS.31/02, the Head of Information Technology presented Financial Memo 2002/03 No. 4, informing Members of progress of the project team conducting the Customer Care Best Value Review.

The Head of IT provided details of the consultation exercises on the current service, including the results of the mystery shopping exercise, comments by the project team on the lessons to be learned from that exercise and the results of the random survey drawn from the Citizens' Panel. In addition, he highlighted progress in consultation on the new Customer Contact Policy and on work in detailing a final customer contact model for adoption by the Council.

In relation to the "Challenge" element of the review, he reminded Members that at the last meeting they had

asked for detailed proposals to be drawn up for two different contact models, namely, a separate single Customer Contact Unit and a DSO run Customer Contact Unit. He advised that work had progressed on these but it was felt that the two models were almost identical, differing only in the way the service was managed. As these differences were slight, they may not constitute a robust enough challenge to the existing service. He therefore proposed a variation to this challenge element by including in one model provision for the out of hours telephone and electronic equipment to be provided by a third party.

The Head of IT then outlined proposals for improvements of any future service and highlighted progress for including partner organisations. He identified some key recommendations for immediate implementation and asked Members to consider these.

He then answered various Members' questions on specific aspects of the mystery shopper exercise and undertook to feedback comments to the organisation which had conducted the exercise.

Members then referred to the key recommendations for immediate implementation as detailed in Appendix B2 of the report. In response to Members' questions the Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that, if the Committee supported these recommendations they would be suggesting to the Executive that they be implemented immediately. Whether that was done and how it was done would be a matter for the Executive to determine.

Members expressed some reluctance to make recommendations to the Executive as there were no costs associated with any of the improvements and they could not see that the recommendations being proposed were addressing matters which were of immediate concern to the public in their contact with the Council. They acknowledged that each of the key recommendations for immediate improvement did signify an area which could be improved, but their concerns were that they did not meet the immediate needs and concerns of the public which related more to their initial contact with people in the Civic Centre.

The Head of IT and the Town Clerk and Chief Executive suggested that if the priorities for immediate improvement as detailed in appendix B2, were not seen as priorities for the Committee, Members should give some indication of their priorities in relation to improvement of customer contact in order that these could be progressed as part of the review. It was suggested that each Member should consider what they thought were priorities for immediate and subsequent improvement in relation to customer contact and feed these comments to the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy who would then pass them on to the Head of IT for consideration at the next meeting of the committee.

RESOLVED – (1) That a variation to, and extension of, the challenge element of the review as outlined above and detailed in paragraph 4 of the report be approved.

(2) That, nearer the time, a visit to a facility closely resembling any final proposal would be appropriate.

(3) That Members each consider the report and pass their comments on priorities for immediate and subsequent improvements in relation to customer contact to the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy who would collate them and forward them to the Head of IT for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee. Members to forward their comments to the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy within two weeks and the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy to remind all Members of the need for comments prior to the completion of that two week period.

CROS.56/02 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE – ANNUAL REPORT 2001/02

The Head of Committee and Administration attended the meeting and presented report TC.59/02 which contained the Corporate Complaints Procedure Annual Report for 2001/02. He outlined the contents of the report, reminding Members of the three stages of the current Corporate Complaints Procedure, after which

there was still an avenue to go to the Local Government Ombudsman.

He outlined a number of observations from the operation of the complaints procedure and highlighted the need to ensure that Members nominated to the Appeals Panel can meet at relatively short notice as the Corporate Complaints Boards of Arbitration.

The scope of the Customer Contact Review had been extended to include Corporate Complaints and the Head of Committee and Administration gave an update on the Consult and Compare aspects of that review. Members' comments were sought on whether the form of the complaints procedure should continue as at present whether further options should be considered.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Corporate Complaints Procedure Annual Report for 2001/02 be noted.

(2) That the Consult and Compare Aspects of the Customer Contact Best Value Review applicable to the Council's Complaints Procedure be noted.

(3) That the form of the Corporate Complaints Procedure should continue as at present, and that if a bigger pool of Members is necessary for Boards of Arbitration, officers could recommend to the City Council that the Constitution be amended by saying any three Members from any of the Appeals Panels.

CROS.57/02 ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Organisational Assessment Best Value Review Sub-Committee meetings held on 22 February, 13 March and 22 March, attached at Appendices A, B and C, be approved.

CROS.58/02 CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS UNIT – SERVICE PLAN 2001/02

As part of a programme aimed at familiarising Members with the Service Plans within the responsibility of this Committee, the Service Plan for the Corporate Communications Unit was submitted. Ms S McKee, the Head of Communications, then gave a presentation on the work of the Unit and outlined the contents of the Service Plan.

In considering the contents of the presentation and Service Plan, Members commented as follows:

(a) The use of the Castle Logo was being standardised on City Council publications with the exception of Mayoral and Civic, which used the City Council Crest. Members pointed the need to have a full discussion on the use of one single logo at some point in the future, and the Head of Communications suggested that this may be appropriate after the outcome of the Organisational Review.

(b) Local Democracy Week

Members of minority groups commented that they had not been involved in this and that in order to be a true reflection of local democracy, Members from all groups should be involved in future events.

(c) The use of notice boards in the City Centre to promote City Council and other events could be improved.

RESOLVED – That the Service Plan and presentation be noted and the comments of the Committee as outlined above taken on board.

(The meeting ended at 4.57 pm)

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