

## RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3rd July, 2008

**PRESENT** – Councillor Haszeldine (in the Chair); Councillors Francis, Johnson, Lewis, Maddison, Richmond and Walker. (7)

**APOLOGIES** – Councillor Burton, Coultas, Swainston and Thistlethwaite (4)

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** –

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services, David Hall, Assistant Director, Accounting Services and Local Taxation, Steve Thompson, Assistant Director, Culture, Lesley Blundell, Head of Human Resource Management, Craig Holden, Leading Edge Programme Manager, Susan White, Head of Strategic Procurement and Contract Management and David Goodchild, Policy Adviser, within the Chief Executive's Department.

**R4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**R5. TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR – RESOLVED** – That, for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2008/09, meetings of this Committee, as detailed in the calendar approved at Minute C214/Apr/08, be held at 4.00 p.m.

**R6. MINUTES** – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 1st, 9th, 12th and 15th May, 2008.

In relation to Minute R94(b)/May/08, it was reported that a meeting of the Task and Finish Review Group to look into the sustainable school build at North Road Primary School would be arranged to set the terms of reference and that the outcome thereof would be reported to the next ordinary meeting of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 18th September, 2008, and in relation to Minute R97/May/08, it was reported that a list of services which could be reviewed had been established and would be circulated to all Members of this Scrutiny Committee for allocation.

It was also reported that, in relation to Minute R99/May/08, the proposed work in relation to the use of consultants within the Authority would be linked to the work being undertaken into the Capital Process Review and the project management work as would the review agreed at Minute R105(b(i))/May/08.

A further joint meeting would be held with Stockton Borough Council later in the year to undertake further joint monitoring of the Darlington and Stockton Partnership.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes be approved as correct records.

**R7. WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09** – The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that further consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the Municipal Year 2008/09.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received.

**R8. SICKNESS ABSENCE 2007/08** – The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the current position in relation to sickness absence across the Authority for the period April 2007 to March 2008. It was reported that the actual outturn for 2007/08 was 9.77 days against a target of 9.69 days and that the figures showed a significant improvement compared to the same period in 2006/07. Performance was slightly below the median across the whole of all English Authorities, however, it was also reported that this Council was the best performing Council within the region against the Best Value Performance Indicator.

Discussion ensued on the further work proposed to be undertaken by the Human Resources Section to try to improve on the performance and to meet the target of 9.5 days which had been set for 2008/09.

**RESOLVED** – That the actions proposed to support further improvement in relation to sickness absence within the Authority be noted and this Scrutiny Committee continue to be advised of the current position in relation to sickness absence on a quarterly basis over the next financial year and that a further report be submitted showing the position for the first six months of the year.

**R9. BOROUGH COLLECTION REVIEW – UPDATE** – The Director of Community Services submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of the progress made in relation to a review which had been undertaken into the management and conservation of the Borough Art Collection together with the future proposals in relation to the management and partnership working.

Particular reference was made to the establishment of a Steering Group to agree the development of suitable policies and procedures to manage, develop, protect and conserve the collection and to the need for a Member of the relevant Scrutiny Committee to be included in the membership of that Group.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be referred to the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

**R10. CAPITAL PROGRAMME OUTTURN 2007/08** – The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (previously circulated) together with a report (also previously circulated) which was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting scheduled for 8th July, 2008, in relation to the Capital Programme Outturn for 2007/08.

It was reported that the total capital spend incurred during 2007/08 was £41.319 million and that, overall, a balanced programme had been achieved with a wide variety of capital improvements undertaken throughout the Borough during 2007/08.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received.

**R11. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT AND OUT-TURN PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2007/08** – The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (previously circulated) together with a report (also previously circulated) which was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting scheduled for 8th July, 2008, in relation to the Treasury Management Annual Report and Actual Prudential Indicators for 2007/08.

It was reported that the Council's treasury management activities during 2007/08 had been carried out in accordance with the Council's policy and within legal limits and that financing costs had been reduced during the year with a saving of £0.065 million achieved from the revised budget as a result of increased cash flow interest.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received.

**R12. SERVICE PLANNING 2008/12** – The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) together with the seven service plans (also previously circulated) for which this Scrutiny Committee was responsible for monitoring and challenging.

It was reported that further training would be available for Members on the use of PerformancePlus if required and discussion ensued on the format of the posters and whether they were clearly comprehensible to all staff.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received.

**R13. POLICY REVIEW - (1) Review of Progress on Policy Review Items** – There were no items to report back.

**(2) Review Items Final Report Back** – There were no items to report back.

**(3) Responses of the Executive to Reports of this Scrutiny Committee** – There were no items to report back.

**R14. EXECUTIVE CALL-IN - (1) Call-in items relating to Key Decisions of the Executive** – There were no call-in items.

**(2) Other call-in Items Requested by Three Members** – There were no call-in items.

**R15. BEST VALUE – MONITORING PROGRESS ON THE IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN** – There was no progress to be reported back to this meeting.

**R16. CAPITAL PROCESS REVIEW** – With the prior approval of the Chair to the matter being treated as urgent to enable consideration to be given to the work being undertaken at an early date, the Director of Community Services submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the core work which had been undertaken within the Authority to review the Council's processes for managing the capital programme and presenting the outcomes of the various work streams to provide consistent arrangements for project management, based on the lessons learnt and the existing good practice both within departments and external to the Council.

It was reported that a number of outcomes from the on-going review had already been implemented and embodied in the restructure of departments which took place in November 2007 and that further outcomes were being piloted on current projects to establish operationally whether further changes were necessary.

Discussion ensued on the need for consultation to be undertaken with Members both in the early stages of projects and at the various control points; the required skills to effectively deliver capital projects and what skills were available in-house and what would need to be sourced externally; training requirements to meet the skill set; the role of the Asset Management Group

and the Project Board and whether it was appropriate for Member representation on each of these bodies; the training needs of staff in relation to project management; the role of Scrutiny to monitor and challenge the processes at each stage; and how Members could access information in relation to projects at the various stages.

Reference was also made to the work this Scrutiny Committee would be undertaking in relation to the sustainable build at North Road Primary School and the scrutiny of that project from inception to completion.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the proposals within the submitted report be endorsed.

(b) That this Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor the introduction of the new procedures and remaining work streams.

**R17. SERVICE PLAN PERFORMANCE YEAR-END 2007/08** – With the prior approval of the Chair to the matter being treated as urgent to enable consideration to be given to the year-end service performance at an early date, the Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) summarising the performance against the service plans for which this Scrutiny Committee were responsible.

It was reported that overall, targets were being achieved and the performance trend was positive with the exception of the Chief Executive's Department which was primarily due to an indicator that measured the number of complaints going between the three stages of the complaints system.

**RESOLVED** – That the situation be noted.

**R18. COMBINED FINANCIAL AND SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT – YEAR END 2007/08** – With the prior approval of the Chair to the matter being treated as urgent to enable consideration to be given to the Council's financial and service performance at an early date, the Director of Corporate Services and the Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) together with a report (also previously circulated) scheduled to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 8th July, 2008, giving information thereon for the period April 2007 to March 2008.

It was reported that, overall, the Council was on target for service performance, the financial results support delivery of the Corporate Plan approved in February 2008 and efficiency gains were better than the mid-year projection.

**RESOLVED** - That the report be received.

**R19. PROCUREMENT FORWARD PLAN** – With the prior approval of the Chair to the matter being treated as urgent to enable the report to be considered at an early date, the Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting Members' views on the criteria for determining whether individual contracts were deemed to be strategic or non-strategic, following the revisions to the Contract Procedure Rules which had come into force on 1st May, 2008.

It was reported, that, in future, in accordance with the agreed criteria, all Strategic contracts would be submitted to Cabinet for approval and decisions on other more routine contracts would be taken by Officers.

**RESOLVED** – That Cabinet be advised that this Scrutiny Committee supports the proposed criteria.