

CORPORATE RESOURCES

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 24 OCTOBER 2002 AT 2.00 PM

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

CROS.116/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no Apologies for Absence.

CROS.117/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

CROS.118/02 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2002 were circulated. The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy drew Members' attention to a number of items included within those Minutes.

The Chairman also referred to a memo regarding arrangements for meetings of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee which had been circulated to Members of the Committee and Chief Officers.

RESOLVED - (1) The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 August 2002 were signed by the Chairman as a true record of the meeting.

(2) That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2002 be noted.

(3) That the contents of the memo regarding Committee meeting arrangements be noted.

CROS.119/02 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

There were no matters which have been the subject of call-ins.

CROS.120/02 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 that the Report on Risk and Safety Management had slipped in the Work Programme and would be considered by the Sub-Committee at its next meeting. The Action Plan in respect of the monitoring of Performance Indicators for Disabled/Ethnic Minority Group Employees had also been moved back to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee, although the timescale was provisional and was dependent upon appointments being made as part of the Organisational Review. The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy added that the Service

Plan in respect of the IT Services Unit had also been deferred until the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED - (1) That the Report be noted.

(2) That the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy arrange to update the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme by the amendment of the Lead Officers included in the Work Programme to take account of those Officers who had recently left the Council.

CROS.121/02 FORWARD PLAN

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reported (TC.204/02) on issues within the ambit of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be included in the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for the period 1 October 2002 - 31 January 2003.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy informed Members that in respect of Key Decision 85/02 (Implementation of Electronic Government), he had requested the Head of Information Technology to report back on proposals for implementation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee but had, as yet, received no response.

Members, in considering the Report, noted that details of consultations were included in the Forward Plan in respect of all Key Decisions. None of those consultations included consultation with local Members who could be involved as representatives of their local communities and felt that it would be an opportunity for Ward Councillors to have a meaningful input to the Council's decision-making process if they were included as part of the formal consultation process for key decisions.

RESOLVED - That the Executive be asked to consider the possibility of including consultation with local Ward Councillors as part of the formal consultation mechanism for key decisions.

CROS.122/02 AREA WORKING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW

Pursuant to Minute CROS 114/02, the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy reported (TC.166/02) on the issue of Area-Based Working. He posed for Members four basic questions:-

What would an area-based structure do?

How would it operate?

What would it look like?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of area involvement for Carlisle?

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy also circulated a copy of the Terms of Reference for Joint Neighbourhood Forums between the Cumbria County Council and the Borough Council which are operated within the Copeland Area, together with supporting information on the way in which those Neighbourhood Forums had operated since their inception in April 2001.

Members commented on the way in which the County Council's Area Forums operated, and in particular the way in which there was a sharing of local knowledge in a friendly/co-

operative atmosphere with representatives of various agencies, including the Community Police, Headteachers etc. Members felt that those Forums represented an opportunity for grass-root representation and local views to be fed into the democratic process and also provided a Community Leader role for local Ward Councillors in giving them a Forum for gathering the views of the residents in their Wards. It could also provide a role for local Councillors to consider applications for grants for local organisations.

Members also commented on the way in which individual Area Forums were arranged and operated and recognised the fact that whilst there were parameters within which the Forums operated, the actual arrangements were a matter for individual Ward Members to make the arrangements to suit their own individual circumstances. Members did, however, highlight potential difficulties where there was mixed political representation in Wards.

Members further commented that they considered that the City Council could add value to the County Council's Area Forums but the City Council and City Councillors would need to approach the proposal with a view to securing a greater Member involvement in the City Council's decision-making and not as a means to utilise "back bench Councillors". Members did not consider that there should be a separate Forum for the District and the County Council, as there would be value in the two Councils acting together. Members also noted the previous difficulties in establishing joint City/County Council decision-making groups and stressed that the City Council should be an equal partner within the Area Working and not a junior partner to the County Council.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy informed Members that the Joint Arrangement between the County Council and Copeland Borough Council was funded by the County Council with Copeland Borough Council making a total contribution of approximately £35,000 which included a grant budget of approximately £10,000, a contribution of approximately £3,000 in respect of the administration charges etc and the secondment of one Officer to Area Working.

Ms Georgina Ternent commented on her previous role as Neighbourhood Development Officer in the Cumbria County Council working in the Allerdale area and in particular of her experiences in Area Working and her role in bringing various groups together to discuss common issues, together with the approach which had been taken to address significant issues etc.

RESOLVED - That the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee support in principle the proposals for Area Working in Carlisle by establishing joint arrangements with the County Council. That the Executive be informed that that would be the preferred option of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee subject to Officers investigating further the details involved in the joint working arrangements.

(2) That the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the contribution which the Copeland Borough Council were making to Joint Working with the County Council in Copeland amounting to some £35,000 and the City Council's Executive be asked to note the possible budget implications arising from such Joint Working. It should however be noted that the above sum may not all be "new money" as it was possible that a number of functions and budgets might be delegated to the Area Committees and it might also be possible to second an existing member of staff.

(3) It be noted that the existing County Council Neighbourhood Forums within the City and the areas which they presently covered may not match exactly the City Council's Wards and consideration might be needed with regard to the groupings etc of Wards/Forums

CROS.123/02 BUDGET POLICY ISSUES TIMETABLE

Pursuant to Minute EX.279/02, the City Treasurer reported (Financial Memo 2002/03 No 56) on the timetable for the Council's 2003/04 budget. He informed Members that the timetable for the presentation of the departmental estimates to the Executive had slipped but was hopeful that that would not affect the timetable for the consideration of those estimates by individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees. He also commented on the proposed consultation exercise on the City Council's budget and added that further details on the consultation process were to be submitted to the Executive on 25 November 2002. He added however that the Government's grant settlement would not be known until early December 2002 and commented on the timing of the consultation on the Executive's Budget proposals and on the role of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee within that consultation process.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Deputy Leader informed the meeting that the Council was to carry out a consultation on the Executive's Budget proposals, however, the details as to how that consultation was to be carried out would be a matter for the Executive to determine.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be received.

(2) That the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy arrange a special meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to make an appropriate response to the consultation on the Executive's Budget. The timing of the meeting to be arranged so as to dovetail with the meetings of the City Council's Executive and the timing of the consultation process.

(3) That the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy arrange for a written reply to be sent to Councillor Mrs Bradley with regards to a question on the cost of the above consultation exercise and the source of funding.

CROS.124/02 COMMUNICATIONS BUDGET SAVINGS

Pursuant to Minute EX.244/02, the Acting Head of Communications reported on consideration which had been given by the Executive to options to make a saving of £9,000 from the Operational Budget held by the Communications Unit. She informed Members that the Executive had considered making savings of £8,000 from reducing the publication frequency of the Carlisle Focus magazine, with a further £1,000 saving to be found from the remainder of the Operational Budget. She added that the Executive had decided that a decision on the savings had been deferred pending the evaluation of the Residents Survey which would seek views on the Carlisle Focus magazine and investigations into attracting further advertising revenue and reducing distribution costs etc and a report on those issues would be submitted to the Executive in November 2002.

Members noted that the Focus had been launched following recommendations from the Communications Best Value Review which had recommended that a new residents' publication would be the main tool of information and communication from the Council. Members also noted the various comparisons within the Local Authority publications and, in noting those comparisons, felt that given the importance which was being attached to the Focus magazine in both the Communications Best Value Review and the Council's Corporate Plan and its comparison with performance against other Local Authority magazines, that perhaps the savings requested by the Executive from the Communications Budget could not be achieved.

RESOLVED – That it be noted that the Executive were to receive a further report on savings from the Communications Budget at their meeting in November 2002 and that that report should be considered by the Committee.

CROS.125/02 BUDGET ISSUES – DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT

AND DEVELOPMENT

Pursuant to Minute EX.245/02 consideration was given to a report from the Director of Environment and Development on areas within the Department of the Environment and Development which had been identified by the Executive where increased income or savings could be made as part of the 2003/04 budget. These included options to:

increase income from car parks £134,000;

increase in Development Control/Building Control income £15,000;

savings on procurement/purchasing £50,000 and

using surplus from Commercial and Technical Services Operations £20,000.

Members, in considering the report, noted that the options for increasing income from car parking included charging for Sunday parking at normal rates, charging for Sunday parking at £1 a day, charging for disabled at normal rates or increasing long stay charges. Members commented that the additional income represented an increase in car parking income of the order of 10% and did not address the impact of the increase in parking charges on shoppers and attracting people into the City. They also questioned the arrangements which had been made for enforcing Sunday parking charges and drew comparisons with parking charges throughout Cumbria and wider afield. Members also noted that part of the rationale for increasing parking charges was to act as an incentive for people to use public transport for journeys into and out of the City. However, given the public transport which was available on Sundays in the urban area and in particular in the rural area would make it difficult for people to access the City. Members also questioned what response there had been to a consultation on the proposal to introduce Sunday parking charges from local businesses and ratepayers. Members felt that this information should have been included in the report.

Members also commented on the option to use part of the Building Control surplus from the Commercial Trading Account and questioned the impact of the ring fencing of that Budget.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Director of Environment and Development provide a written reply to Councillor Mrs Styth on the level of additional income which was expected to be generated from the introduction of parking charges for Sundays. The additional income to identify the gross income and the additional income to the City Council net of staffing charges etc.

(2) That the Director of Environment and Development report to the next meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the details of costs, staffing etc, additional income, impact of public transport and comparisons with neighbouring Authorities.

(3) That the Director of Environment and Development inform the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy as to the programme in respect of the Audit Brief for procurement/purchasing studies and in particular whether it was proposed that the Brief and outcomes would be reported to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

CROS.126/02 TOWN TWINNING FINANCIAL POLICY OPTIONS

Pursuant to Minute EX.246/02, the City Solicitor and Secretary reported (TC.142/02) with details of a revised Town Twinning Programme for 2003/04 to meet the Council's budget savings requirement of a £10,000 reduction in the Town Twinning Budget. The City Solicitor and Secretary highlighted the impact of the reductions and it was:

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CROS.127/02 CORPORATE PUBLICATIONS – BUDGET REVIEW

Pursuant to Minute EX.247/02, the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy reported (TC.159/02) on a proposal to reduce the Corporate Publications Budget by £10,000. He informed Members that it would require the production of less glossy publications and limited print runs with individual services being expected to contribute to their publication needs.

RESOLVED – That the proposals to reduce the budget for Corporate Publications for 2003/04 by £10,000 be noted.

CROS.128/02 BEST VALUE BUDGET REVIEW

Pursuant to Minute EX.248/02, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive reported (TC.158/02) on the rationalisation of the Council's Best Value Budget in the light of the introduction of Comprehensive Performance Assessments and developments in the City Council's approach to Best Value. He informed Members that the Executive had recommended that the Best Value Budget of £100,000 be reduced by £55,000 for 2003/04 and had requested the preparation of a further report identifying how the remaining £45,000 within that budget could be used to develop the City Council's approach to both Best Value and Comprehensive Performance Assessments.

In response to Members' questions, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that support to Members would still be provided but perhaps with more secondment or use of temporary staff.

A Member expressed concern about difficulties in finding Lead Officers and cited the example of an Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer being identified which was not acceptable.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that the Executive were to consider a further report on how the remaining budget would be utilised.

RESOLVED - That, providing the Best Value process could still be adequately resourced, the report be noted.

CROS.129/02 BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE SUPPORT BUDGET

AREA

Pursuant to Minute EX.280/02, the City Treasurer informed Members that the Executive had considered a report of the Head of Economic Development (EDU.16/02) on options for savings in the Business Support and Enterprise area of the Economic Development Unit and had asked for a further report on those options once the report of Internal Audit Section and the Property Services Section had been completed.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted, it also being noted that the Internal Audit Report should come to the Committee.

CROS.130/02 ADVICE AGENCIES

Pursuant to Minute EX.281/02 the Director of Leisure and Community Development reported (LCD.28/02) on the current position with the regard to the potential to realise savings from the funding for Advice Agencies. He informed Members that a further report would be submitted to the meeting of the Executive on 28 October 2002.

Members, in noting the report, felt that preliminary reports should not be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee but expressed concerns that the detailed reports on savings were not yet available.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that the further report should be considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

CROS.131/02 LOCAL LAND AND PROPERTY GAZETTEER AND

NATIONAL LAND INFORMATION SERVICE

Pursuant to Minute EX.282/02 the City Solicitor and Secretary reported (TC.191/02) on the initiative by Central Government through the IDEA to create a National Land and Property Gazetteer and the National Land Information Service. The City Solicitor and Secretary drew Members' attention to the recommendations of the Executive as set out in the above Minute, and it was

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CROS.132/02 LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP CO-ORDINATOR

Pursuant to Minute EX.283/02, the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy reported (TC.194/02) on the future of the LSP co-ordinator post which is a jointly funded post between the City Council and Eden District Council. He reminded Members that the post was initially a two year post terminating in January 2004, and that, should the Council wish to continue the post for a further two year period, funding would need to be provided in the Council's 2003/04 budget.

He informed Members that Eden District Council had recommended that the Contract be extended for a further two years and had proposed that the post should be supported by a further £10,000 contribution to cover administration, publication and meeting costs.

Members, in considering the report, questioned Officers on any criteria which had been set

to evaluate the effectiveness of the post or on any proposals to carry out an evaluation of the postholder's performance. Members noted that without any information which would enable them to assess how effective the postholder had been in the original term of office it would be difficult for them to scrutinise whether the budget bid was money well spent.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted with a recommendation that the funding should only be released subject to an evaluation being carried out into the effectiveness of the Local Strategic Partner Co-ordinator Post.

CROS.133/02 REVIEW OF CHARGES 2003/04 HIRE OF CIVIC CENTRE ETC

Pursuant to Minute EX.284/02, the City Solicitor and Secretary reported (TC.195/02) on proposed increases in charges in respect of the hire of the Civic Centre, purchase of Council Minutes etc.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CROS.134/02 HOUSING GENERAL FUND – REVIEW OF CHARGES 2003/04

Pursuant to Minute EX.285/02, the Director of Housing reported (H.61/02) on proposed increases in charges for Hostels including supporting people charges.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CROS.135/02 REVIEW OF LOCAL LAND CHARGES AND SEARCH FEES

Pursuant to Minute EX.243/02 the City Solicitor and Secretary reported (TC.135/02) on the Review of Local Land Charges and Search Fees.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CROS.136/02 LICENSING CHARGES REVIEW

Pursuant to Minute EX.286/02 the City Solicitor and Secretary reported (TC.190/02) on the review of the Licensing Charges for 2003/04.

Members, in considering the report, supported the proposal for funding to be identified to support the appointment of a Licensing Administrative Assistant on an ongoing basis, in order to free up the Licensing Officers to carry out additional enforcement works.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the proposal to fund the post of a Licensing Administrative Assistant be supported.

CROS.137/02 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHARGES REVIEW

The Head of Corporate Policy informed Members that the Executive had recommended a proposed increase in charges in respect of the Enterprise Centre, Brampton Business and Telecentre and the Assembly Rooms at the Old Town Hall in line with the Council's

Corporate Charging Policy, and that a further report with regards to the Enterprise Centre and the Brampton Business and Telecentre would be submitted to the Executive following the receipt of the Internal Audit Review.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CROS.138/02 LEISURE FACILITIES – CHARGES REVIEW

Pursuant to Minute EX.314/02, consideration was given to a report of the Director of Leisure and Community Development on proposed increase in charges in respect of leisure facilities. Members were informed that increases in respect of sports pitches etc were in accordance with the Council's Corporate Charging Policy and, in respect of Bereavement Services, the increases proposed were above the Corporate Charging Policy to reflect the need for the City Council to avoid subsidising the service as it was currently doing. Members were informed that the Executive had recommended that the charges in respect of Tullie House should be increased in line with the Corporate Charging Policy, and that the proposed charges for the Bereavement Services would be considered as part of the budget consultation exercise.

Members, in considering the report, noted that the Council's Corporate Charging Policy was to increase income by inflation plus 1% (a total of 3.5%). They noted that certain Bereavement Services charges were to increase in some instances by 90% plus, and felt that if the Executive considered that charges should be increased to the levels proposed, then it should be phased in gradually over a number of years.

Members also noted that the Bereavement Services charges were to be included in the Budget consultation exercise, and that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might wish to consider the outcome of that consultation exercise. Members noted that the Executive had taken notice of comments by the District Audit that the City Council should avoid subsidising the service and asked Officers to provide them with the copy of the District Auditor's comments. Members noted that the recent Best Value Inspection had commented on the Council's Charging Policy to the effect that the Council could set its charges so long as it could justify those charges.

Members further commented on the need for clarity with regards to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee's role in scrutinising the budget.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Deputy Leader of the Council commented that the Executive's policy on consultation included a consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and their views were sought, those views would then be passed on to the Executive for their consideration. He added that as part of the Council's budget decision in February 2001, the Council had agreed to bring fees in respect of Bereavement Services in line with costs, and the proposals as set out in the Director of Leisure and Community Development's Report would seek to address those differences.

RESOLVED – That the City Treasurer circulate to all Members of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee the reference from the District Auditor in respect of the Council's Charging Policy, and in particular the reference that the charging policy for Bereavement Services should reflect the need for the City Council to avoid subsidising the service as it was currently doing.

(The meeting ended at 4.30 pm)