

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)

10th February 2003

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

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

Conservative Group

Councillor Douglas.

In Attendance

Councillor Harrington (Labour Group).

APOLOGY

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

COS/43. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 9th December 2002 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

COS/44. **IEG STATEMENT**

The E-Government and Strategy Manager circulated an update which reported progress on a number of IEG initiatives. Under strategic issues, the Council was in the process of establishing a Corporate IEG Strategy Group and Councillor Harrington would be involved in the Group. A number of partnerships had been established and these comprised local partnerships, the NLPG Focus Group and the IEG in Derbyshire Partnership.

Updates were provided for ongoing projects. With regard to infrastructure, it was noted that the high speed network links between Council buildings were close to being completed. There were a number of hardware upgrades for the new financial management system and due to the expiry of a lease for 50 personal computers.

Updates were also provided on the ICT Strategy, pilot electronic ordering and the Derbyshire Shared Mapping Server. The Officer explained progress on projects to provide wider access, online services and the NLPG. There were a number of system replacements and "new style working" for which updates were also provided. The Progress Report concluded with details of barriers/risks, specifically relating to joined up working, resource/training issues and external risks.

COS/45. **HUMAN RESOURCE BEST MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

The Scrutiny Committee received an update on this Best Value Review from the Personnel and Development Manager. Since the last report, the improvement plan and final report had been submitted to the Corporate Best Value Working Group. It had discussed the report and invited the Review

Team Leader to attend its meeting. The Group had advised that there were a number of issues with the final report and improvement plan, but the detail had not been clarified. A further meeting with members of the Group would be held on 20th February 2003.

It was difficult to predict when the review would be finalised, until the requirements of the Corporate Best Value Working Group had been clarified. It was therefore intended to submit a further report to the next available Corporate Scrutiny Committee. A follow-up report would also be made to the Finance and Management Committee on 18th February 2003.

An update was provided on progress towards the Investors in People (IIP) accreditation. The two main issues raised by the assessment related to improving communication within the Council and providing a better understanding of the evaluation of employee development. Weekly team briefings were now held and useful feedback had been received.

The IIP Assessor would return to the Council on 31st March 2003 with the report anticipated in April. It was hoped that the Council would attain the necessary standard to receive the IIP accreditation.

COS/46. **THE BUDGET**

The Chief Finance Officer reported on the consultation arrangements for this year's budget. No representatives of the business sector or the Council's partners had attended their consultation meeting. However, positive feedback had since been received from the Southern Derbyshire Chamber.

Staff consultation had taken place through a meeting of the Joint Negotiating Group. There was broad support for the proposals and particularly staffing increases.

The six Area Meetings had been well attended and participative. A wish was expressed for more active consultation with parish councils through a focus group. Comments had been submitted on the likely level of Council Tax increase and this had been compared to the current rate of inflation. Residents had been informed that projected increases for the County Council and the Police Authority were likely to be higher than that of the District Council.

In general, residents were pleased that the budgetary process was being explained. In future, there was the need to consider holding a more proactive focus group in June/July, to add to the current arrangements. The Financial Services Manager commented that there might have been insufficient time at some area meetings to allow for feedback on the budget proposals. A Member commented that some residents might not have realised they were being consulted on the budget proposals.

The Chair referred to the unsuccessful Service Development Proposal submitted by the Committee. He felt it would be useful to examine the scoring system and that it should reflect the Council's priorities. Funding should be considered as part of the system and he felt that too much weight was being placed on the financial viability of proposals. The Chief Finance Officer responded that the scoring system awarded marks based on Council, Regional and National priorities. The scoring system had been approved by

Members and the scoring of proposals was undertaken by a Panel of Members. The results were submitted to the Service and Financial Planning Working Group to give Members the opportunity to review the list of suggested schemes. The system provided a rational basis to compare schemes and rank them, taking into account a range of criteria. It also provided guidance for those submitting service development bids. The weightings included within the system might require reviewing before the next round of service developments was considered.

The Chair suggested that there was an over-emphasis on financial issues and scope to review the system in the future. He wished to consider this as a possible special project for the Committee.

Note: At 5.00 p.m. Councillor Douglas left the Meeting.

At the Environmental and Development Services Committee, comment had been made on the projected level of income from Building Control. The Financial Services Manager confirmed that the sum of £30,000 had been added to projected income levels. This would be built into the final budget proposals to be considered by the Finance and Management Committee the following week.

The Chair asked about treatment of the Collection Fund Surplus. This would be returned to Council Tax payers and identified on Council Tax bills. The proposal to enhance grass cutting arrangements was discussed and would also be considered at the Finance and Management Committee Meeting. An explanation was provided of the projected level of Reserves at the end of the three year planning period. This was predicted to be £950,000 and was a far more comfortable position than could have been anticipated during the financial crisis three years ago.

COS/47. **FINANCIAL SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW**

The Financial Services Manager gave a verbal update on this Best Value Review. The Review Team hoped to commence work on the Action Plan in the near future. It was anticipated that the Review would be brought to a conclusion shortly. Since the last report to the Scrutiny Committee, the Review Team had concentrated on the 'comparison' aspect of the Review.

COS/48. **CUSTOMER SERVICES AND ELECTRONIC SERVICE DELIVERY BEST VALUE REVIEW**

The Chief Finance Officer outlined the current preparations for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). He spoke of the Electronic Services elements of the current Best Value Review. The Group was starting to look at the information technology strategy and this would require a broader approach than that used for the IEG Statement. Last year, an extensive review of IT systems took place. This had provided useful background information for the review.

There was little progress to report on the Customer Services element of the Review. The Policy and Best Value Manager explained that a report was to be considered by the Finance and Management Committee. It was suggested that the Review be postponed until April 2004 to allow preparations to be made for CPA. The Chair commented on the customer care elements of the

Review and he spoke of the Committee's special project which might provide some further baseline information that could assist the Review Team in the future.

COS/49. **BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN SUMMARY**

It was reported that this year's Best Value Performance Plan Summary was being produced by the Public Relations Officer, Carole Warburton. The document was progressing well and Members were reminded of the publication arrangements last year. For this year, it was hoped to issue the Performance Plan Summary with a community safety pack. More details would be submitted to the Overview Committee.

COS/50. **MONITORING COUNCIL PLANS AND STRATEGIES**

It was reported that at the Overview Committee Meeting on 9th December 2002, it had been agreed to establish a small working group to review arrangements for monitoring and reporting progress on plans and strategies. The group's first meeting was held on 27th January 2003 and the notes of the meeting had been circulated for the Committee's information.

A progress report was provided. All of the Council's plans and strategies had been identified and compiled into a list. The list included details of whether the plans/strategies were statutory, discretionary or required by the Government. It identified which Committee was responsible for the document, a responsible officer of the Corporate Management Team and the date of approval/review. A copy of the list had also been circulated.

The Chair felt that a report should be circulated to relevant policy committees to identify the plans and strategies that each was responsible for. The policy committees would then be able to consider future monitoring arrangements. It was suggested that the sub-group hold a further meeting to consider the approach to be taken in reporting to the policy committees. The Chair felt that this had been a useful exercise in raising an awareness of the various Council plans and strategies that existed.

COS/51. **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

As there would be only one further Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee before the District Council elections in May, little could be achieved on the Special Project for Customer Care. It was therefore agreed to defer consideration of this item until after the elections. It was agreed to include a Special Project item on the next agenda relating to the scoring system used in assessing service development proposals for the recent budget process.

COS/52. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee gave consideration to the agenda for the Meeting on 31st March 2003. Updates would be submitted on the Best Value Reviews for Human Resources, Asset Management and Financial Services. Other agenda items would be the annual report of the Committee, Monitoring of Council Plans and Strategies and the Scoring System for Service Development Proposals.

R. BELL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.40 p.m.