

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**THURSDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2002 AT 2.00 PM**

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

CROS.22/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Bradley and Mrs Prest.

CROS.23/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

CROS.24/02 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 8 January 2002 (Special meeting) and 24 January 2002 were submitted for noting.

Members referred to the Minutes of 24 January 2002 and in particular Minute reference CROS.12/02. Some Members expressed the opinion that the resolution which was minuted was not a firm resolution agreed at the meeting.

The Chairman advised that he had seen and approved the draft minutes containing this resolution. He, and other Members, stated that the minutes were accurate and that he had checked the Committee Clerk's notes and spoken to other officers who were present at the meeting and confirmed the accuracy of the minutes.

After discussion, the Chairman proposed that it be noted that the minutes, and in particular Minute Reference CROS.12/02, be confirmed as a true record of the meeting.

RESOLVED – (1) That the minutes of the Special meeting held on 8 January 2002 be noted.

(2) That it be noted that the minutes of the meeting on 24 January 2002, and in particular Minute reference CROS.12/02, were confirmed as a true record of the meeting.

CROS.25/02 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

A Member referred to an Executive Decision which had been made by the Leader relating to an Executive "Away Day" Event at the Crown Inn, Wetheral on Wednesday 6 March 2002 (PF.005/02). The Chairman could call-in the decision on his own, but Members were asked to consider if they wanted the decision to be called in by three Members of the Committee, rather than by the Chairman on his own. After voting, Councillors Guest, Mrs Styth and Mrs Parsons indicated that they wished to request a call-in for scrutiny of the

Leader's Executive decision PF.005/02 relating to an Executive "Away Day" to be held on 6 March 2002 at the Crown Inn, Wetheral.

CROS.26/02 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted a revised Work Programme for the Committee. He commented that the Communications Unit's Service Plan was on the agenda for consideration at today's meeting. However, the Head of Communications was on sick leave and he therefore suggested that consideration of the matter be deferred.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Work Programme for the Committee, as approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, be noted.

(2) That consideration of the Communications Unit's Service Plan be deferred until the next meeting of the Committee.

(3) That the best wishes of the Committee for a speedy recovery be passed on to the Head of Communications.

CROS.27/02 EXECUTIVE RESPONSES TO MATTERS RAISED BY

THIS COMMITTEE

(a) Executive Meetings

Further to Minute Ref CROS.7/02 an excerpt from the Minutes of the Executive were submitted. (Minute Ref: EX.047/02). The Executive had agreed that the Chairman of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee be invited to attend Executive Meetings when references from that Committee are being considered.

In response to a Member's question, the City Treasurer advised that any Member who is called to a Committee would be entitled to travel expenses.

RESOLVED – That the decision of the Executive be noted.

(b) Developing a Local Strategic Partnership Strategy

Further to Minute Ref CROS.12/02 an Executive Decision Record EX.039/02 was submitted. The Executive had considered a report by the Town Clerk and Chief Executive detailing actions which would be required should the City Council wish to develop a Joint Local Strategic Partnership with Eden District Council.

The Executive had then agreed to make a number of recommendations to the City Council relating to the development of a Joint Local Strategic Partnership with Eden District Council.

Members had discussed the minutes of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 January regarding this item earlier in the meeting (Minute reference CROS.24/02) and had confirmed that the minutes in relation to this item (CROS.12/02) were a true record of the meeting.

As the minutes had been confirmed as a true record, a Member proposed that the matter should be referred back to the Executive.

RESOLVED – That, as the Committee minutes on Developing a Local Strategic Partnership (CROS.12/02) had been confirmed as a true record of the meeting, the matter be referred back to the Executive.

CROS.28/02 REFERENCES FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMITTEES

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

Further to Minutes OSM.19/02 and EX.55/02 the Economic Development Manager was in attendance and submitted Report EDU.02/02 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 the remit of this Committee.

The Economic Development Manager referred to the Sections of the Strategy which were of particular relevance to this Committee. In particular, he asked for Members' comments on paragraph 7.2 – Funding for Rural Carlisle and 7.3 – Monitoring the Strategy and Performance Targets.

In response to Members' questions, the Economic Development Manager advised that the Strategy would require a different approach to rural development and that this would have to be picked up in the Organisational Assessment Best Value Review. 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 this Committee for approval before being forwarded to the Executive.

Members welcomed the Strategy commenting that it was an important piece of work which must be actioned.

RESOLVED – (1) That paragraphs 7.2.1, 7.2.2, 7.2.3, 7.2.4 and 7.2.5 of the Strategy for Rural Carlisle be endorsed in full.

(2) That paragraphs 7.3.1, 7.3.2 and 7.3.3 be endorsed and taken on board in monitoring the Strategy and Performance targets.

b. District Audit Management Letter

Further to Minute EX.057/02, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted Report TC.33/02 enclosing a copy of the District Auditor's Annual Audit Letter on the management of Carlisle City Council in relation to the accounts, financial aspects of corporate governance and performance for the year 2000/01. The report had been referred to the Committee by the Executive.

In considering the report Members made the following comments:

- The report showed that the Council was going in the right direction and officers and Members should take heart from this report. Officers at all levels, particularly those at the front line of services should be thanked for their efforts.
- Improvements in relation to project management had been implemented since the

Gateway City Project. In future these improvements should mean that extra care is taken when officers are expected to take on the management of major projects which are in addition to existing workloads. In future, support needs for major projects should be considered at the outset with specific project management teams and/or consultants used where appropriate.

The City Treasurer and the Town Clerk and Chief Executive then answered Members' questions in relation to Internal Audit's Audit Plan for reviewing key controls for 2000/01 and 2001/02.. They also commented on risk assessments which had taken place in relation to the housing and leisure transfer and on the existence of an alternative strategy if the housing transfer does not proceed. Performance in relation to the collection of housing rent debt was highlighted and it was noted that there had been an improvement in housing performance indicators.

In response to questions, the City Treasurer outlined the procedures which were in place to registering and monitoring all grant income and advised that Chief Officers were responsible for ensuring that staff adhere to these procedures. In relation to the UNIX review, District Audit would come back to the Head of Information Technology to discuss an action plan.

RESOLVED – (1) That the comments of Members as outlined above be noted and officers at all levels be thanked for their efforts.

(2) That the Executive be advised that this Committee endorses the District Auditor's comments in relation to the need for medium and longer term financial plans (Page 2 – Key Messages – Financial Standing).

(3) That the key issues on ensuring that Members and officers are trained to understand their new roles, especially in relation to scrutiny and performance management (as contained in the second set of bullet points under New political arrangements - page 7, first column) be endorsed and referred to the group looking at Member Training priorities.

(c) Proposals for Value for Money and Performance Review Studies

Further to Minute EX.021/02 containing the Executive's proposals for Value for Money/Performance Review studies, it was

RESOLVED – That the Executive's suggestions be considered during consideration of the next item of business on the agenda.

CROS.29/02 AUDIT PLAN 2002-2003 (INCLUDING PROPOSALS FOR VALUE FOR MONEY STUDIES)

The Audit Manager was in attendance and submitted Financial Memo 2001/02 No 141 providing details of planned internal audit work for the financial years 2002/03, together with comments relating to the Strategic Audit Plan.

The Audit Manager then outlined proposed Value for Money/Performance Review/Best Value Studies, which had been received from various sources. The Executive had proposed Bereavement Services, Draft Corporate Plan and Financial Strategy. He advised that Bereavement Services was already the subject of a Best Value review. In addition, after discussion with Members and officers, he had built in time for Internal Audit to give advice and assistance in relation to the draft Corporate Plan and Financial Strategy, instead of having them as the subject of specific reviews.

The Audit Manager then asked Members to consider the proposals for reviews and to agree which of these reviews should be undertaken and in which order of priority.

RESOLVED – (1) That it be noted that the revised Strategic Plan will be presented to this Committee for consideration and approval in February 2003.

(2) That the Internal Audit Plan for 2002/03, as set out in Appendix A, be approved.

(3) That the following Value for Money/Performance Review/Best Value Reviews be undertaken:

- Sundry Debtors and Periodic Income – as the first priority
- Grants
- Quality Assurance
- The Enterprise Centre and the Irthing Centre

CROS.30/02 MONITORING OF FORWARD PLAN ITEMS RELEVANT

TO THIS COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted Report TC.049/02 highlighting items in the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for 1 March to 30 June 2002, which are of particular relevance to this Committee.

In response to Members' questions on KD.026/01 – Wardens Performance Study, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that two components of this matter would be dealt with as part of the Organisational Assessment Best Value Review.

RESOLVED – That the issues within the ambit of this Committee contained within the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for 1 March to 30 June 2002 be noted.

CROS.31/02 CUSTOMER CONTACT BEST VALUE REVIEW – UPDATE

Further to Minute CROS.14/02, the Head of Information Technology was in attendance and presented Financial Memo 2001/02 No.143 informing Members of progress of the Project Team conducting the Customer Contact Best Value Review. In particular, he highlighted progress on consultation exercises, analysis of the existing service, a draft Customer Contact policy, the brief for the critical friend, alternative delivery models, detailed service proposal and involvement of partner organisations. He further commented that the Audit Commission may select this review for inspection during the coming year and he outlined a revised timetable for the Review.

The Head of Information Technology then sought Members' comments on the following pieces of work:

- Draft Customer Contact Policy
- Detailed Service Proposals – improvements

- o Alternative service delivery models.

In response to Members' questions, the Head of Information Technology advised that some other authorities operated indirect provision by the Council through externalisation. In such cases there had been a very significant number of inefficiencies which meant that private sector agencies were attracted as they could see the potential for large savings.

Members' commented that there were a lot of positives to focus on in relation to customer contact. After discussion, Members and officers agreed that although there were positives, there were also a number of areas which could be improved e.g. the introduction of a single customer contact point in the Civic Centre. In addition customers' expectations were continually rising and the Council should aim to be ahead of the game. This would mean that there would have to be more than just an improvement on the current arrangements.

RESOLVED – (1) That the contents of the report in relation to the draft Customer Contact Policy, the role of the critical friend, detailed proposals for improvements of any future service and proposals for including partner organisations, be noted and endorsed.

2. That in relation to alternative service delivery models:

- a. The following possible alternatives outlined under paragraph 5.3(a)(ii) be examined further in the Best Value review:

- o a separate, single customer contact unit
- o a DSO run Customer contact unit

- a. That the following alternatives are not pursued further at this stage:

- o Continuing direct provision by improving on current arrangements
- o Indirect provision by the Council through externalisation of the service

CROS.32/02 ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW

SUB-COMMITTEE

RESOLVED – (1) That the Minutes of the Organisational Assessment Best Value Review Sub-Committee held on 31 January 2002, attached at Appendix A, be noted.

(2) That, when future meetings of the Sub-Committee are being scheduled, attempts should be made to avoid further scheduling of meetings on Fridays.

CROS.33/02 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

(a) National Comparison of Performance Indicators 2000/01

Further to Minute EX.58/02, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted 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 and get an explanation for the position and relevant Action Plans for improvement.

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

(b) Performance Indicators Report – April to December 2001

Further to Minute EX.59/02, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted 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.

Members commented that it was sometimes difficult to understand the performance reports as they contained varied and complex information. The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy advised that, as consideration of performance by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees developed, the focus would be on areas where performance was less than good. There would be detailed examination of these specific areas and focus on possible improvements. In addition, briefing meetings could be used to explain complex information to Members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the focus of examination be on areas of poorer performance.

CROS.34/02 SICKNESS ABSENCE

Further to Minute CROS.17/02, the Head of Personnel Services submitted Report TC.50/02 providing additional information on sickness absence and the measures which had been taken to address any problems. These measures included an absence management policy, adequate and appropriate management information, suitably trained and confident managers and the central monitoring of absence management.

The Head of Personnel Services then responded to Members' questions. In particular, he commented on some of the external factors affecting sickness absence and efforts to reduce stress on employees.

Members welcomed the measures which were being put in place to reduce sickness absence and a Member suggested that there could be further improvements by ensuring that it is the employee themselves or a member of the close family who phones in on a day of sickness absence. In addition, the manager should ensure that there is a return to work interview with the employee.

RESOLVED – That the additional information and the measures being taken to address the current level of sickness absence be noted.

CROS.35/02 SERVICE PLAN – CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS UNIT

RESOLVED – That consideration of the Service Plan for the Corporate Communications Unit be deferred until the next meeting of the Committee.

(The meeting ended at 3.50pm)

Lat Commin 286 Corporate Resources O & S 28 02 02