

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16th June 2003

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Bell (Chair), Councillor Murphy (Vice-Chair) and Councillor Mulgrew.

Conservative Group

Councillors Ford and Mrs. Hood.

In Attendance

Councillor Harrington (Labour Group).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillor Stone (Labour Group) and Councillor Bale (Conservative Group).

COS/1. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 31st March 2003 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

COS/2. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

The Chair welcomed new Members to the Committee.

COS/3. **BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN**

The Policy and Best Value Manager circulated a draft document – the introduction to the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP). She explained the legal requirements to produce a full plan and summary document each year. The content for each BVPP was prescribed by a Government Circular and for this year the Plan would be required to look forward as well as reporting on previous performance.

An outline was given of the scope and content of the Plan. It was proposed to divide the Plan into four parts, to set the scene, give details of the Council's key aims – performance, plans and priorities, to report on implementation and to provide further information in appendices.

The June 2003 Performance Plan compliance checklist was also circulated. This document was used by District Audit to assess local authorities' performance. The key messages for this year were how priorities were set and the actual improvements made. The BVPP had to be published by the end of June. It would be submitted to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Panel and then to the Council Meeting on 26th June 2003.

The Deputy Chief Executive spoke of the discussions with District Audit, the issues identified and the additional elements reflected in Service Plans to provide a link between key aims and performance indicators. He felt the process would be beneficial in providing links between the BVPP, the Corporate Plan and Service Plans.

The Chair noted that the BVPP would be required to look ahead three years and he asked how Members' input would be secured. For many aspects, the Plan would only be able to look ahead for one year based on agreed service levels and priorities. Some other agreed initiatives would take longer to implement and these could be projected within the BVPP.

There was a need for explicit links between the Corporate Plan and the Financial Strategy. An outline was given of the process undertaken to identify resource requirements to meet agreed objectives. The development of a longer term Corporate and Service Planning framework could reduce the capacity for annual service developments.

To achieve the benefits of forward planning, a review would be needed of the way in which policy committees operated. It was planned to talk to policy Chairs about the establishment of work programmes to provide a balance between executive decisions and policy reviews.

In recent years, there had been a clear vision for the Council to stabilise its financial position. Now that this had been achieved, greater choice was available and the Vice-Chair asked how the Council's customers could shape spending plans. To date, priorities expressed during the budget consultations had only affected expenditure at the margins. The wider issue of service replacement/removal or variations in service quality was an area for future consideration.

The Chair asked how policy committees could be encouraged to plan ahead. Discussions would be needed with the Leader of the Council and Member involvement would be required to devise the three-year Corporate Plan. This could be "twin tracked" with work through the Local Strategic Partnership for the Community Plan.

An update was provided on formation of the Local Strategic Partnership. The shadow board had been appointed and a draft constitution agreed. The first meeting was scheduled for October with a view to producing the Community Strategy towards the end of the current year. The Board comprised twenty-four members with six local government representatives, six representatives of other public sector organisations and six from the private sector. There were also six voluntary/community group representatives who had recently been elected. The Vice-Chair commented that the LSP Board only comprised service providers rather than customers. An outline was given of the make-up of the board and the various sectors represented in this open forum. Councillor Harrington spoke to this item, explaining the benefits of the LSP and he also commented on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

COS/4. **CORPORATE PLAN**

A report was circulated for the Committee's consideration. The Corporate Plan was an important "building block" to assist effective management of the organisation, to cope with change and ensure that the work of the Council

was focused on its aims and objectives. An outline was given of the Plan's purpose and the sections contained within it. The first Corporate Plan covered the period November 2001 – March 2003. The Council's Vision and Corporate Objectives were also reviewed as part of the Corporate Plan. The Plan formed part of the Authority's policy framework and was considered by employee groups prior to approval and consultation with key stakeholders.

The baseline position was considered and a number of critical success factors were derived to help the Council improve "across the board". A business improvement matrix was included within the report showing enablers criteria and results criteria. There were 46 critical success factors and targets had been set for 44 of these factors. Department Plans acted as a mechanism for delivery of the critical success factors and the other key tasks identified at a corporate level.

The report included a monitoring methodology and details of progress made by 31st March 2003. 54 targets had been completed, representing some 61.4% of those set at November 2001. A number of conclusions had been drawn and these were reported. In particular there were two areas of the model where a lower proportion of key tasks had been achieved. These related to leadership within the enablers criteria and customer results within the results criteria.

Members discussed the mechanisms in place to monitor contract compliance for services to customers. Effective monitoring could assist service improvement and there was a need for "smart" targets that were achievable and communicated to customers. Comment was also made on negative publicity when problems were experienced and the need for positive press coverage to provide a balanced picture of service delivery. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the Corporate Plan included some difficult issues. This was not an exciting document, but it was a key part of the Council's framework.

COS/5. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Policy and Best Value Manager circulated a report to assist the Committee to develop its work programme. Previously, the work programme had covered four main areas – Best Value Reviews, plans and strategies, special projects and responsive issues. An outline programme, based on this framework was appended to the report. At the introduction to scrutiny event on 2nd June, a number of special projects had been suggested and the Committee was asked to consider these and select projects for inclusion within the work programme. A number of other issues were raised.

Consideration was given to ongoing Best Value Reviews and the budget consultation process. The Chair explained that Members could submit suggested special projects to the Overview Committee. Working Groups were occasionally formed for certain issues and extra meetings could be convened if required. Occasionally, policy committees might refer issues to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration. With regard to the special projects for this Committee, he voiced a preference for the review of the scoring system for service developments and customer care.

The Chief Finance Officer suggested consideration of Risk Management issues which was a priority of District Audit. There was a discussion on the

role that Corporate Scrutiny could perform in receiving Risk Management reports.

COS/6. **BEST VALUE REVIEW – FINANCE SERVICES**

The Chief Finance Officer presented this item and took Members through the executive summary of the Best Value Review. It comprised an introduction, details of how the Council was performing, the views of customers, whether the service could be delivered better by anyone else, how things could be done differently and it provided a conclusion. He referred to the detailed review documents and the proposed recommendations which he felt provided a clear way forward to improve services further.

The Chair asked whether service improvements had been achieved through shorter opening hours. It was accepted that there had been a balance to deliver the service improvements. Previously, there had been a 6-8 week waiting period for Housing Benefit applications. Now such applications were determined within two weeks, which was one of the fastest response times in the Country. Comment was made on the proportion of residents that made use of the Council Offices and the increased services available via the Council's website. An outline was given of the partnership arrangements to provide a new Revenue and Benefits computer system, with funding from the Government. The new system would be implemented in October 2003, together with information kiosks at four locations in the District. The Best Value Review would now be submitted to the Finance and Management Committee for final approval.

COS/7. **IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT (IEG) STATEMENT**

The Chief Finance Officer explained the requirements placed on local authorities and to date, two IEG Statements had been produced to show how technology could be used to improve service provision. The Council's website had been expanded to provide a range of services. For example, nearly 50% of job applications were now received via the website. Through a Derbyshire-wide partnership, a number of technology based projects had been developed to improve service delivery. The Committee discussed the replacement of information technology systems, including a new financial management system. The Council had received Government grants totalling £400,000 for the two plan periods. Through the Derbyshire Partnership a further £2 million of funding had been received and the Council would ensure it received its share of these resources.

Details were provided of a Members' Seminar on 10th July 2003 at the Bretby Conference Centre. Presentations would be made by a representative of the Derbyshire Partnership and there would be a speaker from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. "E-Champions" from each of the Derbyshire Partner local authorities would also be invited.

The Committee discussed the concept of call centres and the range of services that could be provided. The Council was presently recruiting a Customer Services Manager and this issue would be a key priority for the new postholder. The Chief Finance Officer provided further information on call centres and some of the practical issues identified to date.

COS/8. REVIEW OF THE SCORING SYSTEM FOR SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS AND CAPITAL PROJECTS

Documentation was circulated and the Chair gave a brief overview of the purpose of this special project. He outlined the process undertaken to score service development bids and the interest of the Scrutiny Committee in the process, as its proposed service development for an environmental project had scored poorly. He had undertaken a review of the existing scheme and felt it was heavily weighted on cost issues and not the Council's overall priorities. The Chair displayed Service Development Bid documents and was concerned at the amount of Officer time involved in justifying, in some cases, relatively small service development proposals. The Chair felt that clearer guidelines should ultimately lead to spending developments in accordance with the three-year Corporate Plan.

The Chief Finance Officer advised that the scoring system provided a rational guide to the comparison of service developments. The Service Development proposals received this year were scored by a Member Panel and then submitted to a Meeting of the Service and Financial Planning Working Group. He explained the composition of this Working Group and that it had made the final recommendations on service developments. The Chief Finance Officer considered that 30% of the weightings applied were based on cost issues.

The Chair responded, explaining why he felt the scoring system was heavily weighted in favour of cost issues. He suggested that a small Working Group be formed to consider a change of focus, more in line with the Council's aims and objectives. The Chief Finance Officer offered to provide the results of the scored Service Development Bids as this may be useful, particularly for newer Members. (He felt that unless the results of the revised scoring methodology were radically different from those considered and approved, the scoring system review would be of limited use.) The offer to provide information was helpful to this review.

R. BELL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 6.05 p.m.