

CORPORATE ISSUES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING 15 OCTOBER 2007

Present – Councillors R. Allen (Vice-Chair), Ayub, Connell, Hayes, Hollick, Hornby, Murray, Scowcroft, J. Silvester, Spencer, J. Walsh, and D. Wilkinson.

Also in attendance:

Councillor Morris	–	Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance
Councillor White	–	Executive Member for Human Resources, Performance, and Diversity
Mr S. Arnfield	–	Director of Corporate Resources
Mr D. Winstanley	–	Assistant Chief Executive
Mrs S. Curran	–	Deputy Director, Corporate Resources
Mr P. Marsh	–	Assistant Director (Corporate Property Services), Corporate Resources
Mr D. Grogan	–	Assistant Director, Legal and Democratic Services
Mr J. Addison	–	Scrutiny Support Manager
Mr J. Dearling	–	Senior Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ashcroft and P. Brierley.

Councillor R. Allen in the Chair

24. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 August 2007 were submitted.

Resolved – That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

25. MONITORING OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SCRUTINY PANEL DECISIONS

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report that informed members of the progress of decisions taken and issues raised by the Committee.

With reference to the leasing of land at Lever Street, Little Lever, the Committee was advised that although the sale of land was for landscaping purposes, the developer could apply for planning permission for residential use of the land. If any change occurred, the developer would have to pay an additional consideration to the Council.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

26. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE

Extracts from the minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 3 September and 1 October 2007 were submitted.

With reference to minute 24, Corporate Business Planning Process – Initial Financial Guidance and Three Year Forecast, 1 October 2007, members questioned the likely level of Council Tax and the implications for service provision arising from the recently announced government Comprehensive Spending Review. In response, the Committee was advised that council forecasts had assumed a 1.5 per cent increase in grant and further details would be announced by the government in December.

In response to questions about Executive Members considering policy options, the Committee was advised that the Forward Plan was updated monthly and special Executive Member meetings could be arranged if necessary.

Resolved – That the decisions of the Executive be noted.

27. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

The minutes of the meetings of the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance held on 29 August and 26 September 2007 were submitted.

Resolved – That the decisions of the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance be noted.

28. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HUMAN RESOURCES, PERFORMANCE, AND DIVERSITY

The minutes of the meetings of the Executive Member for Human Resources, Performance and Diversity held on 5 September and 26 September 2007 were submitted.

Resolved – That the decisions of the Executive Member for Human Resources, Performance, and Diversity be noted.

29. MINUTES OF THE AREA WORKING POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

The minutes of the meeting of the Area Working Policy Development Group held on 18 September 2007 were submitted.

Members raised concern that the slippage in the timetable of the review of area working, undertaken by the Area Working Policy Development Group, would affect the ability of any findings to inform the council's budgetary planning. In reply, the Committee was advised that the review was being treated as important and the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance indicated the slippage in the timetable of the review would be addressed in order that any financial implications could be built into the budgetary process.

Resolved – That the minutes be noted.

30. MINUTES OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

The minutes of the meetings of the Human Resources Policy Development Group held on 16 August and 19 September 2007 were submitted.

Resolved – That the minutes be noted.

31. IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES FOR SCRUTINY / ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report which provided members with suitable criteria to aid in the selection of topics for scrutiny and outlined the Committee's work programme.

Members' views and comments were sought in relation to any further items and issues that they wanted including on the Committee's work programme.

Members suggested that the Council's policy on the issue of mobile phones to staff, the control of staff use of council mobile phones, and outline details of those staff issued with them merited consideration. The value of a wider investigation of council communication costs and benefits was also proposed. The Committee was advised that the cost of a mobile phone call was less than the cost of a call from a public telephone and that there were sound health and safety reasons for issuing staff with mobile phones.

Resolved – That an overview report on the Council's telephony strategy be provided to the Committee in due course.

32. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACCESS TO COUNCIL SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL – PROGRESS REPORT AND RESPONSE

The Deputy Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report detailing the Executive's responses to the recommendations of the Access to Council Services Scrutiny Panel. The report described the actions and improvements taken by the council, since the Panel's final report, to improve access to council services.

The responses were grouped under the five headings used in the Panel's report: Strategic; Buildings and Access Audits; Bolton One Stop Shop and Public Access Points;

Communications; and Parking. The report stated that the financial aspects of the Panel's recommendations were wide ranging but generally managed within budget. However, there were particular areas where further resource bids were being made as part of the council's Corporate Business Planning Process.

In response to questions from members, the Committee was informed that if the council did make wheelchairs available for people requiring them for travelling some distance within council buildings then staff would not be provided to push them.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

33. REVIEW OF LAND PROPERTY KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OVERVIEW OF COUNCIL'S NON-OPERATIONAL PROPERTY

The Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report advising members on the Key Performance Indicators being used by the council to manage performance of its land and property portfolio and providing members with an overview of the council's non-operational estate.

Out-turn performance results for 2006/07 for the current suite of indicators were detailed in Appendix One to the report, the draft 2007 Corporate Asset Management Plan. This Plan set out how the council's land and property assets, described as the council's second most expensive resource (after staff), was being performance managed.

The Committee was informed that at the end of the 2006/07 financial year the required maintenance value across the council's property portfolio stood at £68.7 million.

In reply to questions from members about renewable energy sources, the Assistant Director (Corporate Property Services), Corporate Resources, advised the Committee that investment in cutting edge technology was not the most efficient use of funds.

In response to questions about Montcliffe Quarry, the Assistant Director (Corporate Property Services), Corporate Resources, informed the Committee that the council would attempt to maintain an income stream after quarrying ceased and the site reverted to an intermediate lessee.

In reply to questions about the maintenance of Bolton Town Hall and the council's property portfolio, the Assistant Director (Corporate Property Services), Corporate Resources, acknowledged that there was a maintenance backlog with the Town Hall. He also suggested that much of the necessary maintenance undertaken was not always readily apparent.

Resolved – (i) That the Committee receive regular information in relation to the council's strategy toward property maintenance.

(ii) That the report be noted.

34. SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING 2006/07

The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report advising the Committee of the council's sickness absence statistics for 2006/07. The report indicated that all council departments had shown a reduction in the percentage of sickness absence in 2006/07 compared with 2005/06.

Committee members indicated that the Human Resources Policy Development Group had discussed the report at length and agreed proposals to be put to the Executive Member for Human Resources, Performance, and Diversity.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

35. WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT REPORT 1 MARCH 2006 – 31 MARCH 2007

The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report about various aspects of the council's employment practice. The report provided information on the basis of employment, employee management, and pay and remuneration. The report contained details including the number of posts in the council,

overtime worked, car park spaces allocated to staff, disciplinary cases, employment tribunals, honoraria payments, market rate pay supplements, and the pay and grading review.

The Executive Member for Human Resources, Performance, and Diversity indicated that the Council had received the North West Employers Charter Mark for Member Development and congratulated those Members and officers involved.

In response to questions on the pay and grading review, the Assistant Chief Executive indicated that initial sifting of appeals suggested approximately fifty per cent did not merit a hearing, and confirmed that the pay structure would be decided after the appeal process was completed.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

36. PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO A MODIFICATION ORDER TO ESTABLISH A PUBLIC FOOTPATH ALONG DARCY LEVER RAILWAY CUTTING

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report advising the Committee of the costs and officer time spent into the public inquiry into the public footpath claim.

The report stated that the costs of the enquiry totalled £17,537.87, with the costs of setting up the public inquiry at £1,048.46, counsel's fees at £7,578.75, council's disbursements at £418.80, and council officer time at £8,491.86.

Members suggested the breakdown of costs confirmed the amount of preparation suggested by officers' performance at the public inquiry.

Members acknowledged that whilst the report accurately reflected the costs of the public inquiry an element of these were notional rather than actual costs

Resolved – That the report be noted.

37. FUTURE PENSION LIABILITIES

The Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report informing members of the council's future pension liabilities. The report informed members that the council had a total liability of £113.3 million but that statutory arrangements for funding the deficit meant the financial position of the council remained healthy as the deficit would be met by increased contributions over the remaining working life of employees.

In response to questions from members, the Director of Corporate Resources, stated that the actuarial valuation of the Pension Fund indicated investments would meet the cost of liabilities over the long term.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

38. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

The following questions were submitted by Councillor Brierley in accordance with Standing Order 35:

Q1. How many children's centres were there currently in the borough? Where were they?

Members were advised of the response from the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance:

The Committee was informed that there were six Phase One Children's Centres and nine Phase Two Children's Centres. The Committee was advised of the centre locations and designations.

Q2. How much money for the last year was allocated to parks, and how much did the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance envisage now would be allocated and when?

Members were advised of the response from the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance:

A report was taken to the Executive Member for Environmental Services in April 2007, which outlined that

in 2006/07 £495,000 of corporate resources was allocated for parks. However, additional funding (largely by means of Cleaner Safer Greener monies, Section 106 money, Lottery Money) raised this figure to £1.7 million.

The report also outlined the current years programme, whereby a further £495,000 of corporate funding has been allocated, which is anticipated to rise to £2.4 million following further funding from CSG, Lottery, and Section 106.

Q3. Due to the vast amount of data/management information/statistical reporting being collated relating to BVPI etc., could the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance inform this committee of the following:

- (i) The number of staff engaged in the collation of this data?
- (ii) The approximate cost of this staff?
- (iii) Was there any mechanism being developed to enable the above resources to bolster (re-direct) front-line services to the people of Bolton?

Members were advised of the response from the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance:

It was perhaps helpful to put BVPIs into context. Whilst the collection and reporting on BVPIs was required by Government, they were in any event an essential piece of management information which along with other data the Council needed to collect anyway in order to effectively manage services and respond to any changes in performance quickly.

Collecting BVPI information was not additional. Also managing performance through indicators was imbedded in the way the council worked. The Council did not have separate posts just collecting data but it was a small part of many staffs' and managers' jobs.

For example, sickness data was collected and monitored long before BVPIs. Managers at all levels constantly used that data and staff at all levels were involved in collecting it.

Another example was the length of time taken to process Benefit claims. Again, the council have always monitored this and it was a key indicator of the performance of the Benefits Section and meeting the needs of Benefit recipients. Most of this data was collected and reported automatically by the Benefits system.

So therefore:

It was not possible to establish how many staff were involved in collecting data or the cost, as so many staff were involved but all only in a small way.

Also, the council was not developing a mechanism to redirect staff to front line services as it was vital that the council continued to collect management data even if not required for BVPIs to ensure that services continued to deliver effectively.

Q4. [With reference to the council's non-operational property portfolio, and with particular reference to both community centres, churches, and mosques, and the various commercial sites within the portfolio]

Is there a policy covering how these rents are decided?

Could this committee have a list of all properties and land covered by these two items?

Could the list please show the rent per square metre for each property or parcel of land?

The Director, Corporate Resources, indicated that the council's policy was to charge commercial rents and not offer any form of subsidy. The Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance indicated that a list of rent paid to the council was

commercially sensitive information but could be made available to Members individually on request

The following question was submitted by Councillor Allen in accordance with Standing Order 35:

Q5. [With reference to minute 18, Brightmet Library Big Lottery Bid: Rationale for Retrospective Permission, Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee, 20 August 2007.]

At the last meeting we were told that there was no risk of additional costs [in relation to Brightmet Library] due to the delay in securing the lottery grant. Since then the council have had to pay £8,000 under emergency powers for special design work.

Could we now have a list of critical construction dates when further payments might be necessary if the lottery funding was not forthcoming?

Could we also be advised of the latest expected decision date for the lottery grant?

Members were advised of the response from the Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Finance:

Brightmet Library Lottery Issues

A report was taken to the Executive Member for Culture and Community Services and Area Working on 24 September 2007, relating to work proposed to be undertaken in advance of the decision on the application for Lottery funding to support the relocation of Brightmet Library to the Brightmet PCRC. This was brought as a late urgent item, rather than under emergency powers. The report was brought in this way because of a delay in the announcement of the decision on the Lottery application. Previously, at the meeting of the Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee on 20 August 2007 it was stated that the Council would incur no expenditure should the Lottery bid fail. However, given the delay in the announcement of the Lottery decision, it was considered

desirable to be able to undertake design work on Phase 2 of the PCRC building in advance of that decision. Phase 2 would involve the incorporation of the library and related modifications to the existing design. The PCRC building was already under construction and there was a limited window of opportunity to incorporate the Phase 2 elements into the construction programme without incurring additional building costs. The intention was that construction would be able to proceed more quickly if the lottery application was successful. Although normally the cost of design work and fees would be met by Lottery funding, this could not be retrospective.

It was agreed at the meeting on 24 September that a sum of approximately £8,000 could be spent by the Council on design work to enable plans to be submitted for Planning Permission. This figure incorporated both the architects' fees and the planning application submission fees. To date, the only work undertaken had involved the architects attending briefing meetings and a site visit, at nil or a small cost. Depending on the date of the Lottery decision (see below), and how much additional work had been carried out by then, this amount could have increased.

If the Lottery bid was unsuccessful, there would be no further expenditure, subject to the above, as the scheme would not proceed.

The council had been advised by the Big Lottery that their decision letter was posted first class on Friday 12 October. This had not been received on Monday 15 October. The council believed that the decision letter would contain detail of embargo dates. As soon as the council was able, Members would be informed of the decision. The council, however, was aware that a number of other Greater Manchester authorities have been informed that their applications have not been successful.

If Bolton's application was successful the council would seek to ensure that all eligible expenditure was met

through the Lottery grant, subject to the Big Lottery's rules.

Resolved – That the questions and responses be noted.

(The meeting started at 6.04pm and ended at 7.12pm)

NOTES