

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11th March 2002

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

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

Conservative Group

Councillors Bladen and Douglas.

In Attendance

Councillor Rose (Labour Group) and Clive Mitchell (District Audit).

COS/35. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meetings held on 28th January and 11th February 2002 were taken as read, approved as true records and signed by the Chair.

COS/36. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

The Chair referred to a recent meeting of the Development Control Committee at which, the decision of the Secretary of State to allow an Appeal for the construction of properties at Nether Hall had been noted. He sought the Committee's approval to discuss with the Planning Services Manager and his department, the process followed in such cases and how it was applied in this case. The Committee agreed to this proposal and the Chair agreed to circulate information to Members following his research.

The Overview Committee was to undertake a review of the implementation of the modernised committee structure once District Audit had issued its report. Input would be sought from both scrutiny committees in order that the Overview Committee could submit its recommendations to the Council and Members gave their initial views.

COS/37. **BEST VALUE REVIEWS**

Human Resource Management

The Committee received a report from the Personnel and Development Manager, to outline the progress made to date on the Human Resource Management Best Value Review. Since the last Meeting, the baseline assessment had been challenged and the Review Team had identified key issues for the authority to address. These had been approved by the Finance and Management Committee and were appended to the report. The key issues had undergone an options appraisal exercise by the Review Team.

A range of focus groups had been undertaken to consult with service users, Members and Personnel and Development staff on the options proposed and to seek views on the prioritisation of tasks. Joint working opportunities with other authorities and the Learning and Skills Council were progressing and the Review timescales were back on schedule. It was noted that inspection of

the review was currently programmed for September 2002, but this might be delayed and undertaken as part of a Corporate assessment in 2003.

The Chair enquired when the Action Plan for this review would be produced. It was expected that this would be undertaken in late May for submission to the June Finance and Management Committee. Members sought further information on the joint working with other local authorities, welfare issues and occupational health. Clarification was provided on the role of Personnel in Health and Safety and with regard to performance management. A Member questioned how the Personnel Section assisted those staff suffering from stress and information was provided on the in-house welfare service, the referrals to independent Counsellors and the approach taken for those returning from long-term ill health absence. The Chair thanked the Personnel and Development Manager for her contribution.

Customer and Support Services

The Policy and Best Value Manager reported that work on this Review had been suspended. It was now proposed to undertake a review in Year 3 of Customer Services and Electronic Services, which would commence in the latter part of this calendar year.

Asset Management

The Committee received a verbal report from the Economic Development Manager. He explained that the baseline data had been collected and work undertaken on the challenge, consult, compare and compete aspects of the Review. Eight key issues had been identified and a number of options taken to a focus group. A preferred option had been selected and a draft report prepared for the Review. Constructive discussions had followed and a revised final report would be produced for submission to the Finance and Management Committee.

The Chair sought detail about the Improvement Plan and it was expected that this would be prepared and submitted to the June Finance and Management Committee. It was requested that the Improvement Plan be submitted to the next Corporate Scrutiny Committee also. The inspection of this Review might again be delayed and considered as part of the Corporate Assessment in 2003. The implications of this possible delay were discussed and the Chair thanked the Economic Development Manager for his contribution.

COS/38. **BUDGET STRATEGY**

The Chair reminded Members of the report submitted to Finance and Management Committee on the budget consultation for 2002/03. The Chief Finance Officer summarised the issues that had been raised, the first of which suggested Member involvement in the assessment of future capital and revenue service development proposals. Mr. Neaves explained that the next round of budget consultation would commence in summer months through the Area Meetings. He referred to the timing of the consultation this year, the constructive feedback received and the opportunity to develop the process for future years. It had also been suggested that Derbyshire County Council and the Derbyshire Constabulary use this forum to consult on their own budget proposals and it was hoped that these organisations would participate in the future.

The Chair explained that he had felt comfortable with the process undertaken and that the consultation had been constructive. The provision of additional information on resources and debts would put the Council's budget in context and the Chief Finance Officer explained the target of producing the out-turn report at an earlier stage this year.

COS/39. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

The Committee received a verbal report from the Policy and Best Value Manager. The Government had issued a White Paper which made proposed changes to the Best Value Performance Plan Reporting Framework. An explanation was given of the current arrangements and in future it would be necessary to produce a summary document at the end of March for circulation with Council Tax literature and to produce the full plan by the end of June. A meeting was to be held with District Audit and officers were currently preparing the Best Value Performance Plan Summary to meet the publication deadline. Some 34,000 copies of the Summary Plan would be circulated and the Policy and Best Value Manager explained the content and format to be used for this publication.

COS/40. "HOW GREEN IS THE COUNCIL"

Under Minute No. COS/31 of 28th January 2002, the Committee had given initial consideration to the special project "How Green is the Council". To stimulate further discussion of this topic, the Chair proposed a brainstorming session and a number of questions were posed to focus the Committee's thoughts. In response to the question "why consider the issue?", Members were mindful of the increasing legislative pressures, the wealth of scientific opinion and the need to make a contribution to environmental issues. The Council's public image and the need to set a good example were also recognised, along with potential savings.

A number of other local authorities had been surveyed to determine their approach to environmental management. An in-house survey had been undertaken, based on seventeen environmental policy issues. A schedule was circulated showing each of these issues, whether the Council complied with it and detail of how the respective divisions and departments achieved this.

(Note: At 5.30 p.m. Councillor Douglas left the Meeting).

The setting of targets was considered to be a key area. There were no systems in place at present to enable comparison or monitoring and these would be necessary to achieve year on year reductions or efficiency savings. Heating of the Civic Offices was discussed and it was noted that from this year, the Government had introduced an energy use performance indicator. For local highway authorities similar indicators were being introduced for street lighting and Members commented upon the energy efficient street lighting available and the opportunity for this Council to influence the Highway Authority to use such lighting through planning gain agreements.

Overall, there was a need to generate awareness, to secure investment and to improve efficiency in the longer term. The Council had the opportunity to influence providers of goods and services through its own purchases and should be more aware of this. Introducing minimum performance

specifications or requiring suppliers to have environmental credentials were specific issues highlighted.

In order to recommend a way forward to the Council, the Committee would need to identify the benefits and costs involved. The next budget cycle would provide the opportunity to bid for resources and dedicated support might be required in terms of officer time to develop a strategy. As a next stage, it was proposed to undertake a visit to another local authority that had been working towards EMAS. Accordingly, it was suggested that a visit be arranged to High Peak Borough Council prior to the next Meeting of the Committee. To ascertain a baseline and to identify the scope for savings, it was suggested that a checklist be devised for each department. Divisional managers would need to be engaged to drive forward the initiatives proposed.

Work Programme

The Committee considered the approved Work Programme for the coming months. Details were provided of those Best Value Reviews, policy framework documents and special projects proposed for consideration at the next meeting. The monitoring of service plans was suggested by the Chair as a further area for the Committee to consider. The Policy and Best Value Manager explained that the first quarter monitoring report for the Corporate Plan should be available for the next Meeting. At that Meeting, the Committee could also consider its input into the annual End of Year Report which the Overview Committee would compile and submit to Council. The Committee agreed to roll forward the remainder of the work programme.

R. BELL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 6.00 p.m.