

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2007

Present: Councillors P Connolly (Chairman); Mrs Y R T Clarkson; Mrs E Eastwood; K Hitchen; J Kane; M McVeigh; R Salkeld; P Whalley.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs W Metherell.

Officers: T Capper, Democratic Services Manager; N White, Scrutiny Support Officer; G Ayling, Interim Head of Finance and Business Development; M Robinson, Audit and Fraud Prevention Manager; M Jepson, Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

MGT 27/07 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2007 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

MGT 28/07 Executive Decisions

The Committee considered the decisions from the Executive meeting on 2 October 2007.

The Committee noted that part of the Executive's decision on the council's submission into the sub regional Action Plan 2008-11 was to write to Cumbria vision questioning the short timescale for the process and to stress the importance of all proposals being considered irrespective of size. The Committee considered that it would be worthwhile to see the response to that letter.

RESOLVED – that the decisions from the Executive meeting on 2 October 2007 be noted.

MGT 29/07 Forward Plan

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of the Council's Key Decisions from October to January 2008.

RESOLVED – that the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions from October to January 2008 be noted.

MGT 30/07 Revised Anti Fraud and Corruption Strategy

The Committee considered a report on the Council's revised Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy.

The Committee noted that in line with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government, the Council has had an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy in place for a number of years. As the strategy was last revised in 2004 it was a good time to update it.

The Committee further noted that the main changes related to:-

- the addition of a Fraud and Corruption Prevention Policy;
- reference to the IT Security Policy;
- reference to the Money Laundering Regulations 2005 / Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 Guidance;
- reference to leadership and the promotion of an anti-fraud and corruption culture;
- reference to Members, as well as officers;
- the addition of the role of Benefits Assessors and Interventions Officers;
- the inclusion of employee screening prior to appointment; and
- reference to working with other agencies / organizations.

The Committee considered the strategy and in noting that it was to be considered by the Audit Committee and the Executive before it was finalised agreed that any comments on the strategy should be sent to the Audit and Fraud Prevention Manager.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

MGT 31/07 Replacement of Financial Management System

The Committee considered a report on the replacement of the Council's Financial Management System (FMS).

The Committee noted that the existing Financial Management System had been replaced with a modern flexible new system due to the fact that the license for the old system was not to be renewed by the supplier due to the age of the product. The Executive had approved an allocation of £250,000 from the Major Projects Fund (now Reserves Fund) on 18 October 2005 to purchase a new FMS.

The Committee further noted that system had gone live as planned on 1 April 2007 and whilst there had been some teething problems with the new

system on the whole these had not led to any serious implications in the running of the system.

The Committee was informed that the project so far had been underpensed by £37,553. However, it was intended to use some of this underpend to provide additional training sessions for Debtor Recovery and to implement an e-procurement module. Any final under spend would then be released back to the Reserves Fund.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

MGT 32/07 Equality and Diversity

The Committee considered a report on Equality and Diversity.

The Committee noted the progress that been made by the council on Equality and Diversity as set against the Equality Standard for Local Government. There were five levels in this standard with five being the highest. In March 2006 the Council had self-assessed itself at level one and was currently working towards achieving level two by next year.

The Committee considered that the main requirements for achieving level 2 were to carry out Equality Impact Assessments and community engagement. An Assessment Toolkit had been produced to help complete the assessments and an officer sub-group was currently working on planning for community engagement.

The Committee noted that when these were completed action plans would be drawn up to help the council reach level 3 of the standard. The Committee agreed that it should look at the action plans as they were being developed.

The Committee also considered the current job evaluation process that was being carried out by the council. It expressed its concern on how the process was being undertaken and agreed that a report be submitted to it and the Personnel Panel on the process.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Management Committee consider the Equality Assessment action plans as they were being developed, and

(B) a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on the Council's current job evaluation process.

MGT 33/07 Dignity at Work and Compassionate Leave

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Dignity at Work and Compassionate Leave Policies.

The Committee noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Resources Committee had set up a small sub group to look into the Council's Dignity at Work policy but this work had been put into abeyance during the council's restructure. Furthermore that Committee at its meeting on 6 November 2006 had asked that a review of the Council's Compassionate Leave Policy should be added to its work plan.

The Committee agreed that a new task and finish group should be established to review the Council's current Dignity at Work and Compassionate Leave policies and to develop new policies so that:

(1) the Dignity at work policy entitles all the council's employees to conduct their work without harassment, bullying or victimisation in their workplace and generally to be treated with dignity and respect, and

(2) the Compassionate Leave policy reflects an effective work life balance which benefits employees, the organisation and the community it serves.

The Committee further agreed that the membership of the group should consist of Councillors Mrs Yvonne Clarkson, Peter Connolly, John Kane, and Keith Hitchen.

RESOLVED – that (A) a task and finish group be established to review the Council's current Dignity at Work and Compassionate Leave policies and to develop new policies so that:

(1) the Dignity at work policy entitles all the council's employees to conduct their work without harassment, bullying or victimisation in their workplace and generally to be treated with dignity and respect, and

(2) the Compassionate Leave policy reflects an effective work life balance which benefits employees, the organisation and the community it serves, and

(B) the membership of the task and finish group should be Councillors Mrs Yvonne Clarkson, Peter Connolly, John Kane, and Keith Hitchen.

MGT 34/07 Overview and Scrutiny Structure

The Committee considered a report on the structure of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Committee was reminded that the Council had agreed at its meeting on 17 April 2007 to change the structure of the Overview and Scrutiny

Committees. The opportunity had been taken to review the effectiveness of the structure as it had been running for six months.

The Committee noted that the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees had been set up to mirror the Local Area Agreement but the work of the committees had become imbalanced due to the terms of reference of the Committees being based on the thematic groups within the Local Area Agreement.

The Committee further noted that the Children, Young People and Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee was having considerably less reports to it as well as the number of task and finish groups that have been set up by the other committees particularly the Safer and Stronger Communities.

The Committee considered that the means for the council to scrutinise the Local Area Agreement had changed following the establishment of a Joint Scrutiny Working Group that was looking at how to undertake effective Scrutiny of the Local Area Agreement.

The Committee further considered four options for the future Overview and Scrutiny Committee Structure. The Committee felt that two of the key aims of Overview and Scrutiny were to:

- Support the development of effective policies and initiatives, which have a beneficial impact on the community, and
- Contribute significantly to continuous improvement in services through Performance Management.

The Committee felt that a closer link to the council priorities that were set out in the council's corporate plan would enable the overview and scrutiny committees to better achieve these two aims. It would also enable a better lining up between overview and scrutiny and the portfolio holders and with the council's corporate team.

The Committee agreed that the option to have a four Committee system with a management committee and three others with responsibilities set around the Corporate Plan/Deputy Leaders Roles should be pursued.

The Committee further agreed that this number of committees along with the number of task and finish groups that the committees would wish to run would require additional staffing resources and that consideration be given to providing those resources in 2008/09.

RESOLVED – that (A) the structure of the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be changed to the option outlined in the report to have a four Committee system with a management committee and three others with responsibilities set around the Corporate Plan/Deputy Leaders Roles, and

(B) consideration be given to providing additional staffing resources for Overview and Scrutiny in 2008/09.

MGT 35/07 ICT Sub Group

The Committee considered the notes of the ICT Sub Group meetings held on 12 July 2007, 17 August 2007 and 25 September 2007.

RESOLVED – that the notes of the ICT Sub Group meetings held on 12 July 2007, 17 August 2007 and 25 September 2007 be received.

MGT 36/07 Work Plan

The Committee considered the work plans of the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

RESOLVED – that the work plans be noted.

MGT 37/07 Regeneration Department

The Committee received an oral report from the Head of Regeneration on the staffing levels within the Regeneration department.

The Committee noted that there were a number of vacancies and the problems that were associated in filling some of those posts. Concern was expressed at the future of the Community Renewal projects and it was noted that a report would be going to the Executive regarding the Egremont and Millom projects.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

The Meeting Closed at 12:30pm

Signed:.....

Date:.....