

# **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

## **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY 1 AUGUST 2002 AT 2.00 PM**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Guest (Chairman), Bain, Mrs Bradley, Mrs Bowman, Jefferson, Joscelyne, Mallinson (J) and Stothard (as substitute for Councillor Mrs Styth).

### **CROS.82/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Styth.

### **CROS.83/02 AGENDA**

Members referred to the late circulation of the Best Value Report on Risk Management and Health and Safety Arrangements which they had received the day before the meeting, and commented that given the size of the document they had had little time to read and consider the report.

Members were informed that they were not expected to give detailed consideration to the report at this meeting, but that the Director of Environment and Development would welcome any comments on the report, and would submit a detailed Action Plan to the next meeting of the Committee.

### **CROS.84/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of personal interests in respect of any item on the Agenda.

### **CROS.85/02 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 18 April, 20 May, 7, 13 and 28 June 2002 were signed by the Chairman as a true record of the meetings.

### **CROS.86/02 MATTERS ARISING – RURAL STRATEGY**

Pursuant to Minute OSM.48/02 the Chairman reported the receipt of a letter from the Economic Development Manager, regarding proposals to achieve representation from rural bodies as part of the Overview and Scrutiny process in monitoring the Rural Policy. He informed Members that it was proposed to submit Action Plans covering different themes within the Rural Strategy to the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in August and September, and at this stage the Economic Development Manager proposed to invite a representative from the Carlisle Parish Councils Association only to those

initial meetings, and to not extend the invitation to other rural organisations at this stage.

He added that individual Committees might wish to consider particular issues at later meetings where representation from other outside bodies would be helpful.

RESOLVED – (1) That the letter be received.

(2) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Corporate Resources are satisfied that for the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in August and September an invitation be extended only to the Carlisle Parish Council's Association to consider the item relating to the monitoring of the Rural Strategy.

(3) That further consideration be given at the Committee's next meeting to possible representation from other outside bodies when consideration was given to particular issues relating to the Rural Strategy.

(4) That it be noted that the representatives would be able to attend and speak at the meetings but would not be able to vote.

#### CROS.87/02 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

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

#### CROS.88/02 WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme was circulated. The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy commented on consideration which was being given to the monitoring of Performance Indicators which appear in the lower quartiles, and drew Members attention to the item included later on the Agenda regarding Sickness Absence/ill Health Retirement.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy also reminded Members that as part of the Council's Budget process, a special meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been arranged for early January 2003 to consider the Executive's budget proposals. He added that it was proposed that similar arrangements should be made in respect of the Council's forthcoming budget cycle.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy also added that the Committee had almost completed its Review of Service Plans and suggested that further consideration of Service Plans by the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be held in abeyance for a year.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Report be noted.

(2) That a special meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee be arranged for Thursday 9 January 2003 at 10.30 am to consider the Executive's budget proposals, the meeting to be preceded by a briefing for Members at 10.00 am.

(3) It be noted that it was likely that there might be other special meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to consider the Executive's Budget proposals, and once arrangements for those meetings had been finalised the City Solicitor and Secretary write to inform all Members of the details.

(4) That it be noted that the requirement on the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and other Overview and Scrutiny Committees to monitor the Rural Plan, had not been included in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme, and the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy arrange to include the monitoring of the Rural Plan in the Programme together with relevant dates once they are available.

(5) That in terms of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committees' Subject Reviews/Enquiries, the Review of Area Working be included as the Committee's first priority.

(6) That it be noted that the Review of Service Plans included in the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme had been concluded and that further reviews of Service Plans be held in abeyance for approximately one year.

**CROS.89/02 MONITORING OF FORWARD PLAN – ITEMS RELEVANT  
TO CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reported (TC.139/02) on issues within the ambit of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee which were included in the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for the period 1 August – 30 November 2002.

**RESOLVED – That the report be noted.**

**CROS.90/02 CUSTOMER CONTACT BEST VALUE REVIEW – UPDATE**

The City Treasurer reported (Financial Memo 2002/03 No.40) on progress of the Customer Contact Best Value Review. He informed Members of the work which was currently being carried out and added that the outstanding work was mainly to do with consultation on the final report and the Action Plan, and he hoped to present the final version to the next meeting of this Committee.

The Head of IT set out for Members details of work which had either been completed or was in progress and which would have an immediate and positive impact on the current Customer Contact Service, and added that for a modest subscription the Council would be able to respond to Customer Service requests and queries in over 40 different languages. The Head of IT

further commented that a bid had been submitted through the Local Strategic Partnership to provide access to Council services from a mobile facility, as part of an Invest to Save Bid.

The intention would be to provide a complete range of on-line services for those hard to reach customers in rural and urban areas.

The Head of IT further commented that the Review Team had investigated possible locations for a new Customer Contact Centre and had concluded that the central foyer area of the Civic Centre would, subject to re-modelling, be the best location for any new Customer Contact Centre. He added that the Building Services Manager had drawn up provisional estimates and the provisional costs for that solution would be £850,000. He set out for Members a copy of the estimates.

The Head of IT also commented on progress which the Review Team had made regarding the possibility of providing externally the out of hours service. To that effect visits had been made to the Fire Service and to the Careline facility, and he was satisfied that either of those organisations could be used to provide a cost effective out of hours service. The Head of IT also commented on arrangements which had been made to visit Customer Contact facilities at both Newcastle and Derwentside on 28 August 2002.

The Head of IT lastly circulated a draft final report and invited Members comments on the document. He added that an Action Plan was currently being prepared and would form part of that report.

Members in considering the report sought further details on the Invest to Save bid particularly the period for which any funding would be available. The details of routes and frequency of visits to areas, the numbers of staff that would be required and the length of contract which the staff would enjoy. Members also commented on the possibility of bolting that service onto existing services such as the Mobile Library Service.

The Head of IT explained that the Invest to Save bid was currently an expression of interest and a further report would be prepared if the bid proceeded beyond that stage, many of the detail issues raised by members would be addressed in that further Report. With regards to a partnership approach to the project the scheme was being considered as part of a partnership umbrella, and he added that consideration would be given to including a number of services as part of the proposals.

Members also commented on the capital cost involved in remodelling the central foyer area of the Civic Centre as a new Customer Contact Centre, and were concerned at the estimated cost of £850,000 for the scheme. Members also questioned the reason why a number of other locations had been discounted as possible venues for the Customer Contact Centre. The Head of IT cautioned that whilst the figures included in the report for the refurbishment of the Civic Centre Foyer as a Customer Contact Centre were provisional, the capital cost of any new Customer Contact Centre would be

significant and it would be a matter for the Executive to come to a decision on the value which they placed on the provision of Customer Contact Services by the City Council. He added however that he would be holding a further meeting with colleagues early next week to firm up the figures for the Customer Contact Centre and those would be included in the Review Team's final report.

Members also sought details as to the service which was to be provided out of hours and how that would interlink with the present emergency out of hours service.

RESOLVED – (1) That the work carried to date by the Review Team be noted.

(2) That the immediate improvements which had been put in place to improve the current Customer Contact Service as set out in Appendix A to Financial Memo 2002/03 No.40 be noted.

(3) That the proposal to include the multi-lingual service as part of the Customer Contact Service be noted.

(4) That the Invest to Save Bid 5 be noted.

(5) That the proposal to use the Civic Centre Foyer as the location for the Customer Contact Centre be noted, it being further noted that there was some concerns regarding the cost of the proposals.

(6) That the arrangements for providing an out of hours service be noted.

(7) That the arrangements to visit two sites which operate Customer Contact facilities at Newcastle and Derwentside on 28 August 2002 be noted.

(8) That the initial draft of the final Best Value Report as attached to Financial Memo 2002/03 No.40 as an Appendix be noted, and the Head of IT be asked to consider further and report back to the next meeting on:

the proposal in page 4 paragraph 13(3) that the Carlisle Works Service Desk continues in operation as this would seem to be against the spirit of the present Council policy of one integrated Council, and

a proposal on page 6 in the paragraph headed "Staff" the proposal being to exclude Council Tax and Benefits.

#### CROS.91/02 CUSTOMER CONTACT BEST VALUE REVIEW – IMPROVEMENTS

Pursuant to Minute CROS.73/02 and EX.199/02 the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy reported that the Executive had authorised the Corporate Management Team in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder to arrange for works to be carried out arising from the Customer Contact Best

Value Review which had a nil or minimum cost prior to the outcome of the final report. The Review Team had taken forward a total of 11 such improvements as noted in Minute CROS.90/02.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy advise the Executive of the works which had been implemented.

#### CROS.92/02 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – ANNUAL REPORT

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reported (TC.141/02) on the City Council's performance against its Best Value and local Indicators for 2001/02. He added that comments were attached in respect of those indicators where the Council's performance was significantly better or worse than forecast.

Members in dealing with the report commented that the Council was focusing its attention on improving the Council's Performance Indicators which were currently in the lower quartiles and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees were giving detailed consideration to those indicators.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

#### CROS.93/02 SICKNESS ABSENCE/ILL HEALTH RETIREMENT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy reported (TC.138/02) on the definitions of the Performance Indicator for Sickness Absence and the Performance Indicator of ill Health Retirements. He informed Members that both the Indicators were likely to be included in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and would influence the outcome of the Council's assessment.

He added that the Council was currently in the bottom quartile with the Council's performance for 2001/02 of 12.7 days sickness absence against a target of 8.7 days and added that the nationally set target for District Councils for 2004/05 was 6.8 days sickness absence per employee. He added that the Council's performance for 2001/02 in respect of Ill Health Retirements was 1.17 against a target of 0.65, the target for 2002/03 was 1% and 2003/04 was 0.9%.

The Head of Corporate Policy set out for Members a table showing the absence rates in different parts of the Council and a comparison between long term and short term absences, together with a comparison of the City Council's performance against our own "family group". The Head of Corporate Policy also set out a comparison on ill health retirements with the other Cumbrian authorities. He detailed for Members the monitoring arrangements which were currently in place for long and short term sickness absences and appended a copy of the Council's existing policy on sickness absence.

He informed Members of actions which were currently being taken by the Authority including the provision of specific Manager training courses.

The Head of Personnel Services was in attendance at the meeting and Members questioned him on the Performance Indicators for Sickness Absence and ill Health Retirement. In response to Members questions the Head of Personnel informed the meeting that approximately half of the Managers within the authority had received training on dealing with sickness absence, and it was proposed to continue with the training programme until all Managers had participated. He added that CMT had given a commitment to the provision of management training dealing with sickness absence, and he was confident that it would be delivered.

The Head of Personnel reported that the difference between Sickness Absence Monitoring in the Works Department and within the Civic Centre were mainly to reflect different circumstances, but the main provisions of schemes were the same. As an example he informed Members that the Civic Centre staff were required to report to their Line Manager within one hour of their normal starting time, whereas in the Works Department staff were required to report in before their starting time to enable arrangements for appointments etc to be changed.

The Head of Personnel Services reported that the Council's Sickness Absence Policy was being reviewed and as part of the management training on Sickness Absence, Managers were being requested to submit any ideas for improvements or adjustments to the policy, and the Action Plan for monitoring sickness absence would include a requirement to review the Policy. Part of the review would be an input from Managers.

The Head of Personnel Services informed Members that quarterly monitoring reports detailing levels of sickness absence were issued to each Chief Officer, which included both a Summary Report and an in-depth analysis of the sickness absence in their own Department. He informed Members that the report was approximately one month out of date but covered a three month period and would present Chief Officers with enough information to enable action to be taken. The information was provided to Chief Officers on the understanding that it would be circulated to Line Managers as appropriate.

The Head of Personnel Services confirmed that there was no detailed analysis of stress related illnesses, although the Council was aware that stress was one of the major causes of sickness absence. He added that incidence of stress related illness tended to be fewer in number but were long term absences. He commented that there was no evidence of stress related illness being prevalent in any particular Department nor had the Authority investigated the impact of delays in filling posts on the incidences of stress related illness within the Authority. He added that management training had been given to help Managers deal with employees suffering from stress, and information had also been distributed to employees on dealing with causes and symptoms of stress.

The Head of Personnel Services commented that with regards to the figures for long term absence per employee, that any organisation which employed 1200 people would statistically have a number of long term absences. There would be a variety of causes and it could be that the majority of reasons for long term illness were not work related. He added that there was no systematic system for monitoring Manager's performance in dealing with long term absences and added that whilst there was a link between the Personnel Section and individual Managers the management of the absence was a matter for the individual Managers with help and support from the Personnel Section. He added that dependant upon the reasons for the absence the individual Managers would need to adopt a different approach to managing the absence.

The Head of Personnel also confirmed that as part of an employees induction, the pack to new starters contained information on absence.

With regard to individuals being informed of their sickness record, the Head of Personnel informed the meeting that the information was distributed to Chief Officers and it was a matter for them to take action as appropriate.

That with regard to the staff facilities and encouragement of healthy practice, the Head of Personnel Services did not consider the provision of canteen facilities for staff would have an impact on the level of staff absences but he would however support the provision of a canteen. He felt that there were other factors than staff facilities which would affect the level of staff absences and he highlighted instances in particular Departments where changes in working patterns had had an appreciable impact on the absence levels of particular sections.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources commented on investigations which were being carried out to provide facilities for staff and confirmed that interim canteen facilities would be provided for staff before Christmas with proper facilities being provided in the future.

The Head of Personnel Services also confirmed that flu jabs had been offered to all staff last year and that the Council had never tried to provide incentives to staff for good attendance. This was mainly due to the potential cost involved.

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 staff absence and ill health retirements. The plan to include timescales, targets and any costs involved and proposals for funding the same. The Action Plan to also include timescales for the completion of the provision of training for Managers in dealing with sickness absence and to address the provision of facilities for staff.



CROS.94/02 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 18 July 2002 which are referred to as Appendix 1 to these Minutes be received.

CROS.95/02 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - MEMBER TRAINING

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy informed Members that topics for training already suggested included Overview and Scrutiny Skills, Team Building, Performance Management, Council Budget and Best Value and he sought any further suggestions from Members and requested an indication as to the priorities which might be attached to the training.

In response to Members' questions, the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy suggested that, at least initially, training on the Budget, Best Value and Performance Management could be provided in-house. He also added that the inclusion of Area working within the Committee's Work Programme could include initially a background report with an option for further investigation which might include input from Authorities where Area Working was already in place.

RESOLVED - That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee be informed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Corporate Resources consider their training priorities to be the Council Budget and Performance Management.

CROS.96/02 SERVICE PLAN - REVENUES AND BENEFITS

The City Treasurer presented the Revenues Division Service Plan for 2002/03. He drew Members' attention in particular to the Service Standards for both Council Tax and Housing and Council Tax Benefits and to the various objectives as included in the Service Plan.

RESOLVED - That the details of the Revenues Division Service Plan for 2002/03 be received.

CROS.97/02 DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

The City Treasurer reported (Financial Memo 2002/03 No 25) on a Review of the Council's Discretionary Rate Relief Policy. He informed Members that as part of the Review, consultation had been carried out with other Cumbrian authorities and similar authorities nationwide. An analysis of the schemes suggested that the Council's current scheme of allowing 100% relief to qualifying organisations via mandatory and discretionary provisions was the most generous in comparative terms.

The City Treasurer further commented that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had recently issued revised guidance on Rate Relief for Charities and other Non-Profit-Making Organisations which had clarified a number of definitions and criteria used by organisations that qualified for relief. The guidance also gave information with regard to procedures to be used on notification of decisions, an area where the Council's current policy and administrative practices were weak. He set out for Members detailed guidance on administrative/policy procedures that the Council could now follow in considering applications for Discretionary Rate Relief.

The City Treasurer circulated a summary of organisations which currently qualified for Discretionary Rate Relief. He added that due to the growing numbers of organisations qualifying for relief, the Council's 2002/03 Budget provision of £50,540 was now overspent and the Council would need to consider increasing its Discretionary Rate Relief budget at revised estimate stage to fund future applications. He added that the Council was likely to receive some significant applications for relief over the medium term.

RESOLVED - That the Executive be informed that the Report and accompanying recommendations as set out in Financial Memo 2002/03 No 25 was acceptable to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee, subject to an amendment which was agreed by the City Treasurer of Paragraph 1.3 on page 17 so that it now reads:

- 1.3 Have the facilities been provided by self-help and/or grant aid?

#### CROS.98/02 RISK SAFETY MANAGEMENT - BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Director of Environment and Development circulated a copy of the Best Value Report on Risk Management and Health and Safety Arrangements which had been prepared by the Council's Consultants - Marsh UK Limited. The Director acknowledged the late circulation of the Report and added that whilst he was not expecting detailed feedback he would welcome Members' comments which he could then include as part of the detailed Action Plan on the Report which he was proposing to submit to the next meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He also added that he would welcome any input from Members outside the meeting.

The Director added that the Review had focused on the strategic direction of the Council's Risk Management arrangements and added that the Review had addressed all steps in the Risk Management process which included arrangements for identifying and assessing significant risks, framework for managing risks, clarifying roles and responsibilities and reporting and monitoring arrangements.

He drew Members' attention to the recommendations relating to the Council's Health and Safety Management. The Director added that as part of the Action Plan, the Council would need to produce a comprehensive General Risk Assessment and he added that consideration would need to be given as to

whether this Assessment was carried out in-house or by an external consultant.

In response to Members' questions, the Director of Environment and Development commented that a Strategic Risk Assessment could be carried out either by the District Auditor or by external consultants for which a fee would be charged. He added that the Council would produce a Risk Management Register and provision for staffing had been made in the current Organisational Review. He added that there could also be a role for Internal Audit in managing the Council's Risk Management Register and added that consideration needed to be given to reporting mechanisms to Members either by submitting regular reports to this Committee or to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

The Director of Environment and Development further commented that as part of the initial Brief there were a number of training sessions still to be provided by the consultants and he commented on future proposals for a training event for Members/Managers. The Director also confirmed that he had written to the District Auditor to seek his views on the Consultant's Report.

RESOLVED - That the Report be received and the Director of Environment and Development prepare a further Report for consideration by the next meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee setting out an Action Plan, Implementation Programme and timescales for the Best Value Report on Risk Management and Health and Safety arrangements.

#### CROS.99/02 CAPITAL STRATEGY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Director of Environment and Development and the City Treasurer reported (EN.85/02, Financial Memo 2002/03 No 33) on the Council's Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan. He informed Members that once the documents had been approved, they would then be submitted to the Government Office North-West and would form an important part of the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

Members, in considering the document, amended the details concerning the political structure of the Authority, questioned the percentages contained in the Chart of Asset Management in relation to the Council's Portfolios and the targets in the Performance Indicator Information ODPM1 relating to the Disposal of Properties in Category D by 2003/04. The Director of Environment and Development agreed to make appropriate amendments to the final document.

RESOLVED - That subject to the minor amendments suggested by Members relating to the political composition of the Authority and the percentage figures in the Chart on Page 4, the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan be endorsed.

## CROS.100/02 MEMBERS' TELEPHONE ARRANGEMENT

The City Treasurer reported (Financial Memo 2002/03 No 30) on the matters raised by Members at the last meeting of the Committee regarding Members' telephone arrangements. He reminded Members that under Minute CROS.74/02, consideration had been given to revised proposals for Members' Telephone Allowances and he reminded Members of the various proposals which had been submitted by Members which included the Council providing Members with a Featurenet line, the Council providing a second telephone line to be installed solely for Council business, Members being allowed to determine their own telephone arrangements.

The City Treasurer added that a further issue which had been raised during the consultation was the need to avoid the potential for duplication of provision in respect of Members serving on both the City and County Council or where more than one Councillor lived at the same address and used the same telephone facilities. He informed Members that under the present arrangements there was some potential for duplication in that the current arrangements for Councillors provided a Basic Members Allowance of £3,700 which incorporated a £200 allowance specifically designated for telephones. Members are entitled to claim the Basic Allowance as of right, however the situation might become more complicated if Members opted to move to a system that takes the telephone provision out of the Basic Allowance.

A Member in considering the Report expressed his dissatisfaction with the proposal to have a "one size fits all" solution and commented that there was no reason why different Members could not have different arrangements for their telephone provision. The Member further expressed his concern at comments made by the Portfolio Holder with regard to Telephone Allowances.

RESOLVED - (1) That the Executive and the full Council be recommended to approve an increase in the Members' Basic Allowance to £3,800 (ie a £100 increase over existing rates) and to delete any reference to it including a specific amount for telephone provision. In effect, it would then be a matter for Members to choose their telephone facility with the cost being met by Members from their basic allowance.

(2) That it be noted that the above proposal has the support of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

(The meeting ended at 4.50 pm)