

FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

17th March 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Pabla (Vice-Chair in the Chair) and Councillors Carroll, Lauro, Mulgrew, Shepherd (substitute for Councillor Wilkins), Southern, Taylor (substitute for Councillor Southerd) and Whyman, M.B.E.

Conservative Group

Councillors Ford (substitute for Councillor Mrs. Wheeler), Harrison, Lemmon and Nalty.

In Attendance

Councillors Lane, Murphy and Stone (Labour Group) and Councillors Bale and Mrs. Hood (Conservative Group)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillor Wilkins (Chair), Councillor Southerd (Labour Group) and Councillors Mrs. Renwick and Mrs. Wheeler (Conservative Group).

FM/113. MINUTES

The Open Minutes of the Special Meetings held on 13th and 24th January and of the Meeting held on 15th February 2005 were taken as read, approved as true records and signed by the Chair.

FM/114. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Nalty declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item 8, The Regional Freight Strategy Consultative Draft. Councillor Mulgrew declared a personal interest in respect of item 15, Grounds Maintenance Service.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

FM/115. REPORTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES – SPECIAL PROJECT TO ASSESS THE COUNCIL'S BEST VALUE REVIEW PROCESS

The Committee received a report and presentation from Members of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee. The report comprised a summary, together with a spreadsheet of conclusions and recommendations. The detail of the document contained a background, which gave reasons for the review and its terms of reference. A methodology was provided and details given on the approach to this review. The report addressed the Best Value Process and the findings of the review were also set out within the report. This included strategic ownership of Best Value, the process, the culture of the Authority and Member involvement.

The presentation slides covered the background to the review and the reasons for undertaking it. Members were reminded of the terms of reference, the review and its findings. From the evidence there emerged four main themes, concerning strategic ownership of Best Value, the Best Value Process, the culture of the Authority and Member involvement. Subsequent slides looked at each of these issues in greater detail.

The Chair voiced his thanks to Members of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee for the excellent report and presentation provided. There was recognition of the time and effort that had gone into undertaking this review. Several Members commented on their involvement in Best Value Reviews. Councillor Lauro compared two Best Value Reviews, on which he had been involved. On one review he felt there had been a lack of discipline and a catalogue of postponements, which caused Review Team Members frustration. Councillor Carroll felt that she had not been engaged in the process and Review Meetings were not convenient for her to attend. Councillor Murphy explained that one of the review recommendations was to form a Commissioning Team, to ensure Member involvement. The Leader of the Council endorsed the comments made and empathised with Members concerns. He gave an example of the resistance to challenge the current way in which a service was delivered. On that occasion, staff were defensive and could not embrace the change, as they perceived this to be a threat. The Leader also praised the excellent report.

Councillor Murphy felt there was a role for the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council to change staff perceptions, that Best Value Reviews were an opportunity rather than a threat. Councillor Harrison also praised the report and questioned why Government had to lead on such review processes. He contrasted two sections of the report and felt these were inconsistent. The Leader commented that there had been many discussions regarding Best Value and there was a need for all staff to embrace it within the culture of the Organisation. Councillor Murphy added that the District Council was performing well against Best Value, but it could strive to improve even further. Councillor Bale commented on the fear of staff who perceived a link between Best Value and reductions in staffing numbers. In response to a question from Councillor Ford, Councillor Murphy provided further information about the Commissioning Team approach to Best Value and the report's recommendations in this regard. It was requested that the Finance and Management Committee consider the report's recommendations and provide feedback to Corporate Scrutiny in due course.

RESOLVED:-

That the recommendations of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on the Best Value Review Process be approved and adopted.

FM/116. COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2005

Members were reminded that County Council elections would be held on Thursday, 5th May 2005. In previous years it had been the practice to keep the Civic Offices open, providing a reduced level of cover, whilst maintaining service to the public. Members were requested to consider whether staff involved with the elections should be granted leave with pay on this day, as had been the practice in previous years.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Civic Offices remain open on the day of the County Council elections.**
- (2) That staff involved in the County Council elections be granted leave with pay on 5th May 2005.**

FM/117. REGIONAL FREIGHT STRATEGY CONSULTATIVE DRAFT

Note: At 6.35 p.m. Councillor Whyman, M.B.E. declared a prejudicial interest in this item and withdrew from the Meeting.

It was reported that the East Midlands Regional Assembly had published a Draft Regional Freight Strategy for comment. The Strategy would supplement the Regional Transport Strategy, which in turn formed part of the Regional Planning Guidance for the East Midlands.

With regard to the environmental impact of freight, the Strategy recommended the development of a freight routing and delivery framework. This was to minimise the environmental impact of freight and to develop proposals to publicise and sign the network. Also proposed were the encouragement of use of more environmentally acceptable vehicles and a review of lorry parking and other driver facilities throughout the region. Officers had commented that the environmental impact of freight vehicles using local roads was a matter of concern in parts of South Derbyshire, including the A511 through Hatton and Woodville and the A444 through Overseal and Stanton. The proposals for development, signing and publicising a regional freight network gave the potential to redirect some of this traffic and was welcomed.

The Strategy looked at encouraging a modal shift from road to rail. It sought to increase the tonnage carried by freight trains and proposals included promoting commercial development at sites that had the potential to be rail connected and encouraging the safeguarding of land adjacent to active and disused rail alignments. Improvements to address rail infrastructure constraints would also be sought. Relevant organisations were to be encouraged to maintain the capability of active lines. The protection of disused railway lines would also be encouraged. The Strategy sought to address opportunities for a modal shift from road to rail, in traffic passing through the region. In response, Officers commented that the emerging Local Plan protected sites with rail freight potential at Cadley Hill, the former Drakelow Power Station and the former Hilton Depot site. It protected rail alignments to allow restoration for passenger or freight use, or for recreation or alternative transport purposes. The endorsement of this approach in the Draft Strategy was welcomed. The location of the East Midlands meant that a substantial volume of freight passed through the area. The transfer of a proportion of this freight to rail would help to ease pressure on long distance highway routes and its aims were welcomed. The potential for introducing a National Forest passenger rail service would be enhanced by the proposal to maintain the capability of active rail freight lines and again this proposal was welcomed.

Consideration was given to air freight and the report included Key Policy 6 of the Strategy, concerning the Nottingham East Midlands Airport. The Strategy sought to identify the implications of freight proposals contained in the Airport's Economic Development Strategy. It addressed surface access needs, subject to the satisfactory resolution of environmental implications. Opportunities to transfer surface freight traffic to rail and for direct rail access to the Airport would be pursued. Opportunities for a modal shift from

air freight to rail would be identified where this could be viable and deliver environmental benefits. The Strategy would also assess the potential for air freight to be carried on day flights as opposed to the existing, predominantly night time operations.

The Council had previously expressed its recognition of the economic benefits of the Airport for the region and the District of South Derbyshire. However, there had been strong concerns about noise and other environmental implications, particularly in relation to night flights. The emphasis given to the requirement for assessment of environmental impact was therefore welcomed. However, this reference fell short of what was required by the Future of Air Transport White Paper, with regard to the expansion of freight operations. The proposals to identify opportunities for a modal shift from air freight to rail and to assess the potential for a shift towards the day time freight operations were welcomed. It was considered that the requirements of the White Paper would be more accurately reflected by adding to Key Policy 6 for the introduction of appropriate mitigation measures, including stringent controls on night noise.

Surface access to the Airport was a matter of concern in villages such as Melbourne and the District as a whole, in terms of traffic congestion. The proposals to address the surface access needs of the Airport, subject to the resolution of environmental implications and to explore opportunities for the transfer of surface freight to rail were therefore welcomed.

In terms of other proposals, the Strategy considered the potential for an increase in waterborne freight, although this would not be applicable to South Derbyshire due to design constraints on the Trent and Mersey Canal. The potential for growth in the use pipelines was also considered.

Councillor Harrison commented on a number of sections of the report and he referred to correspondence from the Department for Transport received via the Local Member of Parliament. In particular, it referred to the requirement for the Operators Master Plan to set out, amongst other matters, development proposals and mitigation and compensation measures, intended to address the impact on people and the environment, caused by its activities. The Master Plan would inform a Local Planning Authority in the preparation of its local development framework. It would enable people, businesses and other interested parties to assess the Airport's response to the Air Transport White Paper and the scale and timing of its development proposals. Councillor Harrison then commented about the DHL facility at Nottingham East Midlands Airport. There appeared to be a large transatlantic input, with European-wide re-distribution, without goods leaving the Airport's confines. This issue would need to be researched as it might have an impact for the Strategic Transport Plan.

Councillor Nalty praised the report and referred to the opportunities to transfer surface freight from road to rail and for direct rail access to the Airport. To further this proposal he felt that the respective local authorities would need to make provision within their Local Plans on the preferred route for such a rail access. Councillor Ford felt that organisations like DHL operated on a 'just in time' basis and he considered that the chance of using rail freight was highly unlikely. Councillor Lauro referred to the number of complaints about freight movements through the rural parishes. The attempts to regulate this were welcomed, but he felt there was a need for enforcement including stronger penalties for contravention of weight limits.

The Officer summarised Members' views and agreed to include within the consultation response the concerns raised about freight traffic travelling through Melbourne and the Southern Parishes. The response would include comment regarding the European distribution hub issue. With regard to the protection of the rail link, this needed to be considered at a strategic level. It was understood that a link was being considered from the Midland Mainline Service, but to date this had not been found to be cost effective. The Deputy Chief Executive added that the request for a rail route to be identified within the Local Plan could not be taken forward presently. However, if it was identified within the Regional Freight Strategy, this would provide the necessary driver.

RESOLVED:-

That the Council responds to the Consultation Document on the Regional Freight Strategy on the basis set out within the report and taking on board Members' comments.

Note: At 6.50 p.m., Councillor Whyman, M.B.E. rejoined the Meeting.

FM/118. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [ACCESS TO INFORMATION] ACT 1985)

RESOLVED:-

That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the Meeting as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that there would be disclosed exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Act indicated in brackets after each item.

MINUTES

The Exempt Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 13th January and of the Meeting held on 15th February 2005 were received.

FINANCIAL REGULATIONS D2.4(b) - WRITE-OFFS (Paragraph 7)

The Committee authorised the write-off of sums due to the Council in accordance with this Financial Regulation.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN BUILDING CONTROL (Paragraph 11)

The Committee approved the continuation of temporary arrangements to address difficulties in retaining qualified and experienced Building Control Surveyors.

GERSHON PROJECT – STAFFING IMPLICATIONS (Paragraph 1)

The Committee approved a secondment and arrangements for cover to assist the Council in delivering the requirements of Gershon.

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE (Paragraph 11)

The Committee approved a revised staffing structure, together with arrangements for recruitment and funding new posts.

L. PABLA

CHAIR