

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24th October 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Murphy (Chair) and Councillor Lane (Vice-Chair).

Conservative Group

Councillors Atkin, Bale and Bladen.

APOLOGY

An apology for absence from the Meeting had been received from Councillor Harrington, the Chair of the Community Scrutiny Committee.

COS/15. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th September 2005 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair. Under Minute No. COS/13, the Director of Corporate Services advised that the requested report on performance was not yet available. Liaison would take place with the Policy Unit, with a view to submitting this report to the next Scrutiny Committee Meeting.

COS/16. **STRATEGIC PLANNING PROJECT**

The final draft report for this special project had been circulated and the Chair asked whether there were any further final amendments, before the document was submitted to the Finance and Management Committee. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested minor amendments to three areas of the report. He referred to the recommendation that the practice of the Policy Unit, the Finance and Management Committee and Council should be reviewed to ensure policy research was co-ordinated effectively. He felt that currently there was a clear understanding of the respective responsibilities. There was a key issue under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment to provide joined up governance, ensuring social inclusion in service delivery. He felt it might be too restrictive to limit this function only to the Policy Unit and the Finance and Management Committee. He suggested alternate wording to this section of the report, which was agreed by Members.

He then referred to the report's recommendation that assurances should be sought from the Policy Unit, that it had the capacity to manage and deliver the consultation outlined within the report. Whilst he understood Members' concerns, there was a role for other departments in consultation. He felt the issue for the Policy Unit was around co-ordination and overall responsibility, to ensure that suitable arrangements were in place. Councillor Bladen asked whether there was a programme of consultation, and who would fulfil the co-ordination role. The Deputy Chief Executive used an example to show how this should be considered throughout the Council.

The Deputy Chief Executive then referred to specific points within the document regarding the purchase of questionnaire design and analysis software, at a cost of £14,000. This software had become redundant due to technology advancement and the use of “e-forms”. There was a discussion on this subject and whether it should be reflected in the report or might detract from the overall messages. After some discussion, it was agreed to remove the relevant sections of the report.

The Director of Corporate Services referred Members to the section of the report on the ‘Role of Finance’. She touched on the statement that finance was placed before the function and reminded Members how this was being reviewed presently. In particular, the revised Corporate Plan would determine priorities and financial planning would be linked to those priorities. She suggested a link within the document to reflect this. The Chair highlighted a further section of the report on "Know your Priorities" and the Officer suggested a link within the document to cross-reference this.

A further recommendation of the report proposed Officer support for political groups, to assist with policy development. There were capacity issues and if such support was needed, a service development proposal would have to be submitted. The Chair recognised that there was a lack of capacity and the recommendation was provided to stimulate discussion. He was not sure if it would succeed. There might be a need for such assistance for specific projects. The Deputy Chief Executive used the recent example of INLOGOV consultant support for Members in developing the Corporate Plan. The Director of Corporate Services was aware that at other Councils, the scrutiny function had its own budget. Such budget provision was made at South Derbyshire, but as it was not utilised, the funding was re-allocated. The Chair repeated that he recognised the capacity issues in the Policy Unit and the competing pressures on Officer time. The Chair then requested the Deputy Chief Executive to make the final alterations to the document, to enable it to be submitted to the Finance and Management Committee. Subject to the changes discussed, the Committee gave its formal approval to the document.

The Director of Corporate Services asked how the outcome of this report would be monitored. The Chair reminded of the requirement for Policy Committees to report back to Scrutiny within three months.

Linked to this item, the Chair had prepared a draft presentation and copies of the slides were circulated. Members were asked to consider these slides and invited to participate in the presentation to Finance and Management Committee. The Committee discussed the presentation slides and it was suggested that the size of the presentation be reduced slightly. The Chair agreed and proposed removing a number of slides showing Gantt charts. The Deputy Chief Executive also felt the presentation should highlight the main recommendations from the report. In particular, he touched on the issues around consultation and capacity and the need to make Finance and Management Committee aware of this.

COS/17. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee gave consideration to its future Work Programme. In particular, Members discussed undertaking a brief project on the work of the Member Champions and a project based on performance management.

Officers were asked to provide a list of the current Member Champions and to circulate this to the Scrutiny Committee, so it could be discussed at the next Meeting. The Deputy Chief Executive questioned whether any Member Champions should be invited to attend the next Meeting. The Chair outlined his thoughts on this review exercise, to ensure that Member Champions were being involved effectively.

The Vice-Chair asked whether Finance and Management Committee was formally responsible for risk management issues. The Director of Corporate Services referred to the current review of the Constitution to reflect this and a number of other omissions from that Committee's Terms of Reference. Councillor Bladen asked whether the Council employed a risk analysis expert. The Council had recently sought advice through its insurers and an exercise had been completed to identify risks. This had resulted in a report to the Finance and Management Committee on 13th October 2005. The report discussed the impact of risk management for all areas of the Council's work and how risk management was being embedded throughout the Organisation.

Councillor Atkin asked whether there was capacity within the Work Programme to look at a further special project. He suggested a project based on creating a Parish Council for the District's Urban Core and there was a brief discussion on this subject. The Chair was also mindful of the Committee's responsibilities to provide feedback on the budget process.

S. MURPHY

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 4.50 p.m.