

**COMMERCIAL & HUMAN RESOURCES  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

14 January 2003  
(4.30 – 6.24pm)

**PRESENT:** Councillors White (Chair), Bagnall, Bradnack, Dryden, Knowles, Liddle, Smart, and Smith.

**Executive Councillor:** Amanda Taylor

**FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**

03/CHR/01 **MINUTES**

The minutes of 29 October 2002, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

03CHR/02 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Ellis-Miller and Stebbings.

03/CHR/03 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor White declared a personal interest in minute number 03/CHR/06 (Property and Building Services Service Plan) (i) as his company rented council commercial property and has a Service Agreement (ii) as Chair of Trustees of the Cambridge & County Folk Museum.

Councillor Taylor 03/CHR/06 (Human Resources) as a Unison member.

03/CHR/04 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No members of the public wished to address the Scrutiny Committee.

03/CHR/05 **KEY DECISION SERVICE PLANS, DRAFT BUDGETS 2003/04 AND FORECAST FOR 2004/5** (see also *Record of Decision 03/CHR/01*)

In discussion on the Service Plans in general, the Committee agreed that the officers must look to improve on what should be reported and what should be left out. Members found it difficult to always identify the key issues, targets and policies of the Executive Councillor to enable proper scrutiny to take place. The Committee also requested that officers look at the number of Plans reported and the amount of information required in each at each stage ie. October and January. There was also an inconsistency in approach taken in the 11 service plans which required attention.

The Executive Councillor stated that a reduced Grant Settlement had meant that it was essential that the Council focused on its priorities. The budget consultation had informed the Executive Councillor's proposals for 2003/04.

## **Reception and Office Services and Corporate Telephones**

The Head of Reception and Office Services informed the Committee that the 2002/03 target for the Local Performance Indicator of answering 75% of DDI calls within 12 seconds will be achieved.

In response to a question from Councillor Bradnack, the Head of Reception and Office Services advised the Committee that the 30 connections referred to in the Voice and Data Connectivity bid was based on a valid working assumption that no more than 30 of 42 councillors would be using the service.

## **IT Contract Management Markets**

### **Democratic Services**

In response to a request from Councillor Smith, the Head of Legal & Democratic Services undertook to provide for members information on the costs associated with all postal voting elections against the standard polling station method. Councillor Bagnall suggested that the Borough of Stevenage may have comparable costs. Councillor Smart stated that the Liberal Democrat Group did not favour only all-postal ballots.

## **Legal Services and Land Charges Human Resources**

### **Accountancy and Support Services**

In response to a question from Councillor Bagnall re BV8 (% of invoices paid within 30 days), the Head of Accounting Services stated that the current figure was 96% although there tended to be a drop toward the end of the financial year, however the target of 95% should still be achieved. The Committee note that achieving 95% and above placed the Council in the upper quartile.

The Executive Councillor stated that the improvements in performance were very welcome and further improvements to electronic transactions should enable the Council to meet its targets for next year.

### **Internal Audit**

Councillor Bradnack queried whether the Service could undertake any more than that which was statutorily required ie. the Audit Plan and whether the 92% achievement of the statutory Audit Plan was too ambitious. The Head of Internal Audit advised that the Service was obliged to undertake special investigations which impacted on other work as in 2002/03. There may need to be a more robust approach on the amount of assistance which can be offered to managers outside of the statutory Audit Plan to enable the target for 2003/04 to be met.

## **Revenue Services**

Councillor Bagnall questioned whether at 61% for BV80 (Customer Satisfaction Level for forms and documents) the Council compared favourably with other authorities and whether there was the opportunity to learn best practice from others. The Head of Revenue Services stated that a working party of local authorities was currently working on this and revised forms/letters etc would be produced within the next six months. It was noted that much of the information contained within the Council's letters was prescribed by the Department for Work & Pensions.

## **Property and Building Services**

In response to a question from Councillor Bagnall on BV 156 (council buildings with good disabled access), the Head of Property and Building Services undertook to provide the criteria on which the indicator was based to members of the Committee.

## **City Services**

### **Recommendations**

The Committee noted that in recommendation 2b the beginning 'Note performance....six months of 2002/03 and' should be deleted. Subject to that change, the Committee agreed the recommendations for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report 2a-h (by 5 votes to 0).

The Executive Councillor agreed to the recommendations.

03/CHR/06 KEY DECISION **CITY SERVICES PERFORMANCE PLAN 2003/06** (see also *Record of Decision 03/CHR/02*)

The Director of City Services advised the Committee that the Performance Plan replaced the Business Plan which under the committee system had previously been reported to the Direct Services Management Board and City Board for approval. As it covered a three year period, the Performance Plan would be a useful tool for members and officers to monitor the Service against the previous annual Business Plan. It was noted that the Performance Plan would also be used by the workforce to monitor performance on a monthly basis.

In response to a question regarding the Best Value Inspectorates comment that housing repairs should be made available in the evenings and weekends, the Director of City Services stated the cost and benefits of such a change in service provision would require detailed consideration.

Councillor Knowles welcomed the basic skills training for streetscene staff being introduced in partnership with the Trade Unions and the Learning Skills Council (page 15).

It was noted that although not stated on the agenda page the Performance Plan was recommended for agreement by the Executive Councillor. The Committee agreed with

the recommendation for the Executive Councillor (by 5 votes to 0).

The Executive Councillor agreed to the recommendation.

03/CHR/07 **KEY DECISION INTRODUCTION OF SURVEILLANCE AS PART OF AN INTEGRATED BENEFIT FRAUD PREVENTION AND DETECTION POLICY** (*see also Record of Decision 03/CHR/03*)

The Committee agreed that an annual report should be provided by the Head of Revenue Services on the use of such surveillance.

The Committee agreed with the recommendation for the Executive Councillor (by 5 votes to 0).

The Executive Councillor agreed to the recommendation.

03/CHR/08 **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

**Resolved -**

To exclude members of the public from the meeting on the grounds that, if they were present, there would be disclosure to them of information defined as exempt from publication by Categories 3 and 7 as defined in the Council's Constitution part 4B (pages 153/4).

03/CHR/09 **NNDR BUSINESS RATES – IRRECOVERABLE DEBTS TO BE WRITTEN OFF** (*see also Record of Decision 03/CHR/04*)

Councillor Smart proposed that debt 3128-463-0 be withdrawn from those recommended to be written off. The Committee agreed to this amendment by 5 votes to 0.

The Scrutiny Committee agreed to the recommendation for the Executive Councillor as amended (by 5 votes to 0).

The Executive Councillor agreed to the recommendation.

**Urgent other business**

At the request of the Chair, and in accordance with the decision taken on 29 October 2002, the Head of Property & Building Services provided an oral update on the Council's office accommodation.

The meeting ended at 6.24 pm

**CHAIR**