

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10th September 2001

**PRESENT:-**

**Labour Group**

Councillor Bell (Chair), Councillor Harrington (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Mrs. Mead and Mrs. Rose.

**Conservative Group**

Councillor Douglas.

COS/5. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 30th July 2001 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

**MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE  
FOR RECOMMENDATION**

COS/6. **BEST VALUE REVIEWS**

(a) **Customer and Support Services**

The Scrutiny Committee received a progress report on this Best Value Review from the IT and Customer Services Manager and the Central Services Manager. It set out various reporting areas, comprising the activities and achievements, problems encountered and how these were being managed together with factors which might affect future progress. Details were submitted of employee awareness/user consultation and work on the challenge, comparison and competition aspects of the Review.

The Review had been split to focus on the Customer Services and Printing aspects. Terms of Reference were provided for each part of the Review setting out the background, services provided, the scope of the review, key tasks, resources available and the timescale for the Review.

Members took the opportunity to ask questions of the Review Team's lead officers. The Chair felt completion of this Review by February 2002 might prove challenging, but the deadline was felt to be realistic provided adequate resources were dedicated to it and the required input from other departments was received. Members discussed the overlap between the work performed centrally and that undertaken in other divisions, with particular reference made to reception and administrative support services. The Best Value exercise would enable a review of the number of personnel held centrally and those dedicated to specific functions. The possibility of moving staff to improve support arrangements would form a key aspect of this Review. A Member questioned whether this could result in staff redundancies and whilst the review was at an early stage it was felt more likely that it would identify the best use of the available resources. Other key issues which would impact on completing the Review were the diversity of the work undertaken and the duties performed for other divisions. The Chair provided clarification on the role of the Scrutiny Committee in monitoring the progress

and processes undertaken throughout this Best Value Review and he thanked the Officers for their contribution.

(b) Asset Management

A progress report was submitted by the Economic Development Manager to inform of the progress made on this Best Value Review. The Review covered the strategic management of all the Council's land and property assets with the exception of housing, garages and sheltered accommodation. It complemented work undertaken on the Annual Asset Management Plan. Unlike many of the other Best Value Reviews, the Asset Management Review cut across a number of service areas. Details were provided of the Review team membership which included representation from Derbyshire County Council, Erewash Borough Council and Unison. The Terms of Reference were explained and had been agreed by the Best Value Working Group and Finance and Management Committee. The scope of the review was divided into four sections to look at assets as a corporate resource, corporate property issues, management responsibilities and Civic Office usage.

Information was also submitted on the consultation and comparison aspects for this review and a project plan was appended to the report to track progress over the review period.

In receiving the report, Members noted that the preparation of the baseline assessment had fallen slightly behind target. Difficulties had been experienced in obtaining required information from other divisions relating to the asset management element of their work. The Best Value Officer Group was aware of this problem and if needs be the matter would be referred to the Corporate Management Team. Members questioned the amount of time taken to undertake a review and there was a general discussion on the merits of Best Value and opportunity costs of not being able to undertake other areas of work. A Member questioned whether there were likely redundancy implications associated with the Review. For some authorities the Best Value exercise had led to different ways of working and identified a need for further resources. The Chair explained the role of the Scrutiny Committee in monitoring progress with this Best Value Review and the Economic Manager was thanked for his contribution.

(c) Human Resource Management

A progress report was submitted by the Personnel and Development Manager. Details were provided of the Review Team established in May 2001, including the Members appointed to the Team. It met on average every three to four weeks and there had been five meetings to date. Details were provided of the Terms of Reference and scope for the Review and the project plan approved by the Finance and Management Committee. Information was also submitted on the baseline assessment, joint working, local factors and staff involvement/consultation.

In receiving the report, Members took the opportunity to ask questions. There were concerns that the Council's financial position might impact on the results of this Review. Information was sought about the performance indicators available for human resource management. The Society of Chief Personnel Officers had prepared a list of performance indicators for such things as absence/sickness monitoring, redundancy costs, staff turnover and

the costs/time taken for recruitment. An explanation was given of those functions undertaken in the Division and the role of managers throughout the Council in delivering other personnel functions. There were differing perceptions of the functions undertaken by the Personnel Division and feedback was awaited from a staff questionnaire which had been circulated. The analysis of the baseline data was due by the end of September although this deadline might prove difficult to achieve. Whilst the Best Value process was time consuming the officer felt it would inform such things as service planning. The Personnel Division also had a role in training others to undertake the Best Value process. The Chair thanked the Personnel and Development Manager for her contribution.

COS/7. **CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the approved work programme for the coming months. Details were provided of the Best Value Reviews and policy framework documents to be submitted to each meeting and those special projects and responsive issues which might be considered. The Chair referred to the Corporate Plan and felt that the Scrutiny Committee could provide a Member perspective to guide production of this document. A Member questioned the role of the Scrutiny Committee with regard to Best Value Reviews and the Chair felt it had a performance review role in receiving progress reports and asking pertinent questions of lead officers. Given the number of Best Value Reviews and policy framework documents to be considered over the coming months it was felt that these should provide the main focus for the Scrutiny Committee and that special projects and responsive issues be considered at a future date.

**RECOMMENDED:-**

- (1) That the Scrutiny Committee concentrates on those Best Value Reviews and policy framework documents identified in the Work Programme.**
- (2) That further consideration be given to the Corporate Plan at the Meeting on 22nd October 2001 and that a further progress report on the Customer and Support Services Review be submitted to the 3rd December Meeting.**

R. BELL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.40 p.m.