

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16th September 2002

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

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

Conservative Group

Councillors Bladen and Douglas.

In Attendance

Councillor Harrington (Labour Group).

APOLOGY

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

COS/17. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 5th August 2002 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

COS/18. **DRAFT PROCUREMENT STRATEGY**

At its Meeting on 24th June 2002, the Committee gave initial consideration to the arrangements for producing the Council's first Procurement Strategy. A report was submitted outlining the proposed content of the strategy, the methods of data collection and a timetable for finalising the strategy. It was proposed that the content of the strategy should be based on guidance contained in the report of the Task Force chaired by Sir Ian Byatt, "Delivering Better Services for Citizens". This report had recently been endorsed by the Government and the LGA as the basis of a national strategy to improve local government procurement. The Byatt report recommended that a procurement strategy should include general procurement principles and methods, as well as updated information on Councils procurement activities. Byatt and the Government agreed that strategies should be succinct, strategic documents. It was also proposed to follow Byatt in terms of the scope of the Strategy. The report adopted a broad definition of procurement and included both acquisition from third parties and from in-house service providers.

An assessment of current procurement activities would form an important part of the Council's strategy. This was being approached by means of a series of case studies and examples of the case studies were provided. It was planned to complete the first draft of the strategy by the end of September for consideration by the Finance and Management Committee.

Members discussed the likely size of the strategy document given the broad range of topics to be included. The Policy and Best Value Manager felt that the Strategy Document would be ten to fifteen pages in length. Green procurement would feature together with the Egan principles and specified workforce matters. The Committee discussed working in partnership with other organisations to gain the benefits of bulk purchasing. An example quoted was the recent “Invest to Save” bid. The strategy would guide procurement in areas where bulk purchasing would be beneficial. Consideration was given to the periods of contracts and longer-term planning where there was a certainty of funding. Monitoring arrangements were crucial to inform future procurement activities.

COS/19. **IEG ACTION PLAN**

The Committee received an update from the Chief Finance Officer on the IEG Action Plan. The Council’s new website had been launched at the beginning of September. It now provided information in a clearer format that was also easier to update. Officers would now look at opportunities to make the site more interactive and to make more information available. The Chair commented on the improvements made to the website and praise was voiced for the Officer concerned, Mr. Rensler. Members noted the procurement opportunities available through use of the Internet.

Officers had been working with colleagues across the County to examine the benefits of working together to meet e-government targets. The project centred around creating call centres and the establishment of a single Derbyshire “portal” which would provide access to all Derbyshire Council websites. Some £2million of Government funding had been secured towards the cost of these projects and Members discussed how these resources would be used.

Securing further funding would depend on progress with the e-government initiatives. The District Council was making steady progress, with particular reference being made to the NPLG. The replacement Financial Information System (FIS) would provide further opportunities for achieving e-government targets through electronic transfer of funds, billing and other financial correspondence. Primarily, the objective was to establish the new FIS. The additional e-government opportunities might require further resources.

Note: At 4.40 p.m. Councillor Bladen joined the Meeting.

Members discussed the establishment of Councillors’ email addresses, linking these to existing private email addresses, security and safe data transfer. Re-establishment of the e-government Working Group, monitoring the use of the Council’s website, the National Land and Property Gazetteer and network infrastructure were further topics discussed.

Councillor Harrington voiced praise for the improvements made to the Council’s website. He hoped that Minutes could be uploaded for public access. As an alternative, it was suggested that the “newsbar” feature be expanded to signpost current issues, which site users could then refer to the Minutes to gather further information on. Councillor Harrington also requested that for the next budget round, Members should be more involved in e-government proposals. He commented that the equipment in the

Members Room was inadequate and that any Member's training needs should be addressed.

COS/20. BEST VALUE REVIEW – ASSET MANAGEMENT

The Committee received a verbal report from the Economic Development Manager. He advised that the reality check for the Asset Management Review had now been completed and feedback received from Derbyshire County Council. The Best Value Working Group had considered the review and made additional comments, resulting in some difference of opinion with the Review Team. The Review Team was now to consider the comments made and to determine a way forward, to enable the report to be submitted to Members. The draft Implementation Plan had been prepared.

It was questioned when the Review would be inspected by the Best Value Inspectorate (BVI). This had been anticipated for October, but it was understood that the BVI was now to re-inspect the Development Control and Sheltered Housing Reviews. This was expected to include the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) due to be undertaken from January 2003. It would be necessary therefore to complete the Asset Management and Human Resources Best Value Reviews by December. It was expected that a further report would be submitted on this Review in 2-3 months time.

The Economic Development Manager voiced his concerns about the current review process. Whilst he recognised the need for appropriate checks, the current prolonged process caused a loss of Review Team interest. The Personnel and Development Manager also spoke about the review process and the Human Resources Review was still awaiting the results of the external reality check. The Deputy Chief Executive commented that the external reality check was a strong recommendation of External Audit. He hoped that better future timetabling of reviews would overcome the problems reported.

COS/21. HUMAN RESOURCES BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Chair requested an outline of the external reality check process for this Best Value Review. The Policy and Best Value Manager outlined the Consultant's brief to consider the Review in the same manner as that of the BVI. The Consultants would assess the quality of the Review, how it contributed to District Council's services and the capacity for improvement. For this Review, several Council policies would be examined and the findings presented to the Divisional Manager to support the Review Team's work. The timetable was discussed and it was anticipated that a Meeting would be held in early October with the Review Team to discuss the outcome of the external reality check.

The Personnel and Development Manager had submitted a progress report and spoke of the Review Team's loss of heart because of the delays experienced. It had resulted in the implementation of initiatives identified within the Review, such as seeking the Investors in People (IIP) accreditation. The Policy and Best Value Manager gave further information on the reality check process and the efforts made to ensure that it would be helpful to review teams. Further information was provided on how the external reality check had been undertaken for the Asset Management Review. It was noted

that combining reviews within the CPA could lead to a loss of review identify, but this could not be controlled by the Council.

Note: At 5.10 p.m. Councillor Douglas left the Meeting.

COS/22. **INVESTORS IN PEOPLE – PROGRESS REPORT**

Arising from the Human Resources Best Value Review, issues identified within the Corporate Plan had been recognised as key principles within the Investors in People (IIP) standard. Whilst the Council had committed to IIP many years ago, no significant action had been undertaken. The standard had been revised since the Council committed to it. There were now four main principles: commitment, planning, action and evaluation.

A member of the Review Team from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) had informed of an opportunity for funding to assist in the progression towards this standard. The LSC would pay for the Council to undergo an IIP assessment and an outline was given of that process. Corporate Management Team had agreed to take up this opportunity. It was a critical success factor which the Council had identified in its Corporate Plan.

A series of presentations were undertaken and feedback sessions held with all employees to communicate the Council's intentions and to prepare for the assessment. The assessment was undertaken and an interim assessment report received in June 2002. This demonstrated the significant progress which the Council had made and details were given of those strong aspects of evidence of achievement identified. A number of areas had been identified for continuous improvement and these were provided within the report. To date, six of the twelve indicators had been achieved and a further three indicators had been achieved partially. At the initial assessment, 65% of the individual sub-indicators had been achieved. A further review was planned for early in 2003. New guidance would be issued to managers on service plans and an action plan was being developed with Corporate Management Team to enable further progress towards this award.

The Chair questioned the impact for staff and the positive outcomes from this exercise. Constructive interviews had been held and generally positive feedback received. Improving communication and information exchange within the Council was one of the key issues identified.

COS/23. **PLAN MONITORING**

At the June Meeting, it had been suggested that a review of arrangements take place for monitoring and reporting progress on the Council's plans, strategies, Best Value Reviews and Audit/Inspection Reports. A template had been prepared to assist with the collection of information and a copy was appended to the report submitted. This sought basic information about each strategy or plan, together with details of present and future monitoring arrangements. The collection of information was being co-ordinated through Corporate Management Team and it was hoped to finalise this for the next Committee Meeting.

In reviewing the template, Members suggested the inclusion of columns for the date of the next review of the Strategy/Plan and the Officer responsible for monitoring. Consideration was given to future monitoring roles for Policy

and other committees and this could be assessed once a baseline position had been established through the collection of data.

COS/24. HOW GREEN IS THE COUNCIL

The notes of a Working Group Meeting held on 22nd August 2002 had been circulated for the Committee's information. The Chair advised that a report and presentation would be made to the next Council Meeting. This would include a presentation by Bill Purviss of High Peak Borough Council on the EMAS scheme implemented by that Authority. Information had been gathered from a number of other local authorities on their respective EMAS initiatives.

The Chair explained that the Committee had no decision-making powers, but could submit a service development proposal for a dedicated officer to drive forward this initiative. If the bid was successful, Management Team would need to consider how best to accommodate this role and clarification was provided on the perceived role and links to the Community Strategy. Members discussed the potential to make savings following the implementation of EMAS.

Consideration was given to the way forward. It was agreed that a formal request be made to the Council to receive the report and presentation on the EMAS initiative. The Service Development Bid would be circulated to Members of the Committee prior to its submission and some minor alterations might be required to conform with anticipated changes in guidance. Consideration was given to the future role of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee regarding the EMAS initiative.

It was noted that the Committee's work programme would be submitted to the Overview Committee Meeting scheduled for 23rd September 2002.

R. BELL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.45 p.m.