

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 5th June, 2008.

Present:- Councillors Grewal (Chair), Basharat, Coad, Davis, Dodds, Haines, Matloob, Munkley and Walsh.

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Anderson, Parmar, Plimmer, Small and Swindlehurst.

PART I

1. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

2. Election of Vice-Chair

The Chair called for nominations of Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2008/09 municipal year. The nominations of Councillors Basharat and Haines were moved and seconded for the position of Vice-Chair and these were put to the vote, with Councillor Basharat receiving four votes and Councillor Haines receiving two votes.

Councillor Munkley requested that his strong objection to the controlling group having taken the Chairs of the Committee and the Scrutiny Panels be placed on record.

Resolved - That Councillor Basharat be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2008/09 municipal year.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 10th April, 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. Minutes of Scrutiny Panels

The minutes of the following Scrutiny Panels were noted and received:-

Education and Children's Services of 17th March, 2008.

Green and Built Environment of 26th March, 2008.

Community and Cultural Services of 27th March, 2008.

Health of 3rd April, 2008.

In respect of the minutes of the Green and Built Environment Scrutiny Panel held on 26th March, a Ward Councillor requested an update concerning the laying of the sports pitches at the Cippenham development and whether the area would now be turfed as seeding had not taken place. It was agreed that an update report be forwarded to the Councillor.

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5. Appointment of Scrutiny Panels, Allocation of Seats and Appointment of Members

The Committee considered a report recommending the reappointment of the four Overview and Scrutiny Panels for the 2008/09 municipal year. The report set out the seat allocations that had been calculated to reflect actual group membership and statutory proportionality entitlements. It was further noted that the Council's constitution stated that, as far as practicable, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Scrutiny Panels should in total number reflect the political balance of the Council. This equated to four appointments to be offered to the Labour Group with two each to the BILLD and Conservative Groups. The administration had indicated that it would be offering the four Vice-Chair positions to the opposition group.

Details of the nominations received from the political groups were submitted and the Committee was asked to appoint the four Scrutiny Panels and the Members nominated. Details were also presented of the co-opted Members for formal approval.

Resolved -

- (a) That the Community and Cultural Services, Education and Children's Services, Green and Built Environment and Health Scrutiny Panels be appointed for the 2008/09 municipal year.
- (b) That the Committee note the allocation of seats to the Panels.
- (c) That the Committee agree the allocation of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Panels on the basis as set out in the report and that the Panels be invited to appoint their Chairs and Vice-Chairs at their first meetings according to that formula.
- (d) That the Members as now submitted be appointed to serve on each of the Panels in accordance with the wishes expressed by political groups in respect of the seats allocated to them.
- (e) That the co-opted Members as listed in the report be appointed to the Community and Cultural Services and Education and Children's Services Panels.

6. Broom and Poplar Houses Refurbishment

As requested by the Committee at its meeting in September 2007, the Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management (HoIA&RM) submitted a report following up the six recommendations made at that time in his report into the delays in completion of the refurbishment of Broom and Poplar Houses. Members were reminded that the previous report had been a high level review of the project focusing on relevant parties, costs and delivery times; tender opening procedures; tender specification and analysis; checks on the contractor;

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monitoring of project progress; information for elected Members and risk management.

To check how well the Council had taken on board the lessons learned from the Broom and Poplar project, Officers had taken a sample of four large capital projects, namely Slough and Eton School; the Customer Service Centre; St Martin's Place fitting out; and Art at the Centre. These projects had been assessed against the six recommendations made in the Broom & Poplar audit report and conclusions drawn in respect of each. Of the six, the first relating to checks on the contractors had been implemented. However, the next four relating to financial and technical tests, project management responsibilities, escalation procedures and risk management had only been partially implemented. In addition, the view of the HoIA&RM was that the recommendations on improved information for elected Members had not been implemented as, apart from the fact that the top thirty capital schemes were reported quarterly to Members, no evidence had been secured as to a Member or Officer review about what information was provided to Members in respect of contracts and projects.

Members expressed the view that, whilst some progress had been made, there was still some way to go before Members could feel confident that the serious shortcomings identified with the Broom and Poplar project would be avoided in future large schemes. The following specific issues and comments were raised during the subsequent debate:-

- A Member asked whether, in future such housing projects, tenants would be decanted from properties to avoid the major disruption suffered by residents at Broom and Poplar Houses. Mr Billany, the Chief Executive of People 1st (Slough) commented that he did believe that these lessons had been learned and where it was considered appropriate as part of the decent homes programme, tenants would be decanted.
- The Committee was anxious that best practice and lessons learned from both successful and not so successful projects were disseminated across the organisation and the example was given of the PFI Schools project which had been run extremely successfully. Officers commented that meetings were held with senior Officers from other departments and from People 1st to share best practice and they would ensure that both good and bad lessons were taken on board. Reference was also made to the role of the Asset Management Group which looked at reports such as that relating to Broom and Poplar Houses and spread good practice across the Council.
- A Member suggested that one of the key lessons that should have been learned from the project was the importance of involving service users as much as possible and he suggested that tenants, residents or school governors, etc should always be fully involved in major schemes in future as there was evidence that there had been minimal involvement both in the case of Broom and Poplar and in other recent large projects. Officers

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were requested to give consideration to writing this requirement into the contracting procedures.

- Another key issue arising was that of better communications with Ward Members in particular and concern was expressed that the audit recommendation in this regard had not yet been implemented. Mr Billany commented that the ALMO had put a number of changes into place and a range of reporting mechanisms for Members were being rolled out, including Member briefings. Members commented that it was essential that regular updates were put in place for them in respect of all such large projects and early warning given of possible problems.
- In noting that the thirty largest capital schemes were reported quarterly to Members, it was suggested and agreed that a post-implementation review should be undertaken of these projects and brought to the Committee at a future meeting.
- It was further agreed that the Committee invite a Directorate to attend its meetings on a quarterly basis to present its capital programme for Scrutiny and, in this regard, it was suggested that the Green and Built Directorate be invited to present to the next meeting in July.
- A Member sought clarification as to what Police checks were carried out on contractors' staff who worked in people's homes. The Committee was advised that random CRB checks were undertaken but he would take the issue back for further consideration with a view to tightening up the current processes. However, he did comment that there had been no reported incidents in the last two years and operatives were generally well received by residents.
- A Member expressed concerns at the Art at the Centre works taking place in the High Street and potential health and safety risks arising. Officers undertook to take the comments back to the Director and it was suggested that the matter could be discussed at the next meeting when the Director of the Green and Built Environment attended the Committee.
- A Member referred to the need to ensure that there was evidence of regular updating of risk assessments on large projects and was concerned at the apparent lack of evidence. Officers confirmed their concern at this matter and stated that they would be continuing to identify evidence that an ongoing process of risk management was taking place.
- A Member requested whether there would be a report back in due course as to the performance of Pellings on the Broom and Poplar scheme. Officers commented that there were still a number of claims outstanding on this matter but that a report back would be submitted in due course.

In conclusion, Members stressed the need to ensure that all of the lessons learned from the Broom and Poplar Houses project were fully taken on board and that the Internal Audit section was able to report full implementation of all

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of the recommendations. It was also agreed that regular update reports on major projects be presented to the Committee on a regular basis.

Resolved - That the report be noted and that the additional actions identified by the Committee be pursued.

7. Presentation - Statement of Accounts 2007/08

The Strategic Director of Resources made a presentation to the Committee on the Statement of Accounts for 2007/08 which showed a small underspend of some £46,000. Members would have a further opportunity to scrutinize the issue at the Extraordinary Council meeting taking place on 26th June, 2008.

A Member asked whether any of the efficiency savings were in any way related to redundancy or job cuts and the Director undertook to provide her with the requested information. Additional information was also sought by the Councillor in respect of the Accord contract and this would be provided.

In response to a question on the Council's internal audit function, the Director confirmed that a great deal of work had taken place to improve the service and he was hopeful that the external auditors would be placing 100% reliance on the internal audit work this year.

Resolved - That the presentation be noted.

8. Financial, Performance and Human Resources Monitoring 2008/09

The Strategic Director of Resources submitted a report outlining the proposals for the reporting of financial, performance and human resources data during the coming financial year. The report also outlined the financial risks facing the Council in 2008/09.

In respect of the Haymill bar, a Member asked whether any risk assessment had been undertaken of the presence of a bar, given that the Centre was used for youth and community activities. In addition, Members asked for additional clarification in respect of the items on concessionary fares and free transport entitlement and Officers advised that these would be presented in a future report.

Resolved - That that the report be noted.

9. Report on Achievements of the Resources Directorate - Capital Programme 2007/08 and Targets for 2008/09

The Assistant Director, Property Services presented a report setting out the key achievements from the capital programme in respect of the Resources Directorate during the last financial year and identifying some of the key targets for 2008/09.

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Members asked a number of questions of detail on the Council's electronic capabilities and whether there were any technical barriers against the eventual use by Members of laptops for much of their Council work. The Strategic Director of Resources commented that the Council did have the capability of enabling Members to use laptops and he referred to the recent audit of Members' IT equipment which would identify the issues arising in this regard.

A Member referred to the Heart of Slough project, and in particular, the situation as regards accommodating Age Concern in the new library building. Officers explained that it had been agreed with the organisation that they would not be accommodated in the new building but Officers were working very closely with them to identify alternative options.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

10. Forward Agenda Plan

The Committee noted its forward agenda plan for future meetings. The Chair asked Members to identify any others areas of work which could usefully be scrutinised by the Committee or by one its Panels and the following areas were identified:-

How the Council responds to complaints of anti-social behaviour.

Responses to Council house repairs.

Child protection procedures.

The Council's customer service including the Customer Service Centre and People 1st.

Members were advised that regular meetings would be established between the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Committee and the Scrutiny Panels to ensure that the work was properly programmed.

The Chair offered the Leader of the Council the opportunity to address the Committee and he commented on his expectations for Scrutiny in the coming year. He stated that he would expect the Cabinet Commissioners to attend the relevant Scrutiny meetings wherever possible and always when requested. He believed that this would assist in improving the relationship between the Executive and Scrutiny. He also referred to the need to ensure that better forward programming took place so that items were scrutinised well before they were submitted to Cabinet to enable Scrutiny to have a greater input and influence in the policy making process. It was also important that Scrutiny developed different ways of working with far more "open" reports to enable fuller scrutiny to take place.

The Chief Executive also commented on the issue and reiterated the comments of the Leader in respect of different forms of Scrutiny meeting, more forward planning and a less reactive form of Scrutiny than had been the case in the past.

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Resolved - That the report be noted and that the suggestions made by Members for future Scrutiny items be considered at the forthcoming meeting of Scrutiny Chairs.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 9.02 p.m.)