

**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****THURSDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2003 AT 2.00 PM**

PRESENT: Councillor Guest (Chairman), Councillors Bain, Mrs Bradley, Mrs Fisher (as substitute for Councillor Jefferson), Joscelyne, McDevitt (as substitute for Councillor Stothard), J Mallinson, and Mrs Styth.

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Firth, Portfolio Holder for Policy, Performance Management, Finance and Resources

**CROS.100/03 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Jefferson and Stothard.

**CROS.101/03 AGENDA**

RESOLVED – That, if representatives of the Trade Unions were in attendance at the meeting, then the item of business relating to Consultative Arrangements with Trade Unions would be moved up the Agenda.

**CROS.102/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest affecting any item on the Agenda.

**CROS.103/03 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 24 July, 13 and 22 August 2003 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meetings.

**CROS.104/03 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS**

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

**CROS.105/03 WORK PROGRAMME****a. Discussion with Portfolio Holder**

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager reminded Members of arrangements whereby Portfolio Holders were invited to attend meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees with a view to identifying issues and policy proposals which were programmed for the forthcoming year and to discuss how these could be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny for consideration as appropriate.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Firth, Portfolio Holder for Policy, Performance Management, Finance and Resources to the meeting.

Councillor Firth commenced by welcoming Members' questions, commenting that here was an opportunity for all Members to put forward their thoughts, which often in the past had only become apparent after decisions had been taken.

He would endeavour to ensure that relevant items of business were programmed to go through Overview and Scrutiny so that the Executive would have the benefit of Members' views in general prior to decisions being made.

Councillor Firth then updated Members on the current position as regards the Budget process, including looking closely at the outturn position, commenting that steps were being taken to ensure that Budgets were monitored via the new Business Unit Heads. He was aware that currently many people had difficulty in understanding Budget reports and was actively trying to ensure that in future they would be presented in a format that could be more easily understood.

Cllr Firth made reference to the income currently derived from the Council's Property Portfolio and the need to identify the resources necessary to invest in the Council's various properties, particularly the industrial estates, before the income stream dried up.

A Member welcomed any move to rationalise the Property Portfolio, believing that there was a need to ensure that if the Council owned and was to retain property/land there should be a valid reason for so doing.

The Chairman stated that this Committee could assist with Asset Management issues, making suggestions through discussions with Councillor Firth.

He then asked whether any delay in the Budget timetable was anticipated and Councillor Firth advised that, as far as he knew, there should be no delay.

Members welcomed Councillor Firth's undertaking to involve Overview and Scrutiny to a greater extent in the future, particularly as regards the development of policy. They again stressed previous concerns regarding arrangements to enable Overview and Scrutiny Committees to effectively scrutinise business within the Forward Plan, particularly as regards the Budget process.

The Head of Member Support and Employee Services stated that the matter had been discussed at Corporate Management Team, following its consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. Steps were being taken to address concerns raised and to implement improvements via the inclusion of an Overview and Scrutiny box within each Forward Plan item. That box would set out which Committee was responsible or was taking the lead in a cross cutting matter and the dates when the matter was programmed to be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committees or, alternatively, a statement that the matter was not to be reported to Overview and Scrutiny and why.

The Chairman and Members thanked Councillor Firth for his attendance which was appreciated.

**RESOLVED** – That the Chairman of this Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Manager meet with the Portfolio Holder for Policy, Performance Management, Finance and Resources to discuss Property Management issues and their consideration by the Committee.

**(b) Work Programme 2003/04**

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager presented the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2003/04 which took into account matters scheduled to be dealt with by this Committee, and explained the current status of the various items.

Referring to consideration of the Council Budget, Mr Mallinson advised that he had been working closely with colleagues to ensure effective timetabling thereof to Overview and Scrutiny. The Executive would consider initial Budget proposals at its December meeting and this Committee had previously resolved that a special meeting should be convened, also in December, to consider the same.

Bearing in mind the timescales involved he suggested that Members may wish to consider bringing forward the January meeting of this Committee to say Monday 12 January 2004. That would allow the Committee to consider the Budget proposal over a period of time and present its views in a measured way in time for the Executive meeting on 19 January 2004.

Members confirmed their agreement with that course of action and requested that a letter be circulated in order that they may diary the change in arrangements.

As regards training, Mr Mallinson advised that a training event for Overview and Scrutiny, to be facilitated by the North West Employers, was to be held on 8 October 2003 at Tullie House and, if Members were interested in attending they should let him know.

Similarly, training on Performance Management was to be provided by an Audit Commission trainer on 14 October 2003, details of which would follow. Councillor Mrs Styth wished to record her apologies for both these events.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Work Programme be noted.

(2) That the meeting of this Committee scheduled to take place on Thursday 15 January 2004 be rearranged to Monday 12 January 2004 at 2.00 pm.

**CROS.106/03 MONITORING OF FORWARD PLAN ITEMS  
RELEVANT TO THIS COMMITTEE**

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager presented Report LDS.55/03, highlighting issues with the ambit of this Committee included within the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for the period 1 September 2003 to 31 December 2003.

Mr Mallinson then reported on the present position on each matter within the Forward Plan.

He then suggested that the Committee may wish to consider or have input to items KD.087/03 (Administrative Support for Members) and KD.088/03 (Framework for Members' Development) at its meeting to be held on 16 October 2003. Members confirmed their agreement to that course of action.

Referring to KD.065/03 – Prioritisation Summary and Next Steps, a Member noted that the consultees included City Vision partners and others, but there was no mention of Members of the Council. She stressed that Members would like the opportunity to have their input included and the Head of Strategic and Performance Services undertook to take that point on board.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Report be noted.

(2) That this Committee wished to input into the issues of Administrative Support for Members and Framework for Members' Development and would consider the same at its meeting to be held on 16 October 2003.

### **CROS.107/03 REFERENCE FROM THE EXECUTIVE**

#### **Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget Strategy 2004/05 to 2006/07**

There was submitted Executive Decision EX.165/03 setting out the Executive's response to this Committee's concerns as regards the Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget Strategy 2004/05 to 2006/07.

The Executive wished to inform this Committee that the budget process would involve consultation with the Community and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committees as well as the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive would forward reports, as appropriate, during the budget process, including any efficiency savings proposals.

RESOLVED – That the position be noted.

### **CROS.108/03 CONSULTATIVE ARRANGEMENTS WITH TRADE UNIONS**

Further to Minute CROS.86/03, report ME.9/03 describing the current consultative arrangements with Trade Unions had been resubmitted, together with a report on the subject, previously submitted to the Personnel Consultative Committee on 27 July 2001 (TC.170/01 refers) which Members had requested sight of.

Consideration of the matter had been deferred to allow representatives of the Trade Unions the opportunity to present their views to the Committee.

The Head of Member Support and Employee Services explained that the Regional Officers of the main Trade Unions (AMICUS, UNISON and GMB) had been in Carlisle for various meetings but were unable to attend the Committee and had submitted their apologies. In addition, it had been necessary to postpone the Level 2 meeting scheduled for August and therefore no collective discussion of the matter had taken place. He could, however, report verbally on feedback from the Unions if Members wished.

Members were most concerned that representatives of the Trade Unions were not present, feeling that if they could not attend it should have been possible for them to submit their views in writing. Members stressed their wish to maintain a good working relationship with the Trade Unions and therefore considered it unsafe to proceed to consider the matter in the absence of Union representation.

RESOLVED – (1) That consideration of consultative arrangements with Trade Unions be deferred until the next meeting of this Committee.

(2) That the Head of Member Support and Employee Services be requested to arrange for representatives of the Unions to be invited to present their views at that time.

### **CROS.109/03 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

### **– SICKNESS ABSENCE AND ILL HEALTH RETIREMENTS**

The Head of Member Support and Employee Services presented report ME.13/03 updating Members on the Action Plan relating to performance on Sickness Absence and Ill Health Retirements.

Mr Williams provided details of the Council's performance as regards sickness absence over the last three years, which was getting progressively worse:

2000/01 An average of 12.2 days per employee

2001/02 An average of 12.9 days per employee

2002/03 An average of 13.1 days per employee

The Council's target was 8.2 days per year by 2004/05 and for 2003/04 was 9 days.

However, in the first quarter of 2003/04 the Council achieved an average of 2.6 days per employee which compared favourably with the same quarter in 2002/03 when the average was 3.7 days per employee.

Mr Williams drew attention to the amended Action Plan appended to his report and outlined progress against the original Plan.

Details of the Council's performance against the Ill Health Retirements Performance Indicator were also provided, which showed that there had been no ill health early retirements in the first quarter of 2003/04 compared with 0.09% in the first quarter of last year.

The previous report (MR.02/03 refers) identified the limited measures available to influence performance in that area, and Officers were continuing with that approach.

The Chairman requested that the next progress report include a breakdown of short and long-term sickness absence by Business Unit, which he considered would assist Members in their interpretation of the statistics, and Mr Williams confirmed that such information could be provided.

A Member also asked that details of the percentage of accidents in the workplace be provided.

Mr Williams advised that, in the main, accidents occurred within the Commercial and Technical Services Business Unit where the reporting of such was very well recorded. It would therefore be possible to provide that information.

Mr Williams then responded to Members' questions.

A Member commented that the impending transfer of Carlisle Works to Carlisle Housing Association would also have an impact on the Council's performance and Mr Williams added that likewise Single Status would affect the figures.

Referring to comparison of the City Council with other Local Authorities, the Chairman questioned how many of those Authorities had Direct Labour Organisations since, if the majority did not, an unfair comparison may be made.

The Head of Strategic and Performance Services advised that the Council was compared with all Local Authorities and a great deal of work would be involved in ascertaining which had DSOs.

The Chairman then requested that a random sample be approached to identify Authorities without DSOs, which information would be valuable in future deliberations.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Head of Member Support and Employee Services be requested to submit a further progress report in four months time, that report to include a breakdown of short and long-term sickness absence by Business Unit, together with details of the number of accidents occurring within the workplace.

(3) That the Head of Strategic and Performance Services be requested to arrange for research to be undertaken, based on a random sample of Authorities, to determine which of those did not have Direct Labour Organisations.

### **CROS.110/03 MONITORING OF THE CITY VISION AND CORPORATE PLAN**

Pursuant to Minutes CROS.60/03 and CROS.81/03(b), the Head of Strategic and Performance Services presented report SP.19/03 updating Members on proposals to facilitate effective monitoring of the Council's City Vision and Corporate Plan by Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Ms Hook reminded Members of the background to the City Vision document which contained a large number of aspirations for Carlisle over its 10 year life. However, at the time of its development, no measurements tools or SMART targets had been developed specifically for the City Vision and so it could not be monitored as a stand-alone document.

Work was ongoing on combining City Vision and Eden Futures into one Community Strategy to be published late this calendar year. Current 'measurability' weaknesses as regards the City Vision would be addressed in that document by the inclusion of SMART targets and measurable objectives which would enable Officers, Members and stakeholders to monitor progress of the joint Strategy.

#### **Problems with Monitoring**

One of the problems that occurred when trying to measure and monitor progress with Community Strategies was the varying sophistication of partners and, for that reason, it was unlikely that the progress against the Strategy could be reported with complete accuracy.

One solution to that problem would be for the Council to be much more proactive in its management of the Community Strategy and work with partners on a one to one basis in developing the Strategy and its management in that organisation. That would be extremely resource intensive and could not be provided within current capacity. In addition, it may not be welcomed by all partners.

Another problem in monitoring was the ability to identify easily measurable, relevant indicators of performance. A lot of work was, however, being undertaken by the Government and the Audit Commission and Officers would be using their best practice development to guide them in making improvements.

## **Relationship to Corporate Plan**

The Council's obligations and commitments towards achieving the City Vision were set out in the Corporate Plan and had cascaded into the new Business Unit Plans. Business Plans would be formally monitored from September and that would assist the authority in ensuring it achieved its organisational objectives. Should the Council approve a joint Community Strategy with Eden, Business Plans next year would reflect any shift in position.

## **Development of the Corporate Plan**

The Council's first ever Corporate Plan had similar problems to the City Vision document. A prioritisation exercise, to be carried out with all political groups, was being developed to rationalise the organisation's objectives and ensure that effort was focussed in areas which were most important to the local community and where greatest improvements could be made.

Once that had been undertaken, a revised Corporate Plan would be developed, reflecting the Council's contribution to the Community Strategy and containing SMART measures and targets. These would be cascaded into Business Plans to enable Members and Officers to monitor progress in an intelligent way.

Ms Hook then responded to Members' questions.

RESOLVED – That the issues contained within the report be noted, and a further report identifying progress be submitted as soon as that was possible.

[The meeting ended at 3.00 pm]