

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**THURSDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2002 AT 2.00 PM**

PRESENT: Councillor Jefferson (Chairman), Councillors Bowman, Bradley, Dodd, Guest, Knapton and E Mallinson.

OSM.77/02 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor C Rutherford.

OSM.78/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OSM.79/02 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2002 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Referring to Minute OSM.76/02 (Housing Strategy Best Value Review), the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted a letter which had been circulated to Members, indicating that the Best Value Inspectorate had stated that it would not present a problem if the City Council delayed the Housing Strategy Best Value Review which may, in fact, be overtaken by events triggered by the CPA process. The way forward would be discussed further by the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Referring to Minute OSM.72/02, the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted a copy of Minute EX.338/02 of the Executive of 28 October 2002 on the concerns expressed by Members that they were not always afforded the opportunity to consider items of business prior to the Executive reaching a decision thereon.

The Chairman of the Executive had indicated that the Forward Plan, which was distributed to all Members monthly, contained details of key decisions to be taken by the Executive in the forthcoming four month period. Overview and Scrutiny Members could ask relevant Portfolio Holders where they would like to discuss specific items at Overview and Scrutiny Committee or, alternatively, input comments directly through Portfolio Holders.

Members noted the position with regard to the above two items.

OSM.80/02 MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Chairman of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Vice Chairman of the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the Minutes of the undermentioned meetings:-

(a) Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee of 10 October 2002

The Chairman of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented that the discussions which had taken place with Superintendent Horne into the Crime and Disorder Performance Indicators (Minute COS.134/02 (a) refers) had been extremely useful and represented a step forward for the Committee in terms of the external scrutiny role.

Referring to Minute COS.134/02 (b) on monitoring the Performance Indicators in respect of Access for Disabled People, it was reported that the work done by the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on these Performance Indicators had resulted in a dramatic improvement to the Council's performance and demonstrated a successful outcome for the scrutiny function.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be noted.

(b) Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Special) of 18 October 2002

The Chairman of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented that the above meeting had dealt with a call-in on the Raffles Area Strategy. He considered that the reason for the call-in had been justified and genuine questions asked at the meeting.

A Member referred to criticism at the special meeting that not all those Members who had been signatories to the call-in had actually attended the meeting. The Member asked whether arrangements for call-in meetings could be investigated in order that all those Councillors who had been signatories to a call-in could be present.

It was pointed out that, with the Constitutional requirement to hold the call-in meeting within seven clear days of receipt of a call-in and the revised Rules on public access to Committee papers, there were limited options available to Chairmen in calling these meetings.

At the above call-in meeting, there had been a suggestion that the Executive report had not contained sufficient information to enable Overview and Scrutiny Members to satisfy themselves as to the background to the Executive decision.

Members considered that there may be instances where a Member(s) would wish to withdraw a call-in request following informal discussions with Portfolio Holders and/or further information on the call-in item being provided.

It was decided that the position should be kept under review and the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy was requested to amend the Call-In Protocol Form so that Members calling in a decision could indicate their availability during the window open to Chairmen when arranging a call-in meeting.

(c) Infrastructure Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3 October 2002

The Vice-Chairman of the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented that the Committee had discussed in detail with Officers Performance Indicators relating to total waste collected. The Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee had questioned the validity of these national Performance Indicators and a number of recommendations had been passed to the Executive in relation to the Indicators and other waste management issues.

RESOLVED – That such Minutes be noted.

OSM.81/02 WORK PROGRAMME FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

COMMITTEES

An amended Work Programme for all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees was submitted. The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy drew Members' attention to the fact that the Lead Officer for Performance Indicator Monitoring had left the Authority. This would inevitably have a short term impact on the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in relation to monitoring Performance Indicators.

He further reported that, with the vacant post of Head of Member Support and Employee Services, reports aimed at improving Performance Indicators in relation to sickness absence/ill health retirement and the employment of disabled/ethnic minority employees may be delayed.

He further reported that the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be having a half day session on the Regeneration Best Value Review and also a special meeting to undertake a subject matter enquiry in relation to tourism.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy also circulated, for Members' information, a list of Lead Officers for Best Value Reviews.

RESOLVED – That the amended Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be received.

OSM.82/02 MONITORING OF AND CHANGES TO THE FORWARD PLAN

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy presented Report TC.219/02 informing Members of changes to the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 October 2002 to 31 January 2003.

RESOLVED – That the departures from the Forward Plan for 1 October 2002 to 31 January 2003 be noted.

OSM.83/02 DEVELOPMENT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted Report TC.209/02 dealing with the following issues:

(a) ODPM Research Report

A summary of a Report which had recently been published by the ODPM entitled "The Development of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government" had been circulated to Members. The Report covered the development of Overview and Scrutiny since its introduction nationally and identified examples of Best Practice drawn from the research conducted.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy indicated that he had been invited to give evidence to the Research Team, and several examples of the approach in Carlisle appeared in the Report as illustrations of good practice.

(b) Review and Annual Report

Under the Council's Constitution, Overview and Scrutiny Committees were required to report annually to full Council on their workings and make recommendations for future Work Programmes and amended working methods, if appropriate.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy indicated that last year this process had started with a

half day workshop for Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice Chairmen, together with Group Leaders. This process had input to a draft Annual Report which was considered by each Overview and Scrutiny Committee before referral to full Council.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy suggested that a similar process be followed again this year, and that a date in January 2003 be considered for the workshop. He also suggested that the findings of the ODPM Research Report be included as an input to the Annual Review of Overview and Scrutiny at the workshop.

(c) Cumbria Overview and Scrutiny Practitioners Network

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy had, in 2001, initiated the formation of the above Officer network for Overview and Scrutiny Support staff from each Council in Cumbria and continued to lead on its administration. The latest meeting had taken place on 8 October 2002 and had been well attended with good discussion on a range of issues. A significant development had been the inclusion of a specialist Officer from District Audit Regional Office who had joined the network. This reflected the importance attached to this function by that organisation and the central role they saw for it in future inspection regimes.

He drew Members' attention to the following two specific matters which had been raised at the last network meeting:

(1) It had agreed that the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy should explore the possibility of joint training in chairing skills for Overview and Scrutiny. This had been identified as a training need common to all Cumbrian Authorities and there were economies of scale, together with networking and joint learning opportunities, in such joint provision. He suggested that this approach be supported.

(2) The possibility of a parallel County Overview and Scrutiny Member Network had been discussed. There was support expressed for the principle with some concerns as to how it would be organised and facilitated. Each Authority was being requested to seek Members' views which would be reported back to the next Officer Network Meeting. It was suggested that the idea be supported in principle and the Committee's views were sought on representation, and that the organisation and facilitation of meetings should be on a shared basis to be agreed by the Officers.

In considering the above issues, Members also referred to the following:

(1) North West Regional Overview and Scrutiny Network

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy indicated that he understood a further meeting of the North West Regional Overview and Scrutiny Members' Network was to be arranged to deal with issues relating to Health Scrutiny, although there were difficulties in booking relevant speakers.

(2) Training in Health Scrutiny Issues

It was reported that investigations were being made into the possibility of Joint Health Scrutiny for all Cumbrian Authorities as Government funding for such training was available.

(3) Role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees in Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA)

Discussion arose on the role Overview and Scrutiny Committees would play in helping the Council to prepare for the CPA inspection.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny function would have a significant role in this regard and also in shaping Action Plans arising from the inspection. The outcome of the inspection would impact on the reputation of the Council, have implications for future revenues and freedoms and flexibilities that would be available for good performing Councils. It was important that all Members of the Council were made aware of the CPA inspection process and he sought approval to consider, in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee, ways of informing and engaging Members in the process at all levels.

RESOLVED – (1) That the research information from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the City Council's input into it be noted.

(2) That a workshop to review Overview and Scrutiny developments (including learning from the Research Report) and initiating the Annual Report process to involve the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Group Leaders be held on the afternoon of Tuesday 28 January 2003 at Tullie House.

(3) That participation in a joint Countywide training event(s) on chairing skills for Overview and Scrutiny be agreed.

(4) That it be agreed in principle to participate in a County Overview and Scrutiny Members' Network subject to further details on how the Network would be administered. The City Council would request representation for four Members on the Network.

(5) That the Town Clerk and Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, be requested to investigate ways of informing and engaging Members in the CPA process at all levels and to take any necessary action arising therefrom.

OSM.84/02 BEST VALUE REVIEW – CUSTOMER CONTACT

The Head of IT, as Lead Officer, presented the Customer Contact Best Value Review document, together with the Minutes of the meeting of the Best Value Scoping Panel of 10 September 2001 which set the terms of reference for the Review.

The final report of the Customer Contact Best Value Review had been presented to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 September 2002. This Committee was asked to confirm that the report presented met the overall requirements set out by the Scoping Panel and to refer the report to the Executive for consideration.

The Head of IT indicated that this Review was one of the first to be carried out under the new thematic review arrangements.

Members noted that the revised Customer Contact arrangements would ensure that all reception facilities were based on the ground floor of the Civic Centre. The implementation of electronic service provision would assist the Authority in meeting e-Government targets. It was noted that implementation of the Review recommendations would have cross cutting implications in improving the City Council's performance for national performance indicators in the above areas.

RESOLVED – That this Committee confirms that the brief and scope originally set by Members for the Customer Contact Best Value Review had been satisfied and the report be referred to the Executive for consideration.

(The meeting ended at 3.27 pm)