

CORPORATE RESOURCES

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 18 OCTOBER 2001 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillors Guest (Chairman), The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Parsons) Councillors Bain, Mrs Blackadder, Mrs Bradley, Joscelyne (as Substitute for Councillor Jefferson) Mrs Prest and Mrs Styth.

CROS.4/01: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jefferson.

CROS.5/01: WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to its first meeting and looked forward to working with Members appointed to the Committee in the spirit of joint co-operation. The Chairman considered that the present layout of the Slupsk Room did not assist with the efficient conduct of Overview and Scrutiny business.

CROS.6/01: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest and no declarations of the party whip relating to any item on the Agenda.

CROS.7/01: CALL IN

There were no Executive matters which had been the subject of Call In.

CROS.8/01: WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that there had been no matters referred from the Executive or the City Council for the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee to include in their Work Programme.

The Committee further noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had referred the Best Value Reviews on Customer Contact, Risk and Safety Management and Organisational Assessment together with the role of Overview and Scrutiny of the City Council's Budget to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members considered items which could form part of the Overview and Scrutiny Corporate Resources Committee Work Programme and suggested that, given the Government's targets for e-government, which would need to be in place by 2005, the Committee should look at the current position and progress with the City Council achieving the Government's targets on e-government.

Members also highlighted the outcomes from the recent Best Value Review of Communications and felt that the Committee should monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of the Communications Action Plan.

RESOLVED - (1) That the matters which had been delegated to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Management, as itemised above, be noted.

(2) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Corporate Resources Work Programme include the monitoring of the way forward for the City Council on e-government based on achieving the Government's targets for e-government and a position statement be submitted to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Corporate Resources.

(3) That the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme include the monitoring of the effectiveness of the Communications Action Plan which had been drawn up as a result of the recent Best Value Review.

(4) That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee be informed of the items selected for inclusion on the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

CROS.9/01: BUDGETARY MATTERS -

REVENUE BUDGETS 2002/03 TO 2004/05

Pursuant to Minute EX. 1 /01, a copy of the City Treasurer's Financial Memo 2001/02 No 77 which summarised the likely cost of supporting current service levels and potential resources available to the Council over the three year period 2004/05 was circulated.

RESOLVED - The Report be noted.

CROS.10/01: BUDGET MATTERS - EXECUTIVE BUDGET PRINCIPLES

Pursuant to Minute EX. 2 /01, a copy of the principles which had been set by the Executive to inform the formulation of the Council's budget for 2002/03 was circulated.

RESOLVED - That the principles be noted.

CROS.11/01: BUDGETARY MATTERS - REVENUE ESTIMATES 2002/03 CIVIC CENTRE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION AND PERSONNEL AND TRAINING ESTIMATES

The City Treasurer circulated (Financial Memo 2001/02 No 89), the Revised Estimates for 2001/02 and the Base Estimates for 2002/03 for the Civic Centre, Central Departments and Personnel and Training. He informed Members that the Reports had been compiled in the light of the City Council's budget strategy for 2002/03 and were set out in a summarised format with details of the major variations between the 2001/02 original and revised estimates and the estimates for 2002/03. The City Treasurer informed Members that the estimates had been considered by the Executive.

RESOLVED - That the Report be noted.

CROS.12/01: BUDGETARY MATTERS - REVIEW OF CHARGES

The City Treasurer circulated the following Financial Memos regarding the Annual Review of Charges:

Financial Memo 2001/02 No 97 the Housing Revenue Accounts and Housing General Fund Review of Charges;

Financial Memo 2001/02 No 98 Review of Charges for Tullie House Bereavement Services and Parks and Recreation;

Financial Memo 2001/02 No 94 Charges in the service areas within the Economic Development Unit;

Financial Memo 2001/02 No 93 Charges for the Department of Environment and Development including Review of Car Parking Charges;

Financial Memo 2001/02 No 96 Charges for Land Charges, hire of the Civic Centre, Council Minutes and matters relating to Electoral Registers; and

Financial Memo 2001/02 No 95 Review of Charges for Licensing.

The City Treasurer informed Members that in respect of the Review of Charges for the Housing Revenue Account and Housing General Fund there would be further reports submitted to the Executive as a result of new guidelines which had been issued. Members, in considering the Report, highlighted the position with regard to the rents for garages and the condition of garages.

The City Treasurer informed Members that under the Review of Charges for the Leisure Department there had been no increase assumed in the level of income for Tullie House due to the difficulties in anticipating future visitor attractions, as a result of the impact of Foot and Mouth on the tourist industry. Members, in considering the Report, noted the proposed increases in the charges for Bereavement Services and the Crematorium and in particular that the proposed increases were significantly above the Corporate target for increase in charges of inflation plus 1% and expressed concern that such an increase should be proposed for services which were inescapable as opposed to a lower rate of increase on services which were optional.

The Director of Environment and Development commented that with regard to the Review of Parking Charges the proposals had been noted. Consultations would be carried out with the City Centre interests and other parties prior to the Executive considering the matter further at its next meeting and he sought any comments from the Committee which could be included as part of the consultation on Parking Charges.

With regard to the fees for Land Charges, the City Treasurer informed Members that the Executive had considered two options in respect of the Land Charges fees. He informed Members that following the transfer of the Highways Agency Agreement, the County Council had now taken over responsibility for dealing with all Highway searches via CAPITA dbs and the Water Company (United Utilities) had taken over responsibility for answering water and drainage enquiries. The City Treasurer drew Members' attention to the increase in costs arising from the above and its impact on the income to the City

Council from search fees. He set out two options for the setting of search fees and added that the Executive had approved Option 2, which would see the cost of a Standard Search increase from £71.50 to £82.50.

RESOLVED - (1) That the City Treasurer draw the Director of Housing's attention to the poor condition of many City Council owned garages, and seek his comments on proposals to increase the garage rents by 1.5% above inflation, given the condition of many of the garages.

(2) That the Town Clerk and Chief Executive invite the Portfolio Holder for Health and Well Being to a Special Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Corporate Resources to discuss the level of charges for Bereavement Services and the Crematorium in general and in particular the proposal to increase the level of charges for those services by twice the rate of inflation as opposed to the proposed rate of increases for other services which were lower.

(3) That the Executive proposal in respect of the increase in the fees for Land Charges be noted.

(4) That the various Financial Memos as detailed above be noted.

CROS.13/01: BUDGETARY MATTERS - REVENUE ESTIMATES 2002/03 REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE OF GENERAL FUND PROPERTIES

The Director of Environment and Development reported (Financial Memo 2001/02 No 88 and EN.162/01) on the Repair and Maintenance Budget for General Fund Properties for 2002/03. He informed Members that the matter had been submitted to a recent meeting of the Executive who had deferred a decision on the Planned and Essential Repairs for 2002/03 valued at £191,000 until such time as a decision was made on funding for requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act. The Director added that this matter was likely to be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 5 November 2001.

Members noted the inclusion in the Planned and Essential Repairs of funding for asbestos removal, and whilst noting that consideration of the Planned and Essential Repairs was to be considered further in the light of the requirements to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, it was felt that items which were Health and Safety related should be given priority.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That it be noted that a further report on planned and essential Repairs was to be considered by the Executive at its next meeting, which would include funding requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act.

(3) The Director of Environment and Development bring to the attention of the Executive the concerns of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with regard to deferring expenditure on Health and Safety related repairs, such as asbestos removal.

CROS.14/01: BUDGET MATTERS – RENEWALS RESERVE 2002/03

Consideration was given to a report of the City Treasurer (Financial Memo 2001/02 No.87) on items contained within the Replacement Programme under the established Renewals Reserve for Replacement of Items of Vehicles, Plant and Equipment, and which set out the items of equipment due for replacement in 2002/03. The City Treasurer informed Members that the report had been considered by the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CROS.15/01: BUDGET MATTERS – NEW SPENDING BIDS

The City Treasurer reported (Financial Memo 2001/02 No.91) summarising new spending bids submitted by Officers. He informed Members that the report had been considered by the Executive who had referred the matter for consideration as part of the budget process.

Members considered the report in some detail, and in particular the future options for City Council websites and the Concessionary Fares Swipe Cards, but noted that under the Executive budget principles all spending bids should be accompanied by a list of equivalent potential savings which, if provided, would enable Members to consider the bids against the impact of the possible savings.

Members commented in particular on the lack of detail and highlighted proposals for funding of events to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee from the existing grants budget without any details as to the impact on the funding from the grants budget presently received by voluntary organisations, and stressed the difficulties which the Committee experienced as an Overview and Scrutiny Committee in being unable to perform its Overview and Scrutiny role, due to the lack of details submitted from the Executive.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Head of Communications be asked to submit a report to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Corporate Resources on the option of developing one corporate website which satisfied the needs of departments whilst retaining a corporate identity but which could be developed in-house by a full time web designer with no additional costs to the authority.

(2) That the issue of Smart Cards across the authority be referred to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, to consider how the various Swipe Cards which presently existed for Council services could be incorporated into one Swipe Card.

(3) That it be noted that the Concessionary Fares Card was currently being developed on a County wide basis.

(4) That the Executive be informed that it is the view of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Corporate Resources that that Committee is unable to perform its function in carrying out an Overview and Scrutiny of the Council's budget process due to the timescales involved and the lack of information and detail relating to the Council's budget which was being passed to the Committee from the Executive.

CROS.16/01: BEST VALUE REVIEWS

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive gave a verbal update on the current position in relation to the Customer Contact Best Value Review, the Risk and Safety Management Best Value Review and the Organisational Assessment Best Value Review. He informed Members that it was proposed that the next scheduled meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Corporate Resources should receive a Project Plan, Consultation Strategy and Initial Challenge Questions together with an outline of the Customer Contact

Policy arising from the Customer Contact Best Value Review. The Risk and Safety Management Review was expected to be scoped by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee at its next meeting. The Organisational Assessment Best Value Review presently being undertaken by HACAS was in its early stages and Member Workshops for individual groups were to be arranged. He added that it was envisaged that a report on the initial findings would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 20 December 2001.

The Director of Environment and Development added that the joint training event on Risk and Safety Management was presently being organised, and suggested that the Chairman or Vice Chairman might wish to attend the event as background information to the Risk and Safety Management Best Value Review.

RESOLVED - (1) That the report be received.

(2) That the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee attend the forthcoming training event on Risk and Safety Management.

CROS.17/01: FUTURE MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

RESOLVED - That the start time for future meetings of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee be 2.00 pm.

CROS.18/01: DTLR CONSULTATION PAPER – TRAVEL SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCE AND PENSIONS FOR MEMBERS

Pursuant to Minute EX.35/01 the City Treasurer reported (Financial Memo 2001/02 No.92) on a recent Consultation Paper issued by the Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions regarding Travel and Subsistence for Members and Pensions for Members.

The City Treasurer drew Members attention to the summary of the proposals contained in both Consultation Papers, and added that the report had been considered by the Executive who had agreed that subject to obtaining the views of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee, that the following comments should be made to the DTLR :

- (a) Travel and Subsistence Allowances should not be built into the basic Members Allowance as this would impact unfairly on those Members who were required to do the bulk of travelling to fulfil their duties on behalf of the Council,
- (b) Travel and Subsistence Allowances should be simplified and not leave Members out of pocket,
- (c) any proposals on Pensions should not discriminate against any Member.

Members in considering the matter and the Executive's comments on the proposals highlighted the need to draw the attention of the DTLR to the position with regard to insurance cover, in that Councillors who were on approved duties were covered by insurance. In that regard confirmation should be sought from the DTLR that attendance at Ward Surgeries or carrying out Ward work could be considered as part of a Councillors Approved Duties, so as to enable such duties to be given the proper insurance cover.

RESOLVED – That, subject to confirmation that the list of Councillors Approved Duties include matters relating to Surgeries and Ward work which would enable such work to be covered as part of the Council's insurance arrangements, the comments as submitted by the Executive be agreed, and the City Treasurer be asked to consult with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources on the Committee's suggestion that the above be included as part of the City Council's response to the DTLR.

CROS.19/01: SPECIAL MEETING

RESOLVED - That a Special Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Corporate Resources be arranged for Thursday 25 October 2001 at 1.30 pm to discuss with the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, the issues relating to the level of charges for Bereavement Services and the Crematoria in general, and in particular why the proposed level of increase for those services should in some instances be by twice the rate of inflation as opposed to the proposed level of increase for other services which were lower.

(The meeting ended at 3.05 pm)

gh Committee Minutes Vol 283 Corporate Resources 18 10 01