

PERFORMANCE REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 19 January 2000 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Evans (Chair); Councillors Mrs Begg, Boad, Caborn, Mrs Clayton, Coker, Mrs Compton, Darmody, Ms Flanagan, Golby, Mrs Hodgetts, MacKay.

(Councillor Darmody substituted for Councillor Dove and Councillor Golby substituted for Councillor Shilton).

1. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 1999, having been printed and circulated were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

PART I

(Matters not the subject of powers delegated to the Sub-Committee by the Council)

2. **BENEFITS FUNDAMENTAL REVIEW**

The Sub-Committee considered a report from the Benefits Fundamental Review Group on the findings of the fundamental review of the Benefits service.

The report set out the process of the review and the results of the review, with a copy of the proposed action plan which was appended to the report.

The results of the review showed the significance and the relevance of the new software system for the calculation of benefits, which was part of the Resources 1999/2000 Capital Programme. The rest of the results were considered in the light of the Challenge, Consult, Compare and Compete format of Best Value.

It was considered that the review had shown the standard of service currently being provided, and established how the Finance Unit was planning to develop the service over the next five years. The general service level was considered to be excellent and one which the Council could be proud, as had been indicated by the external consultants. The future improvements required to the service were detailed in the action plan.

It was suggested that any future requirements for saving options could be considered alongside the major issue items ie. the introduction of advanced technology, data image processing and the requirements of the verification framework.

RECOMMENDED that

PERFORMANCE REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE (Continued)

- (1) the actions of the Sub-Group in the undertaking of the Benefits Fundamental Review be approved; and
- (2) the Action Plan for Benefits, as appended to the report, be approved.

3. INFORMATION SECURITY POLICY, CODE OF PRACTICE AND GUIDELINES

The Sub-Committee considered a report from the I.T. Steering Group on the implementation of a new information security policy, code of practice and related good practice guidelines to replace the existing computer security policy and guidelines.

The report set out the various developments since 1995, when the existing computer security policy and guidelines had been produced, and the need for an information security policy.

Representatives of UNISON and MPO had been consulted on the draft policy and code of practice. Some overlap with the proposed draft whistleblowing policy had been noted but with no conflict arising.

It was proposed that all staff and members be issued with a copy of the code of practice, each being required to sign an acknowledgement of having received and read it.

A limited distribution of the information security policy in paper form was proposed which would include members, Heads of Business Units, divisional managers and section heads, as well as publishing the policy on the Intranet. As part of the implementation of the information security policy, the Head of I.T. would from time to time publish guidelines on good security practice for all staff and members. The guidelines listed at the end of the draft policy had been prepared and would be published on the Intranet. In addition, it was proposed that the guideline entitled "summary user check list" be issued with the code of practice in an illustrated leaflet form.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the implementation of the information security policy and code of practice, as set out in Schedule 1, be supported; and
- (2) the proposals for the publication and distribution of the policy, code of practice and summary user check list be supported.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE (Continued)

4. WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Sub-Committee considered a report from Finance on a proposed whistleblowing policy and procedure. A copy of the policy and procedure was appended to the report.

Whistleblowing was the term that had emerged in recent years to describe the raising of a concern, usually by an employee, about misconduct, illegal practices and cover-ups within an organisation.

Although there was no statutory requirement for a local authority to set up formal whistleblowing procedures, the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, which protected employees who had suffered as a result of whistleblowing, encouraged the adoption of such procedures.

The Audit Commission had issued an update in December 1999 to a report, which had originally been issued in December 1993, entitled Protecting the Public Purse (ensuring probity in local government) that was critical of the fact that half of local authorities had not established formal whistleblowing arrangements. Their particular interest was the role of whistleblowing in helping to combat fraud and corruption.

The proposed policy and procedure was based on the LGMB model that had been issued in January 1999, taking account of local terminology and incorporating suggested improvements after consultation with interested parties.

The policy and procedure had the support of Management and, with the exception of one aspect, it had the support of the recognised Trade Unions. Concern had been expressed by MPO about Section 11 of the policy and procedure which offered employees the option to raise concerns outside the Council. However, the offering of every reasonable safeguard to employees was intended to ensure that concerns were raised within the Council. The option of raising a concern outside the Council was consistent with the Council's culture of openness and honesty and was a recommended feature of whistleblowing policies as endorsed by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

The policy and procedure would be made available and drawn to the attention of all employees and would be reviewed after a twelve month period from the date of adoption by Council.

RECOMMENDED that the adoption of the whistleblowing policy and procedure, as set out in Schedule 2, be supported.

5. CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

PERFORMANCE REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE (Continued)

The Sub-Committee considered a report from the Commissioning Team on the existing internal practices within the Council's units in relation to customer care.

RECOMMENDED that the establishment of a broad officer group (to include front line staff) to assist in the drafting of a customer care policy, be approved.

6. GENERAL REPORT

(A) REPORTING BACK FROM OUTSIDE BODIES

The Sub-Committee received written reports from members who represented the Council on the Bath Place Community Venture, Council for Voluntary Services, Warwick District Racial Equality Council and Citizens Advice Bureau.

RECOMMENDED that the reports be noted.

PART II

(Matters delegated to the Sub-Committee by the Council)

7. WHITNASH TRAFFIC CALMING CONTRACTOR'S APPRAISAL

The Sub-Committee considered a report from Engineering, which had also been considered by the Development Committee on 10 January 2000, on the performance of Bardon Aggregates Construction in their undertaking of the Whitnash traffic calming scheme.

The report set out the background to the awarding of the contract to Bardon Aggregates Construction and the details of the contractor's performance appraisal undertaken by the Engineering Business Unit.

The Development Committee had recommended that Bardon Aggregates Construction be removed from the Council's select list of contractors and had requested a further report on how it could be ensured that these problems did not happen with other schemes. It was clarified that the report, which would be submitted to Development Committee and to this Sub-Committee, would include the issue of reimbursement of costs incurred by the Council in managing the contractor and the consequences of his activities, and also how the Council could enforce the regulations on the supervising of such works. Members expressed concern about the difference between the tendered sum (£139,000) and the available budget for the works (£80,000)

(Councillor Kirton, Ward Councillor, attended the meeting and addressed the Sub-Committee on this item).

PERFORMANCE REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE (Continued)

RESOLVED that

- (1) Bardon Aggregates Construction be removed from the Council's select list of contractors, until such time as the Head of Engineering is confident of their suitability for future inclusion on the list; and
- (2) an investigation into the estimated (budgeted) costs for works and their relation to the tendered amounts for works be included into the internal audit plan for the year 2000/2001.

(The meeting ended at 7.20 p.m)

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