

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 5 March 2002 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Caborn (Chair): Councillors Mrs Boad, Davis, Dray, Mrs Evans, Mrs Leddy and Windybank.

714. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 8 January and 5 February 2002, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

715. ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered a report from Property Services providing members with an update on the progress of the implementation of the Council's Asset Management Plan.

The Asset Management Plan, (A.M.P.), had become a statutory requirement for Councils for 2001/02. The A.M.P. had been submitted by 31 July 2001, and this had followed a dry run from 1 December 2000. The A.M.P. contained an action plan against which performance could be assessed and was detailed in Appendix "A" to the report. Possible sales, acquisitions, developments etc, were detailed in Appendix "B" to the report.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

716. SALARY UNDERSPENDINGS 2000/2001

The Committee considered a report from Planning, Leisure and Amenities, Housing and Finance updating the Committee on the progress made during the current year, to deal with salary underspendings which related to unfilled posts, identified in the report on the accounts for 2000/2001.

Staff Savings - Former Engineering Unit (£118,000) - The underspendings in the former Engineering Business Unit had to be seen against the background of the retirement/redundancy of the Head of Engineering and the restructure of Engineering, which by the end of 2000/2001 had only partially been achieved. The principle adopted had been to preserve within the 2001/2002 budget the current level of resources on staffing in order to fund the impending restructure.

On 29 May 2001, the Executive approved the restructure of Engineering which had included the relocation of Engineering duties to the Planning, Environmental Health and Leisure Units, resulting in estimated savings of £50,000 in 2001/2002.

A further report to the Executive, on 17 September 2001, approved an

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amended structure within the Leisure and Amenities Business Unit, including the creation of a new post to be funded from savings arising from the restructure. With regard to the remaining post, the current position was that there remained a number still unfilled, including the newly created Operations Engineer, the Transport Project Engineer and two Engineering Technician Posts and this had meant the employment of temporary professional staff as cover. It was anticipated that there would be an underspend of around £43,000 against the revised estimate for the current year.

Staff Savings - Planning - £58,900 - The latest position regarding staffing within the Planning Unit was that, following the move to Riverside House, the Planning Officer has amalgamated the two Area Admin Support Teams to create a single Admin Support Unit within Development Control, which enabled staff savings from the two posts to be offered up as part of the budget savings exercise for 2002/03, amounting to £24,590. It still had not been possible to appoint to the Building Control Officer post, and it had been decided to assess the impact of revised Building Control Regulations from 1 April 2002 before further re-advertising the post. The underspend against the revised estimate was estimated to be £31,500.

Staff Savings - Royal Pump Rooms - £47,600 - During 2000/2001 difficulties had been experienced in recruiting Pump Room Assistants, together with savings in overtime due to more work on activities and functions being carried out during core hours, compared with the original projections. As a result of measures which had been identified in the November report, action had been taken to step up the recruitment of casual staff and to reduce the overtime budget by £20,100 in 2001/02, and by £15,700 in 2002/03. As a result, it was anticipated that there would only be a marginal underspend of £5,000 in the current year.

Staff Savings - Housing Contract - £59,700 - Salary underspendings in 2000/2001 had been primarily due to delays in appointing staff in two main areas. Staffing changes had been anticipated as a result of a review of rent arrears which had not been completed until May 2001. The latest position was that a new rent arrears team had been set up on a 12 month trial from 1 September 2001, and a full-time Estates Assistant appointed.

In addition, delays had been experienced in appointing three Estates Supervisors pending a review of care taking facilities at Fallow Hill, The Crest and the Woodloes.

Following a report to the Executive on 17 September, it had been agreed to part fund with Warwickshire County Council the appointment of an Occupational Therapist on a two year basis, from staff savings. The revised budget for the current year allowed for 6 months funding. The County Council had experienced problems appointing to the post and, therefore, this Council was

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continuing with the special arrangement agreed with the Director of Public Health. As a result of all these measures, the anticipated underspend against the revised estimate for the current year was £18,100. However, interviews for the post had been held today and it was hoped a successful appointment would be made.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted and the Community Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor the Royal Pump Rooms .

717. PEOPLE STRATEGY CONSULTATION

The Committee considered a report on the action plan for the first year of the People Strategy 2002-2006. The strategy had been developed to expand the eight strategic themes that had been presented to the Committee in October 2001. Each of these themes had an aim in each of the four years of the strategy and the action plan related to the aims for the first year. The action plan was being consulted on through discussions with representative groups, trade union consultation, and open invitation to comment through the Intranet and management team involvement.

A final version of the strategy and action plan would be considered by the Corporate Management Team on 13 March 2002, and then submitted to the Executive on 8 April 2002.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

718. WARWICK PLAN 2001/2002 AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER PRIORITY AREAS

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services updating the Scrutiny Committee's work plan for the year and monitoring progress against the Portfolio Holder Priority Areas.

It had been agreed to consider the Committee's work plan as a standing item on each agenda. The current work plan reflected items raised by the Committee at the meeting on 5 February 2002, and was detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Executive had agreed priorities and work programmes for each Portfolio Holder at its meeting on 25 June 2001. Development priorities and work programmes for the Portfolio Holders, covered by this Committee, were detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.

Following the review of scrutiny arrangements at the January meeting, the comments of all three Scrutiny Committees were being collated and considered. A meeting was being arranged for the three Scrutiny Chairs and the Strategic Directors to discuss the comments. Any changes would be introduced in the new municipal year from May 2002. It was also intended to

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discuss the future work plans of the Committees as requested. An end of term report on the work of the Scrutiny Committee and agreeing its work plan for 2002/03, would be considered in due course.

RECOMMENDED that the progress against the Portfolio Holders priorities and work programmes be noted with the following additions:

- (i) A report on the Credit Union
- (ii) A further report on the People Strategy in November
- (iii) A presentation on the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 presentation in April/May
- (iv) SMSR be invited to give a presentation on the Citizens Panel in June/July
- (v) A presentation on EFQM and peer assessment process

719. COMPLIANCE WITH THE RACE RELATIONS (AMENDMENT) ACT 2000

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services on the amendments to the Race Relations Act 1976 which formed the basis of the Central Government's response to the findings of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, and the impact it would have on Local Authority functions.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 came into force on 2 April 2001. It placed a general duty on a wide range of public authorities to promote race equality. This duty meant that, in everything they do, authorities should have due regard to the need to:-

- (i) Eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- (ii) Promote equality of opportunities; and
- (iii) Promote good race relations between people of different racial groups.

The 2000 Act contained a number of provisions that would have significant implications for public authorities. From April 2001 there would be a general duty on public authorities in carrying out their functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality and opportunity and promote good race relations between people of different racial groups. Local Authorities had specific duties to provide race equality and policy and service delivery, and provide race equality employment.

As far as the District Council was concerned, the introduction of the new Act would have a major impact in that, not only will it introduce new duties for the authority but, more importantly, it would provide legislative support and legitimacy for key areas of quality activity that the District Council was committed to.

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RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the Committee receive a presentation on the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 at a future meeting.

720. WARWICK DISTRICT RACIAL EQUALITY COUNCIL

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services on the Warwick District Racial Equality Council (W.D.R.E.C.) strategic plan for 2002/2005.

The W.D.R.E.C. strategy for the next three years would take full advantage of the strengthening legalisation, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. They would be working with public sector authorities to make sure race equality was central to the modernisation process and in social inclusion strategies.

Locally, the W.D.R.E.C. was going through its own modernisation and transformation. They had committed themselves to a quality assurance policy which would ensure that they demonstrate continuous improvement in all areas of their work. This is monitored through on the C.R.E. core standards.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the Committee receive a presentation on the Strategic Plan at a future meeting.

721. CITIZENS PANEL

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services updating Members on the progress and usage of the Citizens Panel.

Over the past year the Citizens Panel had been consulted on a quarterly basis using either telephone or postal surveys. Many of those surveys had covered a range of issues which may have been confusing to some respondents and could, therefore, create a lower than desired response rate.

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The Panel currently consists of around 1,000 residents who had been selected from those contributing to an initial survey. The Panel is "topped up" on a regular basis through ongoing consultations, with a major recruitment effort centred around key postal surveys such as the former D.E.T.R., general satisfaction survey, conducted in November 2000. The Panel was normally surveyed either by telephone or post. Whilst this had provided some information, it was primarily of a quantitative nature. To gain maximum benefit from the Panel, more qualitative work had been undertaken over recent months and it was proposed that this became a regular theme in the future.

Qualitative work normally involved fewer people and was, therefore, not representative, but allowed issues to be explored in greater detail, and informed comments to be made.

The Citizens Panel consultations scheduled for this year will be based upon the themes of:-

- March (telephone) - Community Engagement and Inclusion
- June (postal) - Environmental Issues
- September (telephone) - Access Equalities and issues raised by the Panel
- November (postal) - Annual Service and Council satisfaction with Service Quality

Consultation was being made more effective through the use of themed exercises, and increased emphasis was placed upon qualitative work through enhanced use of Focus and Reflector Groups.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

722. RIVERSIDE HOUSE

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services on the revenue consequences of the move to Riverside House, compared to estimated costs and savings of the move.

In July 1998, the former Strategy Committee approved the relocation of all of the various Council offices to one building - Riverside House. Included in that report had been certain revenue consequences of the move. Details relating to the running costs were:-

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Detail

	<u>£</u>
Length of cables for internal telephone system between different buildings	-40,000
Rent of Data transmission lines over the IT network	-10,000
Energy savings as a result of being in one building	-8,000
Repair and maintenance costs as a result of being in one new freehold building	-25,000
Rates as a result of being in a larger better quality building	+61,000
Efficiency savings as a result of reduced duplication etc.	-25,000
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Involved Net savings in Running Costs	-47,000

All of these savings had been put into revenue budgets for 2000/01 and 2001/02. As far as rates were concerned, the Council was paying substantially more than forecast in the report. It appeared a result of the revaluation which had took effect from 1 April 2000 rather than an error in the original report. The new valuation, (£577,000), times the new multiplier was substantially more than the old evaluation, (£444,000), times the old multiplier projected forward by approximate information. The extra rates amounted to approximately £20,000 to £30,000.

The anticipated savings on energy had not been realised. Revenue estimates for 2000/01 and 2001/02, had been reduced by £8,000 (and by a further £6,200 in 2001/02 for energy saving measures that had been introduced). However, expenditure for both years had exceeded the budget by a substantial margin. As a result, an increase of more than £20,000 had been made in the revenue budget for 2002/03 to reflect the actual situation.

The original report also referred to rents on office accommodation which were £354,000 per annum. It had been accepted that some of those rents would continue to be paid until such time as leases came to an end, or break clauses could be exercised. Rents paid had fallen from £354,000 to:-

- £296,000 in 2000/01
- £144,562 in 2001/02
- Estimated for £131,000 in 2002/03
- £0 in 2003/04

There was a break clause for Marlborough House on 25 December 2002, but it had been considered prudent to allow the full year's rent in the budget for 2002/03, following the penalty that had been paid for Victoria Chambers.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

723. QUALITY STRATEGY

The Committee considered a report from Policy Services on progress with the development of the Quality Strategy 2002/2006.

The original Quality Strategy had been introduced in 1998 and had four key areas of focus: People, Communication, Specification and Delivery.

The starting point for the new Quality Strategy was the proposed vision of being ***An Acknowledged Excellence Council***.

To incorporate this vision, the emphasis of the Quality Strategy would change from the previously stated areas of focus to create two main focal aspects:-Excellence and Acknowledgement.

The underpinning feature of the Quality Strategy was the emphasis on providing quality services from a customer's prospective. To achieve this, the strategy addresses the elements of:- Leadership, People, people and Strategy, Partnerships and Resources and Processes. These elements would contribute to the excellence focal aspects. Achievement of the acknowledgement aspects could be through various forms.

Warwick District Council was actively involved in the W.M.L.G.A. Peer Assessment Scheme, though this remained relatively low profile and would not achieve the acknowledgment aspect. Other options existed such as the Midlands Excellence Awards and the new Investors in Excellence scheme about to be launched within the Midlands, both of which would achieve recognition at a corporate level. Individual services would be able to gain acknowledgement through the Beacon Council Scheme, Chartermark, the EFQM assessment or I.S.O. 9000 Standards, depending on which, if any, was considered most appropriate.

The Quality Strategy and action plan would enter a state of consultation during April, allowing refining and further development prior to a report being presented to the Executive in May 2002.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the Committee receive a further report and presentation on the EFQM and peer assessment process.

724. EXECUTIVE MINUTES

The Committee considered the minutes of the Executive held on Monday, 11 February 2002, which came within the remit of this Committee.

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

RECOMMENDED that the minutes be noted.

725. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS AND REPORTS)

Agenda Item Number 2 - Housing Options

The Committee made the following comments:

Recognising the importance of the decision about the future of housing within the council, the Committee is concerned at the lack of information in certain areas and that before a decision is taken further work should be undertaken on:

- a) Obtaining a clearer picture of the views of tenants through a statistically robust and representative technique.

- b) The details of the stock condition survey and its implications now and for the future in maintaining the stock in a good condition, in particularly explaining the impact on tenants if there is a lack of funds.

- c) The impact on the Council of a transfer of its housing function, in particular on its capacity to perform its full range of functions.

In addition the Executive may wish to commission an investigation into the experience of other councils who have undergone a housing transfer. The Community Scrutiny Committee may be best placed to undertake this investigation. The Committee would endorse the need to establish a clear landlord / strategic split within the housing function, irrespective of what option is adopted.

Agenda Item Number 3 - Service Plans 2002 - 2004

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

Agenda Item Number 4 - Riverside House Car Park

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report and also recommended that Environment Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor the alterations as part of their review.

Agenda Item Number 6 - Treasury Management Policy Statement and Strategy Plan for 2002/2003

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

Agenda Item Number 7 - Advocates

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report if the scheme is run on a trial basis.

Agenda Item Number 8 - Progress of Regeneration of Leamington Old Town (Srb5 Scheme)

The Committee supported the recommendation but the Directors Handbook should be made available to the Executive.

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Agenda Item Number 10 - Future of the Conservation Area Advisory Forum

The Committee supported the recommendation but would like to see a report back in 6 months on the cost implications.

Agenda Item Number 11 - Devolution of Building Control Charges (Revised Scheme)

The Committee supported the recommendation but would like to see a report back in 6 months on the operation of the revised scheme.

Agenda Item Number 15 - Strategic Plan for Warwickshire

The Committee supported the recommendation but would like to bring to the attention of the Executive that not all Chief Executives in Warwickshire are included in the Countrywide Steering Group.

Agenda Item Number 16 - Closer Collaboration Between County and District Councils

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

Agenda Item Number 19 - South Warwickshire Tourism Service Level Agreement

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

(Councillor Mrs Boad declared a non-pecuniary, non-substantial interest in this item)

726. PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within paragraphs 8 and 9 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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727. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS AND REPORTS)

Agenda Item Number 23 - Installation of Printers

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

Agenda Item Number 24 - Regent Hotel, Leamington Spa

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report but felt that the costs in respect of CB Hillier Parker and legal advice should be capped at £32,000.

(The meeting ended at 9.10p.m.)

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