

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24th June 2002

**PRESENT:-**

**Labour Group**

Councillor Bell (Chair) and Councillors Mrs. Mead and Stone.

**Conservative Group**

Councillor Douglas.

COS/1. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 29th April 2002 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

COS/2. **ARRANGEMENTS FOR MEETINGS**

It was agreed that in future, Meetings of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee would commence at 4.00 p.m.

COS/3. **PROCUREMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee received a verbal report from the Building Control Manager. Local authorities were now required by Government to produce a Procurement Strategy, which would give strategic guidance on procurement across the Council. An outline was given of current procurement methods.

Members questioned the level of detail of the research being undertaken and were advised that this would be an overarching strategy, rather than looking at the detail of the process. The Building Control Manager explained the main aspects to be considered in formulating a policy, one of which was consideration of environmental issues. He spoke of the stages involved in developing the strategy and particularly about providing guidance to those spending resources and the monitoring role. The Chief Finance Officer responded to a Member's enquiry, explaining how budget underspends were re-allocated and overspends were met from balances. The timescale for the review was considered and the target completion date was September 2002. Other issues raised were cost/risk analysis of buying in a service and the merits of central purchasing or use of purchasing organisations.

COS/4. **BEST VALUE REVIEWS**

(a) **Asset Management**

The Economic Development Manager gave a verbal report on progress with this Best Value Review. In accordance with a recommendation of District Audit, the draft report had been submitted to Derbyshire County Council to provide an external reality check. A Meeting had been held with Officers of the County Council to discuss their comments and these had been assimilated into the Best Value Review. The implementation programme had been extended and would now be undertaken over a two and a half year period. The Best Value Review and Asset Management Plan were inter-

linked. The revised Asset Management Plan was due to be submitted by the end of July 2002 and once this had been undertaken the final Best Value Review report would be submitted.

(b) Human Resources

The Personnel and Development Manager gave a verbal report to update Members on the Human Resources Best Value Review. As a result of the consultations undertaken, a prioritised list had been prepared of areas to be addressed. As part of the Council's Investors In People (IIP) assessment, further staff consultations took place and the resultant report had been received. Similar issues had been identified to those included in the Human Resources Best Value Review. A draft action plan had been produced and this had been submitted to the Southern Derbyshire Chamber to provide an external reality check. Any feedback received would be incorporated into the Best Value Review and it would then be submitted to the Finance and Management Committee.

Members sought further information about the IIP assessments. The feedback had been generally positive with some areas of significant progress made and partial accreditation being achieved. A re-evaluation would take place for the remaining areas in due course and the exercise had resulted in practical ideas to enable the delivery of service improvements.

COS/5. **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL – ACTION PLAN**

The Committee received an update on the action plan for this Best Value Review. The Chief Finance Officer highlighted key issues, including the implementation of a new Financial Information System. The Service and Financial Planning cycle had now been in operation for one year and a Meeting would be held later in the week to review the budget and to consider possible service development proposals. At the next round of area meetings there would be early consultation on the budget for 2003/04. This would provide summary level information and seek feedback on service priorities. The Council's financial regulations had also been reviewed. Members sought further information about the procurement of the new Financial Information System, the options considered and the cost implications.

COS/6. **IEG STATEMENT**

A progress report was submitted for the IEG action plan. This showed the activities, major milestones and action taken to date. Overall, good progress had been made in a number of areas and the Chief Finance Officer referred particularly to progress on the replacement of the Financial Information System and the IT system for the Revenue and Benefits Section. All computer-based systems would be examined to ensure they were capable of meeting anticipated increases in electronic transaction requests. Guidance was awaited on when the IEG statement would need to be updated.

Under the "Wider Access" activity, Members questioned how community consultation would be undertaken. Possible mechanisms were area meetings and the use of focus groups with the Council's web site being suggested as a further option. It would be interesting to see how the public responded to the additional service delivery mechanisms that would become available.

Further issues considered were the frequency of IEG group meetings and the provision of IT equipment for Members.

**COS/7. “HOW GREEN IS THE COUNCIL”**

Further to Minute No. COS/47, the Chair advised that a visit had been undertaken to High Peak Borough Council, which had registered to the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS). The Technical Services and Environmental Health Managers had been invited to attend the Meeting and give their views of the benefits of EMAS for this Council.

The Technical Services Manager commented that EMAS appeared similar to a quality assurance (QA) process. He spoke of the QA achieved for the former Engineering Design Section and the benefits from that exercise. Consideration was given to possible financial savings and the environmental impact issues. From information received via the internet, the implementation costs of EMAS could be significant. Ensuring employee participation would be a key issue.

The Environmental Health Manager considered the EMAS initiatives as sound environmental policy. Many of the initiatives were already undertaken and he referred particularly to efforts to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, to promote energy efficiency and to reduce landfill through the composting scheme. He felt there was a need for commitment throughout the Authority and appropriate resources in the form of a dedicated officer.

There was no existing expertise within the Council, but the experience gained through securing QA could prove of use. The Chair commented that it had taken High Peak Borough Council five years to achieve EMAS. He circulated a fact sheet for the Committee's information and felt that both morally and financially, the Council should pursue EMAS. He proposed the establishment of a small Member group and sought Officer support to prepare a report for consideration by the Council. It was suggested that a team of officers assist the working group. Initially it could benchmark data with High Peak Borough Council to see the scope for savings and whether EMAS could be achieved on a cost-neutral basis. A realistic assessment was required, so that a service development proposal could be submitted to meet any costs and enable the pursuit of EMAS on sustainability grounds. Further proposals made were the establishment of a suggestion box to encourage staff input and seeking a presentation from High Peak Borough Council.

**COS/8. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN**

The Committee received a verbal report from the Deputy Chief Executive. He reminded Members of changes to the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) reporting framework. It was now necessary to produce a summary document by the end of March and to produce the full plan by the end of June. This was to enable the inclusion of actual figures rather than estimates in the final plan and had been achieved in the main for the South Derbyshire BVPP.

The document included information on the Council's approach to Best Value, gave details of those Best Value Reviews completed and those to be undertaken. It identified the Council's approach to consultation, included summary Best Value Performance Indicators and progress on the Corporate

Plan. Overall, the Council was improving. Its Performance Indicators were improving and more than 50% of targets were being achieved. There was however the need to improve in some areas and there were concerns about achieving longer term objectives.

The BVPP was to be submitted to a Special Meeting of the Council on 27th June. This would be preceded by a seminar to inform Members on the BVPP.

COS/9. **FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the work programme for the coming months. Details were provided of those Best Value Reviews, budget and policy framework documents and proactive issues proposed for consideration. In addition to the items listed, progress reports would be given to future Meetings from the Working Group on EMAS. The Chair voiced a preference for the previous format of work programme presented to the Committee.

R. BELL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 6.05 p.m.