

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**THURSDAY 24 JANUARY 2002 AT 2.00 PM**

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

CROS.4/02 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Mr David Taylor, the newly appointed Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer to his first meeting of the Committee.

CROS.5/02 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jefferson.

CROS.6/02 AGENDA

Members proposed that the report on Political Assistants (B.1 on the agenda) be considered in public. The Officers who were identified in the report were present at the meeting and stated that they had no objections to the report being considered in public. The City Solicitor and Secretary advised that if the Officers involved had no objections and if Members were of a mind that the report should be dealt with publicly, then the report could be considered in public.

RESOLVED – That the report on Political Assistants be considered in public and therefore become item A.12 on the agenda.

CROS.7/02 EXECUTIVE MEETINGS

The Chairman and other Members proposed that when this Committee, or any other Overview and Scrutiny Committee refer a matter to the Executive, the Chairman of the relevant Committee should be invited to attend the Executive to present the matter and answer any questions.

RESOLVED – That the Executive be asked to consider inviting the Chairman of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee to attend meetings when references from that Committee are being considered by the Executive.

CROS.8/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

CROS.9/02 MINUTES

RESOLVED – (1) That the Minutes of the meetings held on 25 October and 6 December 2001 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meetings.

2. That the minutes of the Special meeting held on 8 January 2002 be noted.

CROS.10/02 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

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

CROS.11/02 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted a revised Work Programme for the Committee

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme for the Committee, as approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, be noted.

CROS.12/02 REFERENCE FROM THE EXECUTIVE – DEVELOPING A LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Further to Minute EX.112/01, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted Report TC.242/01 on the options available for developing a Local Strategic Partnership.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive commented on the need for a Local Strategic Partnership and the options for developing such a Partnership. He advised that a further report was being compiled which would give more detailed examination and analysis of the options of:

- a. The Carlisle and Eden Strategic Partnership;
- b. The Carlisle City Vision Partnership;
- c. The Cumbria Strategic Partnership.

This report would come back to this Committee for consultation.

Members commented that the report should examine the advantages and disadvantages of the options outlined above, but should also analyse potential Local Strategic Partnerships with other groupings of Local Authorities, as different partnerships may be appropriate to tackle different strategic issues.

RESOLVED – That the Executive be advised that any further report on developing Local Strategic Partnerships should:

1. include the terms of reference of the current Carlisle and Eden Strategic Partnership;
2. widen the examination of options to include other partnerships with other Local Authorities, including Allerdale, Dumfries and Galloway and Northumbria.

3. An evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of each of the options in report TC.242/01 and the ones proposed at (2) above.

CROS.13/02 THE FORWARD PLAN – ITEMS RELEVANT TO CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted Report TC.018/02 highlighting items in the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for 1 February 2002 to 31 May 2002, which are of relevance to this Committee.

A Member referred to item KD.035/02 on developing a Local Strategic Partnership and expressed the hope that the Executive would take on board the comments of the Committee at CROS.12/02 above.

RESOLVED – That the issues within the ambit of this Committee contained within the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for 1 February to 31 May 2002 be noted.

CROS.14/02 CUSTOMER CONTACT BEST VALUE REVIEW – UPDATE

Further to Minute CROS.33/01, the Head of Information Technology presented Financial Memo 2001/02 No 130 informing Members of the progress of the Project Team conducting the Customer Contact Best Value Review.

The Head of Information Technology reported on the consultation exercise, the analysis of the existing service provided by all Departments and work on a new customer contact policy. In addition, the Customer Services Manager from Debenhams had been invited to join the Review Team as a critical friend and the Team were looking to appoint an external consultant to perform a mid-term review of the work carried out.

The Team had started the Challenge part of the Review and had identified early possible alternatives, although more work had to be undertaken in this area. A revised timetable for the Review had also been drawn up.

The Head of Information Technology then answered various Members' questions and the Committee made the following comments:

- the interim report on "challenge" should include a brief outline of the Liverpool model;
- evidence of good practice should be included as part of the report on the draft customer contact policy;
- customer contact in Community Centres had not been considered as part of the Review to date, but it has a role to play;
- the role of elected members could be addressed under the forthcoming Best Value Review on Community Engagement;
- the Committee should have an input to the brief for the critical friend.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive commented that, if it would be of assistance, visits could be arranged to some organisations in the North East, who were leading the way in terms of customer contact.

The Chairman then thanked the Head of Information Technology and commended him on the quality of his reports.

RESOLVED – (1) That the contents of the report be noted.

(2) That the comments of the Committee, as outlined above, be addressed by the Project Team in conducting the Best Value Review.

CROS.15/02 ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW

An excerpt from the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee held on 17 January 2002 was tabled at the meeting. The Minute reference OSM.09/02 explained that, whilst scoping the Organisational Assessment Best Value Review, the Management Committee had recommended to the City Council that it was the appropriate Committee to undertake the Review and had asked that a suitable amendment be made to the Constitution to facilitate this action.

As the City Council had not yet considered the Management Committee proposals, and the matter was on the Work Programme for this Committee, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive's Report TC.12/02 which contained a report by HACAS Chapman Hendy setting out the work to date, was submitted.

Members proposed that the Committee should respond to the Management Committee and recommend to the City Council that this Committee should continue with the Organisational Assessment Review by setting up a Sub-Committee to consider the Organisational Assessment Best Value Review. The Sub-Committee would be politically balanced on a 3-1-1 basis, with the Chairmen of the other two Overview and Scrutiny Committees (or nominated substitutes) also co-opted to the Sub-Committee on a non-voting basis.

The City Solicitor and Secretary advised that the Committee could agree to set up such a Sub-Committee, but the Group Leaders would have to nominate their respective Members to serve on the Sub-Committee, drawing from the membership of this Committee. Two of the Group Leaders were present at the meeting and gave their nominations and the third Group Leader had given his nominations to the Vice-Chairman.

RESOLVED – (1) That an Organisational Assessment Best Value Review Sub-Committee be set up to consider and undertake the Best Value Review, with the following membership:

Conservative - Councillors Jefferson, Blackadder and J Prest (substitutes – Councillors Bain and Parsons);

Labour – Councillor Bradley (substitute – Styth);

Liberal Democrat and Independent – Councillor Guest;

Co-opted Members in a non-voting capacity – Councillors Ellis and C Rutherford (as Chairmen of the other two Overview and Scrutiny Committees)(or their nominated substitutes).

(2) That the first meeting of the Organisational Assessment Best Value Review Sub-Committee be held on Thursday 31 January 2002 at 11.30am.

2. That this Committee respond to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's

proposals by requesting that the City Council allow consideration of the Organisational Assessment Best Value Review to be conducted by this newly formed Sub-Committee.

CROS.16/02 COMMUNICATIONS REVISED BEST VALUE ACTION PLAN

Further to Minute CROS.30/01, the Head of Communications presented Report TC.17/02 containing the Best Value Action Plan for Communications, which had been revised in light of the Best Value Inspector's report published in November 2001.

That Head of Communications then answered various Members' questions and the Committee commented as follows:

- the next report to the Committee should relate the recommendations for further action in specific areas to the areas for improvement in the Action Plan;
- future reports should highlight and address communications with elected Members;
- the enforcer of the corporate identity manual should be clearly identified;
- consideration should be given to the Communications Unit approving drafts of publications rather than by using a pro forma.

RESOLVED – (1) That the comments of the Committee, as outlined above, be addressed by the Head of Communications in subsequent reports.

(2) That the recommendations in the Action Plan be approved and the Head of Communications be instructed to undertake the actions detailed in the Plan within the timetable as set out in the Plan.

CROS.17/02 PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT – APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2001

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted Report TC.238/01 providing details of how the City Council had performed against the Best Value and local indicators for the second quarter of financial year 2001/02. Comparisons with annual targets and performance in the same period in 2000/01 were provided.

In considering the performance indicators, Members commented that the following areas could be problem areas and should be monitored:

- Sickness absence – including BV12 – Number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence and BV15 - % of employees retiring on grounds of ill health as % of total workforce;
- LP94 - % of letters replied to within target times – City Treasury was below target due to the fact that the number of days for providing a response had been reduced in order to be in line with the rest of the Authority. The Department was having to adjust to the new target times;
- The effect of Foot and Mouth on BV10 - % non-domestic rates due that were received.

RESOLVED – (1) That the City Council's achievements against the Best Value and local Performance Indicators for the second quarter and the first six months of year 2001/02 be noted.

(2) That the Council's performance against the previous year and annual targets for 2000/01 be noted.

(3) That the following areas be identified as problem areas and monitored as follows:

- a. Sickness absence and retirement on grounds of ill health (BV12 and BV15) – The Head of Personnel Services be asked to report to the next meeting of the Committee on sickness absence within the Authority.
- b. % of letters replied to within target times (LP94) – City Treasury's performance to be monitored through future performance indicator reports
- c. % non-domestic rates due that were received – The City Treasurer to be asked to provide a written response to Members of the Committee on the effect of Foot and Mouth on performance.

CROS.18/02 SERVICE PLAN – CORPORATE POLICY AND STRATEGY UNIT

As part of a programme aimed at familiarising Members with the Service Plans within the responsibility of this Committee, the Service Plan for the Corporate Policy and Strategy Unit was submitted. Mr J White, the Policy and Research Officer then gave a presentation on where the Unit fits into the organisation; recent developments; current structure of the Unit; work of individual posts and achievements during the past year.

A Member referred to the Carlisle and Eden Strategic Partnership and in particular its work on the Foot and Mouth Crisis. She suggested that the Partnership should have talks with the Health Authorities and Primary Care Groups regarding the long term health effects of the Foot and Mouth Crisis.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Service Plan for the Corporate Policy and Strategy Unit be noted.

(2) That the Corporate Policy and Strategy Unit action the comments of the Committee in relation to the Carlisle and Eden Strategic Partnership having talks with Health Authorities and Primary Care Groups.

CROS.19/02 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 upon which comments were sought.

The Strategy set out the strategic direction for the County Council in 2002/05 and beyond and highlighted the priorities which the organisation would be working towards in partnership with local communities and key public, private and voluntary sector bodies.

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

CROS.20/02 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 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 White Paper.

RESOLVED – That the documentation be noted.

CROS.21/02 POLITICAL ASSISTANTS

Further to Minute CROS.26/01, and the Executive's response EX.103/01, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted Report TC.016/02 outlining a range of options in respect of Political Assistants and indicating the employment and financial implications of each option. This Committee were being consulted on the report prior to its submission to the City Council.

The Head of Personnel Services advised that, since the report had first been issued to the Committee, further advice from Counsel had been received on some of the options. He advised that, in light of this Advice, an amended version of TC.016/02 had been circulated. This report set out six options, but after receiving Counsel's Advice, Officers were not recommending options 4, 5 and 6. Therefore, although the report set out 6 options, Officers would only recommend the following options to the City Council:

1. To reduce the allocation of Political Assistants to part time;
2. To abolish all Political Assistant posts;
3. To reject all options for change.

The Head of Personnel Services, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive and the City Solicitor and Secretary then answered various Members' questions in relation to specific aspects of the report. The Committee then held a detailed discussion on the report and made a number of comments and proposals which are set out in the following resolution.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the amended report be noted and the following comments and proposals made as part of the consultation exercise:

1. The final report to the City Council should provide some indication of the potential costs and resource implications, in terms of placing additional demands on other Officers of the Council, if Political Assistant posts are abolished or made part time. Although it would not be possible to give exact costs, an estimate was requested if possible as this would have to be considered against potential savings.
2. The final report to the City Council should also include the positive comments on the role of Political Assistants which had arisen during the consultation with non-domestic ratepayers.
3. The original report TC.221/02 on Members Support Needs should be circulated to all

Members as background information, when the final report on Political Assistants is being sent to Council Members.

4. The report on Political Assistants should be considered by the City Council during the public part of the meeting, the two Officers involved having indicated that they consented to this proposal.

(The meeting ended at 4.49pm)