

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)

12th March 2007

**PRESENT:-**

**Labour Group**

Councillor Bell (Chair), Councillor Mulgrew (Vice Chair) and Councillor Tilley.

**Conservative Group**

Councillors Atkin, Bale and Bladen.

**APOLOGY**

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Jones (Labour Group).

COS/47. **INFORMATION PROJECT**

The Chair introduced this item, reminding Members of the background and suggested way forward with this special project. Contact had been made with departments to ascertain whether they kept a register of the information or leaflets produced. This had resulted in a document, circulated at the meeting, that tabulated information on how many leaflets had been produced. It provided details of where the leaflets had been distributed, whether they were available for downloading from the website or were distributed to partners. Members commented on the resultant data collated.

The Chair introduced Sasha Ryan who had recently been employed within the Policy and Economic Regeneration Division. He gave an outline of her background and her role on consultation and communication policies. The Chair felt there was a need to bring work on this special project to a close and to report to the next meeting of the Finance and Management Committee. He considered that there were three areas to focus on, for internal and externally produced information and the arrangements for its control and management. Guidance should be provided so that Officers considered whether the literature was needed, whether it should just be produced electronically or to determine how many publications should be produced and where they were distributed. The Director of Corporate Services had circulated further information on the arrangements for leaflet management and a procedure for producing information and literature. There was a desire to keep the public areas of the Civic Offices tidy and to display South Derbyshire literature first. There had also been concerns that some of the literature was out of date. The leaflet management arrangements should address this. The Chair reiterated that guidance should be provided on whether the publications were needed. Officers considered that a guide from Members, was needed on this issue.

The Director of Corporate Services explained that the Procurement Manager was now responsible for the print room service. In order to ensure best value for money, it was now recommended that Heads of Service authorise the production of literature above a specified level. It was considered that all documents should be placed on the Council's website, to further the E-Government objectives. There were statutory or other requirements to produce certain information, but it was questioned how the Council could assess the information that residents wished to receive.

Councillor Bale felt that providing information only in electronic forms discriminated against residents that did not have access to the internet. This point was acknowledged, but the Director explained the benefits of providing information electronically and there were information kiosks throughout the District. It was not suggested that the Council ceased production of information leaflets, but that it be provided electronically as well.

Councillor Tilley questioned the mechanisms for monitoring the number of leaflets taken from the Civic Offices. Checks could be made on the numbers of leaflets replenished and those printed, which would give an indication of demand. A comparison was made to Leicestershire County Council, which categorised the demand for its literature. Consultation would be needed to determine those publications that the public found important. Further reference was made to Council Tax literature and to the service standard booklets, which showed the legal requirements or recognised best practice of producing certain literature. Councillor Atkin commented that many parish notice boards were congested with such literature.

The Chair referred to the external information displayed at the Civic Offices. He questioned whether Members were comfortable with the current range of literature provided, or whether it should be reviewed or limited. For example, should the Council duplicate information displayed at the Tourist Information Centre?

It was considered that the Council should not display commercial information and felt the Committee could endorse the prioritised list in the leaflet management paper as follows:

- Leaflets produced by South Derbyshire District Council,
- Leaflets produced by Derbyshire County Council,
- Leaflets produced by partners,
- Leaflets produced by Community Groups

The Chair also referred to the information made available through the Area Meeting help desk.

Councillor Bale spoke about the arrangements for making contact with an Officer. The leaflets produced usually gave details of a contact for further information. This might include availability in other languages or forms to request a service. If residents visited the Civic Offices, they were likely to make contact first and then receive the appropriate literature. The Chair questioned whether the receptionist could provide information as required, by printing the relevant literature.

The Committee discussed making information available in other languages. A translation service was provided where required, but it was noted that the

vast majority of residents in South Derbyshire spoke English. It was considered that providing publications in other languages might not be of assistance to some elderly residents, who might not be able to read in their own language. In these cases, assistance and a translation service might be more useful. It was confirmed that this was the approach adopted by Leicestershire County Council. The Committee also discussed the merits of producing multi lingual “strap lines”, tailored to specific documents, including committee agendas. The Director of Corporate Services explained the cost incurred for the generic strap line and provided a broad estimate of the likely costs of producing tailored information for such things as committee agendas. Councillor Tilley considered this cost to be extortionate. Officers also questioned the likely level of demand for this service, making reference to the level of demand for committee agendas presently. There was a consensus that the Council provided sufficient information and it was not economic to incur additional costs, particularly as Members were mindful of immigration legislation and other Government initiatives, to promote the use of the English language.

The Chair then referred to the management arrangements for the production of literature. He felt that all publications should be produced by the print room, to ensure they accorded with corporate standards. He spoke of the role of the receptionists, who should have access to the schedule of leaflets, be able to access information electronically and to provide copies to customers. There was a need for a regimented approach, possibly with sequential numbering of the literature. He considered the nomination of the leaflet monitor to be a positive step. There was a need to ensure that literature was kept updated and to keep surfaces clear, rather than them being covered with excessive literature. **The Committee endorsed the Chair’s thoughts on this issue.**

The Director of Corporate Services thanked the Committee for its support and confirmed that the Customer Services Manager would manage this area as effectively as possible. Through using the Council’s print room, it would assist monitoring of the literature produced and ensure it was in the appropriate format. Through the Procurement Manager, certain controls could be imposed, although some heads of service might challenge these. This approach should also result in savings on printing budgets.

One issue that remained difficult to assess was the range of information that should be displayed. Councillor Bladen considered that each head of service should know the types of information that needed to be published. He used the example of waste disposal, to show how through recycling endeavours, substantial information was now produced. There was a discussion about consultation requirements and the Director of Corporate Services used the example of a leaflet on the Council’s accounts. There had been a successful focus group consultation, which had helped with the design of this literature. Further issues discussed were the efforts to ensure that publications were produced in plain English and a Member questioned whether it would be useful to look at consultation feedback.

**It was agreed that the Chair produce a draft report and that this be circulated to the Committee for comment, before being submitted to the Finance and Management Committee on 22nd March 2007.**

COS/48.**ANNUAL REPORT 2006/07**

A document was circulated that proposed the text for the Corporate Scrutiny Committee's contribution to the Annual Report for 2006/07. The Chair discussed the mechanisms for concluding projects and determining whether reports were needed to policy committees in order that the work programme was completed. The Chair intended to work with Councillor Lane, the Chair of the Community Scrutiny Committee, to finalise the Annual Report.

**It was agreed that the Committee note the draft report and authorise the Chairs of the respective Scrutiny Committees to compile the report for consideration at the Overview Committee and subsequently the Council Meeting.**

R. BELL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.40 p.m.