

INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 7 MARCH 2002 AT 10.30 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Rutherford (Chairman), Councillors Mrs Bowman, Mrs Crookdake, Dodd, Hodgson B, Hodgson G, Mrs Mallinson and Miss Martlew (as substitute for Councillor Weedall).

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillors Glover, J Mallinson, Morton and G Prest attended part of the meeting as observers.

IOS.16/02 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Weedall.

IOS.17/02 AGENDA

The Chairman indicated that Agenda item A.9 (Cumbria County Council Corporate Strategy Review 2002/05) would be dealt with in conjunction with item A.4(iii) ("Listening to the Rural Voice" – A Strategy for Rural Carlisle).

In addition, she had agreed to an item concerning the County Council's proposed Public Transport and Pedestrian Improvements in the City Centre being considered as a matter of urgency in view of the need to deal with the issue before the next meeting of the Committee, and that would be considered as item A.7.

Further item A.7 (Concessionary Fares Best Value Review) would be moved down the Agenda to be considered following the Planning Services Service Plan.

IOS.18/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING DECLARATIONS OF "THE PARTY WHIP")

Councillors Mrs Mallinson and Dodd declared personal interests in accordance with the City Council's Code of Conduct for Members in respect of the item of business concerning The Forward Plan and in particular Carlisle Works : LSVT Related Issues. The interest related to their membership of Carlisle Housing Association Shadow Board.

Councillor B Hodgson declared a personal interest in accordance with the City Council's Code of Conduct for Members in respect of the item of business concerning the County Council's proposed Public Transport and Pedestrian Improvements in the City Centre. He declared the interest because it may affect his friends financially.

IOS.19/02 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2002 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

IOS.20/02 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

RESOLVED – That it be noted that there were no matters which had been the subject of call-in.

IOS.21/02 THE FORWARD PLAN

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy presented report TC.51/02 highlighting Forward Plan (1 March 2002 to 30 June 2002) issues which fell within the ambit of this Committee.

The Director of Environment and Development responded to Members' questions.

In considering the matter, a Member noted that the item concerning the Carlisle Northern Development Route – Implications for the City was unlikely to meet the deadline for decision by the Executive of 11 March 2002.

With regard to the item on Carlisle Works – LSVT Related Issues, a Member indicated that it was likely that the 25 March 2002 Executive deadline would slip and, because of the importance of the matter, sufficient time must be devoted to it in Committee. Further, a Member commented that one of the consultees detailed was Riverside which was incorrect. She therefore asked that the words "Carlisle Housing Association" be substituted for "Riverside" on that entry and in all Council documentation relating to the large scale voluntary transfer.

RESOLVED – That the issues contained within the Forward Plan for 1 March 2003 to 30 June 2002 and which fell within the ambit of this Committee be noted, subject to the error highlighted in respect of the item relating to Carlisle Works – LSVT Related Issues.

IOS.22/02 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted an Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2001/02, which took into account matters scheduled to be dealt with by this Committee.

He outlined certain issues of specific note and responded to Members' questions.

RESOLVED – That the 2001/02 Work Programme for the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

IOS.23/02 REFERENCES FROM THE EXECUTIVE

(i) Assembly Room – Old Town Hall

Pursuant to Minute IOS.16/01, copies of the Executive's response to this Committee's wish to be consulted as part of any future considerations in relation to the Assembly Room at the Old Town Hall had been submitted.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy indicated that the Executive had recently

agreed, following a request from the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee, that the Chairmen of relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees be invited to attend Executive meetings when references from those Committees were being considered.

RESOLVED – That the position be noted.

(ii) Best Value Review – Regeneration

Pursuant to Minute IOS.23/01, copies of the Executive's response to this Committee's comments regarding the Best Value Review of Regeneration had been submitted.

RESOLVED – That the response of the Executive be noted.

(iii) "Listening to the Rural Voice" – A Strategy for Rural Carlisle

Pursuant to Minutes OSM.19/02 and EX.55/02 the Economic Development Manager was present at the meeting and submitted Report EDU.2/02 containing the "Listening to the Rural Voice" – A Strategy for Rural Carlisle. The Committee had been asked to consider the Strategy and make comments in relation to the specific areas within its remit.

The Economic Development Manager referred to the Sections of the Strategy which were of particular relevance to this Committee. In particular, he stated that the key was to ensure that the measures listed under each of the 'Vision' statements could be developed and that none had been omitted. He asked for Members' comments on paragraphs 6.8.5 – developing the vision for the Economic Prosperity theme and 6.9.12 – developing the vision for the Infrastructure, Environment and Transport theme.

The Economic Development Manager then responded to Members' questions.

In considering the matter Members raised the following concerns –

The changes to the planning system suggested in the Planning Green Paper entitled "Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change" could impact on the Strategy for Rural Carlisle and should therefore be taken into account.

The Strategy should not be developed in isolation. Rather it should be looked at in conjunction with Cumbria County Council's Corporate Strategy Review for 2002/05, and integrated with the policies of all relevant organisations to ensure a corporate and wide ranging document.

The budgetary implications had not been included in the report and again it was extremely important to work in partnership from a funding point of view.

With regard to monitoring of the Strategy and targets measuring Parish Council 'vitality', a Member commented that she had been appalled to see Parish Councils described in the Cumberland News newspaper as "sleepy", that being based on a questionnaire. She added that Parish Councils were in fact very active and a vital part of the community. Another Member expressed the hope that that would be noted by the Officer and communicated to the Portfolio Holder for Community Activities.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy advised that once each Overview and Scrutiny Committee had commented on the Strategy, he would collate the comments into one

collective response which would be submitted to the Chairman of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee for approval before being forwarded to the Executive.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy be requested to note the concerns outlined above when compiling the collective response to the Strategy.

IOS.24/02 CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE STRATEGY REVIEW 2002/05

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy presented an Executive Summary of Cumbria County Council's Corporate Strategy Review for 2002/05 which had now been adopted.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy outlined certain of the key priorities contained within the Strategy which were linked to the work of this Committee and put the Strategy into context, particularly as regards the Strategy for Rural Carlisle.

RESOLVED – That the County Council's Corporate Strategy Review 2002/05 be noted.

IOS.25/02 NATIONAL COMPARISON OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS REPORT – 2000/01

Pursuant to Minute EX.58/02, the Performance Officer presented report TC.14/02 containing details of the City Council's performance over a range of Best Value and Audit Commission National Indicators for 2000/01, compared with a group of other similar Authorities and the national upper and lower quartiles. The Executive had asked each Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine performance areas within the lower quartile, obtain an explanation of the position and relevant Action Plans for improvement.

The Performance Officer provided a history of the matter, together with details of those indicators identified to be within the upper and lower quartiles.

The only indicator within the ambit of this Committee which fell within the lower quartile was BV91 % of population living within 1 km of a recycling facility or kerbside collection. The Director of Environment and Development explained the position, commenting that the City Council was working in partnership to expand the scope of the service which should result in an improvement.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Portfolio Holder for Infrastructure, Environment and Transport expressed his disappointment regarding BV91 and queried the wording of the definition. He added that £20,000 was available in the Budget for refurbish existing and provide new recycling centres following analysis of the pilot scheme.

The Performance Officer confirmed that the wording was correct and the Council was placed in the lower quartile because there had been difficulties related to the provision of data and, in particular, the application of the definition which had been applied differently by Authorities. The Council had since changed the way it calculated the data to enable more meaningful and consistent comparisons to be made with other Authorities and this had resulted in the Council being able to report upon a much higher figure.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy outlined the need to consider the manner by which Performance Indicators should be included in the Committee's Work Programme. He suggested that Officers be asked to identify areas where performance fell within the lower

quartiles, provide background information and attend meetings as necessary. In addition, definitions constantly caused problems and that area should also be considered.

A Member commented that it was important to look at improvements and targets for 2002/03 in conjunction with the expectations contained within the national indicators covering that period, to avoid the scenario whereby indicators currently just above the lower quartile subsequently fell within that quartile. The Performance Officer indicated that Officers were trying to address that point.

A Member commented that, although the main thrust of issues such as conservation projects and community safety did not fall within this Committee's responsibility, certain aspects did and the Performance Officer undertook to highlight the same in future reports.

RESOLVED – That the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy produce a programme, for consideration by the Committee, of areas where performance fell within the lower quartiles and ask the relevant Officers to attend meetings as necessary.

IOS.26/02 PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT – APRIL TO DECEMBER 2001

Pursuant to Minute EX.59/02, the Performance Officer presented report TC.15/02 detailing how the City Council had performed against the Best Value and Local Indicators for the third quarter of the year. Cumulative totals for the year so far were also included, together with comparisons with performance against 2001/02 annual targets, and for the same period in 2000/01 where appropriate. National upper Quartile figures were included where available. The Executive had referred the report to Overview and Scrutiny Committees for consideration.

The Director of Environment and Development commented that certain indicators (i.e. BV109 and 110) related to planning and were extremely sensitive to the availability of resources, including staffing. He then responded to Members' questions.

A Member expressed concern that budgetary implications had a knock-on effect on performance and stressed that all reports should include budget implications so that Members had all the relevant information to hand to make a judgement.

With regard to indicators which were of interest to Members and where Officers considered that definitions were being inconsistently applied, a Member suggested that those Officers investigate how Local Authorities within the Historic Cities Group and Neighbouring Authorities Groups dealt with the same, which course of action was agreed.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

IOS.27/02 PROPOSED PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS IN THE CITY CENTRE

Having declared a personal interest, Councillor B Hodgson left the room during consideration of this item of business.

The Director of Environment and Development presented a consultation leaflet issued by Cumbria County Council regarding proposed public transport and pedestrian improvements

in the City Centre, comments upon which had been requested by Friday 22 March 2002.

The Director explained current problems, together with the aims and objectives of the proposed scheme. He added that it was important that the Council responded formally, and both he and the Portfolio Holder would welcome the comments of this Committee.

The Director then responded to Members' questions.

A Member had attended a meeting the previous evening when the subject had been raised. There was disquiet regarding the proposed bus lane for Devonshire Street and the demise of parking in Court Square, although it was appreciated that drop off points should improve things. He had raised the possibility of taxis using bus lanes during off peak periods to assist in getting people off the streets with an Officer from the County Council and a Police Officer and they were not adverse to the idea. The Director indicated that that was the subject of ongoing debate and, on balance, may not be feasible from an enforcement point of view. A Member confirmed his opposition to that suggestion.

Concern was expressed with regard to:

- (a) The proposed replacement of some short stay parking on the Station forecourt and Court Square with an area for pedestrians. It currently proved difficult to obtain a parking space during certain periods for dropping/picking people up from the Station, a situation which would only be exacerbated by that proposal. In addition, if the public conveniences were to be removed an acceptable alternative must be provided.
- (b) If the taxi rank on Court Square Brow was moved back it would impact on persons carrying luggage to and from the Station, particularly visitors to the City.
- (c) The proposed bus/cycle/deliveries/taxis only lane in English Street could affect traffic flow.
- (d) Traffic flow at the Crescent was complex with no priority as to who had the right of way and which could prove dangerous. In addition congestion was caused by people parked illegally there and stricter enforcement was required.
- (e) The length of time which it takes to get out of town via Botchergate.
- (f) The proximity of the proposed pedestrian crossing at Victoria Viaduct with the traffic lights should be clarified from a safety point of view.

The following points were raised:

- (i) The possibility of traffic turning right down Warwick Road to alleviate congestion at The Lanes.
- (ii) The current pedestrian crossings at Court Square were adequate.
- (iii) The provision of a drop off point at the Bus Station should be investigated.
- (iv) If these revised proposals were implemented, care should be taken to ensure that road signs provided clear guidance to motorists.

The Director undertook to take the points raised on board.

RESOLVED – That the views of this Committee as outlined above and, in particular, the need to ensure that all vehicle movements worked safely, be forwarded to the Portfolio Holder for Infrastructure, Environment and Transport.

IOS.28/02 PLANNING SERVICES SERVICE PLAN

The Director of Environment and Development presented report EN.16/02 enclosing the Planning Services Service Plan for 2001/02 which would be updated in light of the Corporate Plan.

The Director provided an explanation of the services provided, links to the Council's objectives, strategies and major issues facing the Division. He commented that planning was a very high profile statutory service, sensitive to the availability of professional staff and outlined the problems currently being experienced in recruiting such staff. In addition, an officer had been seconded to DEFRA for six months which had impacted on the pro-active work undertaken and performance of the Division.

The Director then responded to Members' questions.

RESOLVED – That the Planning Services Service Plan for 2001/02 be noted.

IOS.29/02 CONCESSIONARY FARES BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Head of Revenues submitted Financial Memo 2001/02 No.144 enclosing the final draft of the Best Value Review of Concessionary Fares.

The Head of Revenues drew Members' attention to particular sections of the report. Overall the review and consultation feedback evidenced that the Concessionary Fares Scheme had been significantly improved during the 2001/02 review process, with 88% of concessionary fare passholders preferring the new system. In addition, a clear and concise three year Action Plan, monitoring arrangements and targets had been set down to ensure that the Scheme continued to improve over the medium term.

He then requested that Members scrutinise the report with a view to recommending the Review and its findings for submission to the Executive in March 2002.

In considering the matter, Members welcomed the recognition of their input into the report and expressed their appreciation of what was an exceptionally high quality piece of work. A Member commented that it may be appropriate for consideration by the Best Value Inspectorate.

RESOLVED – That the Concessionary Fares Best Value Review and its findings be recommended for submission to the Executive and City Council.

IOS.30/02 GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER – "STRONG LOCAL LEADERSHIP – QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES"

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy presented an IDeA summary, DTLR response to IDeA questions and LGA summary and comment on the Government's White Paper entitled "Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services".

The White Paper followed the 1998 White Paper – Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People – which laid the foundations for legislation on best value and new political management arrangements. It had also been preceded by the Local Government Finance Green Paper, published in September 2000, which proposed a number of reforms to the Local Government finance system which were now confirmed in Part II of the White Paper.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy outlined the LGA key messages and next steps, stressing that the Town Clerk and Chief Executive would be arranging a presentation to all Members of the City Council on the matter.

RESOLVED –That the documentation be noted.

[The meeting ended at 12.50 pm]