

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2004 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Guest (Chairman), Councillors C S Bowman (as substitute for Councillor Joscelyne), Dodd (as substitute for Councillor Mrs Prest), Glover, Hendry (as substitute for Councillor Mrs Bradley), Jefferson, Ms Quilter and Mrs Styth.

CROS.124/04 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Bradley, Joscelyne and Mrs Prest.

CROS.125/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest affecting the business scheduled to be transacted.

CROS.126/04 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meetings held on 25 May, 28 and 29 June 2004 were agreed as a correct record of the meetings and signed by the Chairman.

Referring to the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2004 (Minute CROS.90/04), Councillor Mrs Styth indicated that she had declared a personal interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda item A13: Trading and Charging Performance Review – Interim Report. Councillor Mrs Styth stated that the interest related to her membership of The Henry Lonsdale Trust and not The Lonsdale Trust as recorded in the minutes, and asked that the Minutes be amended to reflect that.

Subject to the above amendment the Minutes of the meetings held on 22 July, 3 and 4 August 2004 were noted.

CROS.127/04 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

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

CROS.128/04 WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager presented the work programme for 2004/05 and explained the current status of the various items of business scheduled to be dealt with by the Committee.

Referring to the issue of Subject Reviews/Inquires, Mr Mallinson invited Members to consider whether they wished to put forward suggestions for an additional Review to be included in the programme.

The Chairman referred to the lengthy nature of recent Agendas and suggested that perhaps the Industrial Estates Policy Review was sufficient for the time being. Members confirmed their agreement and did not wish to include further Subject Reviews/Inquiries within the work programme at that time.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.

CROS.129/04 MONITORING OF FORWARD PLAN ITEMS RELEVANT TO THIS COMMITTEE

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager presented report LDS.42/04 highlighting issues within the ambit of this Committee included within the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for the period 1 September 2004 to 31 December 2004.

Mr Mallinson then explained the current status of each item.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CROS.130/04 THREE YEAR BUDGET 2005/06 TO 2007/08 – FIRST FORECAST AND TIMETABLE

The Executive had, on 17 August 2004, considered a reference from this Committee outlining the views of the Committee on the Three Year Budget 2005/06 to 2007/08. The Executive had responded as follows (Minute EX.158/04 refers):

“That Minute CROS.99/04 of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the response of the Portfolio Holder be noted.”

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager advised that the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee had recently considered and commented upon the draft Housing Strategy for the period 2004 – 2009. That Committee felt that further work was required on the priorities and budget to deliver the same. The first indications would come forward as part of the Budget papers scheduled to come to this Committee later in the year.

Members stressed that they wished to be involved at the draft stage, rather than later in the Budget process.

RESOLVED – That the above decision be noted and the Executive be advised that this Committee requests the opportunity to be involved in the Budget process at an early stage.

**CROS.131/04 CORPORATE JOINT CONSULTATIVE MEETING –
MINUTES OF 11 AUGUST 2004**

RESOLVED – That it be noted that this item of business was withdrawn.

**CROS.132/04 CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORTS:**

(a) Annual Returns and Performance Summary 2003/04

(b) 1st Quarter PI Report 2004/05 (1 April to 30 June 2004)

The Policy and Performance Officer presented report SP.32/04 appraising Members of the Performance Indicator results for 2003/04 and the first three months of 2004/05 (1 April to 30 June 2004).

Dr Coleman welcomed the Committee's feedback and questions.

Discussion arose, during which Members raised a number of issues including:

- Looking at the overall Council PI results for 2003/04 and, for example, the 39 which had deteriorated as opposed to 25 in 2002/03, it was not possible to tell whether those 39 included the previous 25 or whether they were differing indicators. Could fuller information be provided? Also, 45 PIs had improved as opposed to 56 in 2002/03. Was that improvement good enough?

Dr Coleman responded that full details were included within the Corporate Plan. In general, very minor changes in performance overall had occurred and had any major changes occurred those would have been highlighted within her report. The idea had been to provide an overview to Members, but it would be possible to provide fuller information in the future.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits Services referred to BV78 and 79 which fell within his remit and which had improved significantly, his feeling being that further improvement would be experienced this year.

- BV12 – Days sick per member of staff was recorded as being on target and yet the actual figures did not appear to show any great improvement.

In response, the Head of Member Support and Employee Services commented that the figures disguised the considerable efforts made by Officers to improve the Council's performance and, for the first time in some years, some improvement had been achieved.

- Historically Carlisle Works had experienced high levels of sickness absence. Was the improved position on sickness absence due to the fact that those staff had now transferred to Carlisle Housing Association?

Mr Williams responded that the transfer of staff had taken place in two stages and the previous year's figures had taken into account the loss of those staff. It was difficult to quantify how much was down to the transfer.

- The percentage of late return of Performance information from Officers remained high. What was the reason for that and should the deadline for the supply of information be amended?

Dr Coleman responded that a number of reasons contributed to that figure, and that systems were being put in place and methodologies adopted to improve the situation.

- Referring to LP95a (% of all phone calls answered in target time) which was not on target, a Member questioned whether the position was likely to improve when the Customer Contact Centre was up and running.

In response, Mr Mason reminded Members of his presentation to them at the last meeting of the Committee when he had stressed that it was not his wish to transfer the problems experienced in Revenues and Benefits as regards telephones to the new Centre.

Mr Mason tabled Target Response Analysis information covering the months of August 2003 and August 2004 and which demonstrated improvements achieved. He felt confident that problems were being resolved and that further improvement would be evidenced following the transfer to the Customer Contact Centre.

- What action was taken on the Performance Indicator results?

Ms Mooney (Executive Director) advised that the information was taken to CMT and areas of concern identified. Those were also fed through Business Plan monitoring reports and picked up in the one to one meetings held between Executive Directors and Business Unit Heads. Dr Gooding (Executive Director) stressed the wish to drive up performance as a matter of urgency.

- Referring to the return of Audit Commission PI self-assessment forms by Business Unit, Members were pleased to note that the target of 100% had been achieved.

RESOLVED – That, subject to the above issues raised by Members, the content of the reports be noted.

CROS.133/04 IMPROVING ATTENDANCE: SICKNESS ABSENCE – ACTION PLAN

The Head of Member Support and Employee Services presented report ME.25/04 detailing proposed actions designed to improve attendance.

Mr Williams reminded the Committee that sickness absence was a key Best Value Performance Indicator and outlined performance to date. Although the level of improvement last year over the previous year seemed to be slight, it did represent a significant achievement as that was the first year when a worsening performance had been halted. Referring to section 2 – Performance to date, paragraph 3, a figure had been omitted which should have been 2.6 days.

Members' attention was then drawn to the Action Plan appended to the report which covered the next twelve months.

In considering the Improving Attendance Action Plan Members raised the following issues:

- (a) Referring to point 9. – there may be occasions when staff took sick leave when the underlying cause related to caring/family responsibilities. It may help if staff were allowed to accrue flexitime for use on such occasions. Was the Council sufficiently flexible in its approach to parental leave, in conjunction with the Trade Unions?

Ms Mooney (Executive Director) responded that individual Business Units made their own arrangements and Managers were flexible as regards childcare needs, etc. Those arrangements were, however, fairly ad hoc and were a matter of concern and she therefore wished to look at the work/life balance with a view to addressing those concerns.

A Member added that there should be a corporate policy governing the matter.

Mr Williams indicated that the Management/Trade Unions Working Group referred to at point 8. was just one example of partnership working with the Unions, and he would be happy to consider Trade Union involvement in point 9. as part of the review of policies.

- (b) The Action Plan was designed to focus on the positive. Were Managers receiving detailed training to ensure that return to work interviews were supportive and did not put staff in fear of returning to work. Also was there a mechanism in place so that staff could access guidance and support independent of their Manager?

In response, Mr Williams assured Members that the tone of return to work interviews was indeed supportive and included no aggression or threats to staff. Research had shown that the existence of such interviews had a beneficial impact on sickness levels.

As regards the second issue, then he would arrange for the Member to receive a written response.

- (c) A Member further requested that the Committee be provided with a quarterly update on sickness absence BVPI.

Mr Williams agreed to provide that information.

(d) Referring to point 10., a Member suggested that the word “incentives” be replaced by “motivators”.

Mr Williams undertook to investigate whether that was possible/desirable.

RESOLVED – That the Action Plan be noted and endorsed.

CROS.134/04 CLARIFICATION OF FIGURE IN BVPI 16 (PERCENTAGE OF DISABLED EMPLOYEES)

Pursuant to Minute CROS.67/04, the Head of Member Support and Employee Services presented report ME.27/04 providing clarification of a figure in his previous report (ME.7/04) relating to the Audit Commission target of 14.4% for BVPI 16 (the percentage of employees declaring that they had a disability, compared with the percentage of economically active people in the areas who had a disability). There were 14.4% of those in the community with disabilities who were economically active. The Council employed 2.66% staff who had declared that they had a disability.

As previously requested by the Committee, Mr Williams explained that there were a number of reasons why the figure for Council employees did not compare with the target set by the Audit Commission.

‘Economically active’ was defined as those who were between the ages of 16 and 65 years. It did not necessarily mean that the people concerned were seeking employment; some would be in receipt of invalidity benefits and not wish or be able to work. The percentage of ‘employees with a disability’ in the Council was derived from the personnel/payroll database records and was the number of those declaring that they had a disability. Anecdotal evidence existed that not all employees with a disability declared themselves as such. ‘Disability status’ was sensitive data under the Data Protection Act and the Council had to accept the declaration made by individual employees whether or not it had evidence to the contrary.

For the above reasons, the original Audit Commission target was unachievable and the locally set targets were:

2003/04	2.20%
2004/05	2.90%
2005/06	3.10%

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

**CROS.135/04 BUSINESS PLAN PERFORMANCE MONITORING
REPORT – MEMBER SUPPORT AND EMPLOYEE
SERVICES**

The Head of Member Support and Employee Services presented report ME.19/04 providing an overview of performance for the year against the Member Support and Employee Services Unit Business Plan.

Mr Williams outlined progress achieved, covering key developments and challenges since the last report; progress on Best Value; achievement of performance against Best Value Indicators; Corporate Issues; Key Decisions update and Budget update.

In addition, the Action Plan of the Unit's new Business Plan for 2005/06 was also included, progress against which would be recorded in subsequent reports.

The report had been presented to CMT, discussed with the Executive Director who had line management responsibility and shared with the Portfolio Holder, and amended to include their comments.

Referring to the new approach adopted to staff training, a Member questioned whether staff development was designed to assist staff in undertaking their existing posts or to provide them with new skills so that they could progress in their careers should they so wish.

In response, Mr Williams advised that training was available in both areas.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

**CROS.136/04 PERFORMANCE MONITORING OF BUSINESS PLANS:
PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The Head of Strategic and Performance Services presented report SP.37/04 outlining proposed improvements in the quarterly reporting of Council business and progress towards objectives.

The reasons why the improvements were considered necessary were outlined and the following proposed improved system detailed –

There would, in future, be one quarterly report produced addressing the performance of all 12 twelve Business Units (a summary of performance for each Business Unit) along with quarterly corporate performance indicator returns and corporate financial returns. There would effectively be 3 sections to quarterly Business Reports in the future:

- (a) A quarterly Performance Indicator Report (covering the whole organisation);
- (b) A quarterly Financial Report (covering the whole organisation), and

(c) A Narrative Performance Summary for each Business Unit.

Attention was also drawn to an addendum to the report comprising the Business Plan Monitoring Timetable for the period October 2004 – February 2005.

In considering the matter Members raised the following:

- (i) Concern that the new proposals may overload the system.

Ms Hook responded that rather than reports being submitted to every meeting, one meeting in a quarter would focus on performance. The revised system would add a significant workload onto that meeting and the implications for agenda planning and time management were as detailed in the appendix to her report.

- (ii) A Member commented that the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been concerned that although the new reporting system would provide an opportunity to compare performance of Business Units, there may be less detailed information for each Business Unit which could make it difficult for Overview and Scrutiny Committees to monitor performance in a meaningful way.

A Member of this Committee reiterated that concern, particularly as regards the amount of information which would be available to back bench Members, and asked that Ms Hook give further consideration to the matter prior to any pilot of the new system commencing.

Ms Hook asked whether Members were in agreement with production of a quarterly report, rather than the previous staggered approach.

A Member responded that, whilst he was not totally against the new approach, it may be necessary for Officers to report to Committee more frequently should problems arise.

Ms Hook undertook to take on board Members' concerns and also any comments made by the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following week.

RESOLVED – (1) That the reasons for making changes to the Business Reporting system be noted.

(2) That the comments and concerns of the Committee as detailed above be taken on board.

**CROS.137/04 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT PROVISIONAL
OUTTURN 2003/04**

The Executive had, on 17 August 2004, considered a reference from this Committee drawing particular issues to the Executive's attention as regards the Housing Revenue Account Provisional Outturn 2003/04.

The decision of the Executive was that the comments of this Committee be noted (Minute EX.159/04 refers).

Referring to issue no. 2. (in certain Wards there were houses which had not been transferred to Carlisle Housing Association and which were in a desperate state of repair) a Member asked whether any such properties existed other than those previously identified in Raffles.

The Head of Property Services responded that, as far as he was aware there were not, but he would require to check the position and provide a written answer to Members and the Overview and Scrutiny Manager following the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the position be noted.

**CROS.138/04 ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN: STRATEGIC REVIEW OF
ASSETS**

The Head of Property Services presented report PS.17/04 on the Asset Management Plan – Strategic Review of Assets.

Mr Atkinson outlined the background to the matter, commenting that the review of assets, concentrating as a priority upon those held directly or indirectly for economic development, was underway albeit at a pace that had to fit with other corporate priorities. The ultimate aim was to encompass a wholesale review of all property, but the sheer scale of that task was considerable.

It was intended that a review be conducted in three parts, comprising:

- a portfolio review
- a geographical review
- a process to identify priorities for action.

Leading the review were a number of general policy initiatives specified in the new Corporate Plan which were relevant to asset management, details of which were provided. That area of work required some freedom away from a formal Committee setting before work could commence on a new formal strategy and set of policy objectives. It was therefore suggested that a special meeting of the Committee (in workshop format) should be held, to also include appropriate input from the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

One of the themes in the 6th round of the Beacon Council Scheme was asset management, which indicated a continued wish by Central Government to strive for excellence in that area of work. Details of the criteria for judging Councils were provided, the intention being to apply for Beacon Status at Carlisle City Council.

In considering the matter, Members –

- (a) agreed that, as suggested, a Workshop session be arranged for Thursday 4 November 2004 at 2.00 pm to progress the review, at which time the Chairman and one other Member of the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee be invited to attend.
- (b) questioned whether logistical support was in place to achieve and retain Beacon Status as proposed by the Officer.

In response, Mr Atkinson advised that although in itself that would be another piece of substantial work combined to further inspection, the main objective was for the Council to benchmark and learn from other Authorities as the Council developed a unified Asset Strategy.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That a Workshop Session be convened on Thursday 4 November 2004 commencing at 2.00 pm to progress the strategic review of assets, at which time the presence of the Chairman and one other Member of the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee be invited.

CROS.139/04 RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

Dr Gooding, Executive Director, submitted report CE.29/04 appending the initial drafts of the Risk Management Strategy and Risk Management Policy.

Dr Gooding gave a short presentation to Members on the Policy and Strategy documents. He believed that the Council should have a robust, confident approach to risk, which would be formally captured within the Policy. Critically the Policy would –

- define Risk and Risk Management
- define roles and responsibilities within the authority for Risk Management
- describe how the authority would analyse risk
- articulate the authority's tolerance to risk.

The Risk Management Strategy would be a separate document, owned and reviewed at least annually by the Corporate Risk Management Group.

The documentation did not include project risks, a methodology for which would be brought forward as part of project management.

Dr Gooding invited Members' comments and guidance on the documentation in advance of its consideration by the Executive and formal consultation. That was particularly important since the Committee would have a key monitoring role on the management of risk.

In considering the matter, Members commented –

- (i) Risk was not something that could be “controlled” and therefore “limited” may be a more appropriate choice of word.
- (ii) Was it possible to learn from previous City Council risk policies and other authorities' experiences in the development of the new strategy and policy?

Dr Gooding responded that the draft documentation had been informed by numerous public sector documents, including those of the Office of Government and Commerce and Cumbria Constabulary.

- (iii) Referring to Appendix 1 – Risk Assessment – a Member stressed the need to take account of the Council's community leadership role.
- (iv) Members very much appreciated the fact that Dr Gooding had brought the matter before them at such an early stage. They did, however, feel that it was a substantial subject area which would best be dealt with at a special meeting of the Committee. They would also welcome a training session on risk management to assist in their consideration of the documents.

Dr Gooding confirmed that he would be happy to facilitate such a training session and it was agreed that that should take place at 10.00 am on Thursday 4 November 2004.

RESOLVED – (1) That the draft Risk Management Strategy and Policy be noted.

(2) That Dr Gooding be requested to undertake a training session on risk management for Members at 10.00 am on Thursday 4 November 2004.

[The meeting ended at 4.10 pm]