

AUDIT AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 21 July 2004 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 7.20 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Caborn (Chairman), Councillors Chander, Davis, Ms De-Lara-Bond, Holland, Mrs Knight, Pratt and Mrs Sawdon.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Crowther (Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Strategic Leadership)

(Councillor Chander substituted for Councillor Ashford).

209. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

210. **CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

A report from Members' Services and the Member Sub Group was submitted on the work of the Sub Group in scrutinising the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

The Committee had set up a Work Group comprising Councillors Chris Davis, Martyn Ashford and Balvinder Gill to scrutinise the complaints procedure. Prior to this decision, the Complaints Officers in the various Business Units, had met on a number of occasions to discuss improvements to the procedure.

The Work Group had viewed the existing procedure and computer system and had also viewed a computer system provided by Flare.

The Best Value Review of Customer Access had identified that there was a need to create an accessible, straightforward complaints system which drove service improvements. The Peer Assessors had commented that the corporate complaints process did not appear to be consistently applied across the Council, or effectively integrated into the Council's Performance Management framework. They also held the view that there was a lack of evidence as to how the complaints procedure was used to promote change and improvement across the Council.

Following these comments and their other investigations, the Sub-Group had accepted that a new system was required which would need to include a systematic, robust and consistently deployed approach for collating and reporting complaints so that service improvements could be considered.

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The complaints procedure needed to be extended to cover complaints regarding discrimination. At present there was a separate leaflet relating to complaints about discrimination, but no procedure to back it up. The existing complaints procedure would therefore be extended to make special reference to complaints alleging discrimination. There was a need, under the Anti Discrimination Legislation, for details of complaints to be logged and analysed. In the short-term IT had been asked to amend the existing computer system to enable this to be done, but in the long-term it would need to be incorporated into any new system.

The procedure also needed to refer to complaints about Data Protection and Freedom of Information. Changes had been made to the existing procedure and these would need to be incorporated in any new system.

The Complaints Officers had identified the need for the system to be linked to the Council's Web page, so that complainants could enter complaints on-line. This was supported by Sub-Group.

Most Councils now had systems which allowed comments and compliments to be registered as well as complaints. These could also be used to drive service improvements.

The report referred to the necessary training which needed to be given to Complaint Officers and to all staff who were likely to take complaints. There could also be a need to train Councillors. There was at present difficulty in identifying Officers to investigate Stage complaints and this would need to be addressed.

The Flare computer system was being introduced during the summer of 2004 to deal with applications under the new Licensing Act. The complaint part of the Flare system could, therefore, be accessed for a relatively small amount, and the Sub-Group had suggested that this system be adopted provided the necessary funds could be found. However, since the report was written IT had commented that there was a possibility that one of the other systems being introduced (i.e. Northgate or the Document Management System) could be used which would involve no annual costs.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the Sub-Group's recommendation that a new compliment, comments and complaints procedure be adopted on the lines set out in the report be accepted;
- (2) further investigations be carried out, involving the Sub-Group, to identify the most cost effective computer system to back up the complaints procedure;

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- (3) investigations be carried out into how any costs involved in introducing a new system and for the training of Officers and members can be met; and
- (4) when all the investigations have been completed a report be submitted to the Executive seeking approval for the new procedure, the computer system and the training of Officers.

211. QUARTERLY INVESTMENT AND BORROWING REPORT FOR THE QUARTER TO 31 MARCH 2004, 2003/4 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT AND A COMMENTARY ON ETHICAL INVESTMENT ISSUES

A report from Finance was submitted on the Council's Treasury management activities for the quarter ended 31 March 2004, and for the whole of 2003/2004. The report also commented upon the topic of ethical investment issues and how it could affect this Council.

In March the Committee had requested that they received the Quarterly Investment and Borrowing Report for the quarter ending 31 March 2004, which had previously been circulated to members with the Information Bulletin. The Council was required to report on its 2003/4 Treasury Management Performance and it was felt appropriate to incorporate the annual review within the report.

The Strategic Director (Finance) explained the important role that members had in monitoring performance on treasury management; she referred to historical cases where Councils had either invested in risky investments, or been 'trading' in money market activities which had brought many of the present regulations regarding process and scrutiny into force. Roger Wyton introduced the report in detail and he and Mike Snow answered questions from members.

It was reported that Mike and Roger had initially identified the benefits to the Council of becoming debt free had been instrumental in achieving this in March 2004.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted and Mike Snow and Roger Wyton be thanked for their informative presentation and for their work in arranging for the Council to become debt free.

212. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN AND ASSOCIATED WORK

A report from the Asset Management Steering Group was submitted updating members on the Asset Management Plan and associated work.

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The Asset Management Plan (AMP) had become a statutory requirement for all Councils in 2001. The latest AMP had been submitted on the 31 July 2003, and had been assessed as “good” by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Whilst the Council did not have to formally submit a AMP for 2004, it was considered prudent to continue producing a shortened version for use as a management tool. This would be submitted to the Executive with the capital strategy in October.

The AMP contained an action plan against which performance could be assessed and this was circulated with the report. It also contained national performance standards which were monitored annually. Details of matters relating to potential disposals, acquisitions, possible developments etc were also circulated with the report.

The Strategic Director (Finance) updated the meeting on the present position with the Irish Club.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

213. EXECUTIVE MEETING MONDAY 14 JUNE 2004

The Committee considered the minutes of the Executive meeting held on the 14 June 2004.

RECOMMENDED that the reports be noted.

214. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON-CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS AND REPORTS)

The Committee considered the items which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on the 28 July which came within its remit. As a result the following comments were made for forwarding to the Executive.

Agenda Item No. 5 – Kenilworth Town Centre – Progress

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Agenda Item No. 6 – Approval of Statement of Accounts

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Agenda Item No. 7 – Financial Monitoring 2004/2005 (to 31 May 2004)

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report and emphasised the importance of the Executive receiving a report in October and at regular intervals thereafter.

Agenda Item No. 8 – Portfolio Performance Indicators

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Agenda Item No. 9 – Revised Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) Programme Initiation Document (PID)

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The Committee supported the recommendations in the report and asked that the Executive ensure that the contracts for the two new posts are time limited.

The Committee asked that as part of its monitoring process, reports be submitted to it at six and 12 month intervals.

215. PRESS AND PUBLIC

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 paragraph 8 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

216. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS AND REPORTS)

The Committee considered the confidential item and report which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on the 28 July 2004, which came within its remit. As a result, the following comments were made for forwarding to the Executive:-

Agenda Item No. 15 – Flood Alleviation Measures at Saltisford

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report and asked the Executive to ensure that if the scheme proceeded all parties involved must be required to adhere to an agreed timetable for carrying out the work.

(The meeting ended at 9.10 pm)

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