

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 3rd July, 2008.

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

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Hewitt, Bains, Plimmer and Parmar.

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Coad and Davis.

PART I

11. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

12. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 5th June, 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13. Review of Terms of Reference of Scrutiny Panels

The Democratic Services Manager reminded the Committee that, following the local elections on 1st May, there had been changes to the portfolios of the Cabinet Commissioners. In addition, several Departmental restructurings had recently taken place which had meant that the responsibilities of certain of the Scrutiny Panels no longer reflected either Departmental structures or Cabinet portfolios. As an example of this, housing matters now fell within the responsibility of the Director of the Green and Built Environment. However, housing issues were not dealt with by the Green and Built Environment Scrutiny Panel but by the Community and Cultural Services Panel. Moreover, housing was now within the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Renewal, along with planning, transportation and highways issues as well as neighbourhood matters.

Simply moving all housing issues into the terms of reference of the Green and Built Environment Panel was considered but would have led to the Panel having an extremely heavy workload, given that during 2007/08 it had very busy agendas and long meetings. Accordingly, the portfolios of the existing Panels had been reviewed and it was proposed to make adjustments to the terms of reference of both the Community and Cultural Services and Green and Built Environment Panels to more accurately reflect current Departmental structures and Cabinet portfolios, as well as ensuring a more even split of work between the Panels. No changes were proposed to the current responsibilities of either the Education and Children's Services or Health Scrutiny Panels.

The Committee generally welcomed the proposals but some Members were concerned that it may be appropriate to adjust the memberships of the Panels, as certain Members may have chosen to serve on Panels because of their particular interests which may now have been transferred to another

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Panel. It was agreed that a letter be forwarded to the Members of the two Panels concerned explaining the changes and seeking confirmation of any desired changes of membership which would be approved by the Committee at its next meeting.

The Chair also asked whether the Committee wished to continue receiving the minutes of Scrutiny Panels for information. Members confirmed that it was helpful for Panel minutes to be submitted to the main Committee to keep Members abreast of the work being undertaken by the Panels.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Community and Cultural Services and Green and Built Environment Scrutiny Panels be renamed the “Community, Leisure and Environment” and “Neighbourhoods and Renewal” Scrutiny Panels respectively and that their terms of reference be amended as set out in Appendix A to these minutes.
- (b) That the three co-optees from the Tenants’ and Residents’ Federation be appointed to serve on the Neighbourhoods and Renewal Panel.
- (c) That these proposed changes take effect from the September, 2008 cycle.
- (d) That Members of the two affected Panels be canvassed as to whether they wish to change their membership of one or other of the Panels in view of the above changes and that any such adjustments to membership be referred to the next meeting of the Committee.
- (e) That the Council be recommended to make any consequential changes to part 4.5 of the Constitution (Scrutiny Procedure Rules) as a result of these recommendations.

14. Temporary Staffing Contract - Update

As requested by the Committee at a previous meeting, the Human Resources Services Manager submitted a report advising on progress on the master vendor contract with Pertemps Recruitment Partnerships that had commenced on 1st October, 2007. The report outlined the progress made since that time with Pertemps endeavouring to sign up as many of the existing agencies as second tier providers as were needed to provide the full range of staffing to the Council with priority being given to specialist agencies and those where the Council had high volumes of bookings. At present, 43 agencies had signed up with Pertemps as second tier suppliers and work was ongoing to increase this number. The anticipated efficiencies and savings were calculated on the basis of all bookings being made via the master vendor contract as, in order to take advantage of the low agency margins negotiated with Pertemps and second tier suppliers, and to gain efficiencies in invoicing processes, it was important that as many agency staff as possible were recruited through the Pertemps contract. The report indicated that

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during the first six months of the contract, spend on agency staff had reduced significantly with a year on year reduction of some £448,000. The next steps in realising the benefits of the project would include:-

- Actions agreed between the Council and Pertemps to address the bookings that were still outside the contract, working closely with managers to use the contract for the benefit of managers, service users and the Council.
- An analysis of temporary staffing usage and costs as part of the overall use of the staffing budget across the Council, to assess the effectiveness of the temporary staffing contract and the use of staffing resources.
- Analysis of the use of consultancy staff on projects.

Whilst there was still progress to be made, Officers believed that the Council was now beginning to see the real benefits of the contract with Pertemps and these benefits were anticipated to accrue over the coming months.

Members raised the following issues in the subsequent discussion:-

- A Member sought information on how the total agency spend in 2007/08 of £7.9m was split between staffing costs and agency fees. Officers explained that, because the necessary management information was not collected previously, it was not possible to give any historical data of this nature. However, via the new Pertemps contract, this information was being collected and would ensure that agency fees were kept to a minimum across the Council.
- A Member asked whether there had been any improvement in the figures given in the report of 49% of bookings still being made outside of the new contract. The Officer reported that the figure was now up to some 77% and was still increasing. She did however explain that some of the work outside of the contract was in specialist niche areas but her staff were working with those particular Departments and other agencies to get them signed up to the new contract.
- A Member asked whether the Council continued to take on trainees to address staffing shortages and whether there were any schemes which offered employment to young offenders. She also had concerns about individuals from overseas being employed by the Council to work with vulnerable individuals who may not have been properly police checked. Clarification was also sought as to whether recent changes in legislation had meant that temporary staff had the same rights to holiday pay, etc as permanent staff. The Officer responded that the issue of employing more trainees was being looked at in certain areas, such as with regard to care staff where it was difficult to recruit individuals with the necessary qualifications. The possibility of trainees being employed and given the necessary training was being actively considered. Discussions had taken place with Pertemps as regards the possibility of working with the Council and employing young offenders and other vulnerable groups and this was

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ongoing. With regard to individuals working with vulnerable children and adults, Pertemps was responsible for ensuring that its staff were CRB checked. However, as a further safeguard, such staff were required to take their CRB checks with them to any units that they worked in. It was noted that any temporary staff who had worked for over 13 weeks were entitled to holiday pay but, as a protection for the Council, the agency rather than the Borough Council had contracts of employment with the temporary staff so their rights were via Pertemps.

- A Member asked whether consideration was given to secondments in appropriate circumstances and whether individuals from black and ethnic minority groups were given an equal opportunity to take any jobs available. Officers confirmed that where vacancies occurred, consideration was always given to finding an internal solution prior to seeking a temp and that the Council's equal opportunities policies ensured that all individuals had an equal chance of securing work with the Borough Council.
- The issue of the monitoring of the contracts and ensuring that managers used Pertemps in the first instance was discussed. It was noted that there was a real need for resources to support the monitoring process and Officers hoped that, as savings were delivered, it would be possible to set up at least one post to monitor progress and educate managers in the proper utilisation of the contract.
- A Member referred to particular problem areas where it proved extremely difficult to recruit permanent staff, such as inspectors for private sector housing. He asked whether, where there was a high turnover of staff or other recruitment difficulties, the Council targeted such areas to come up with creative solutions to the problem. Officers responded that there were indeed a number of areas across the Council where it proved extremely difficult to recruit and Officers tried to be as creative as possible by for example introducing a career grade to attract individuals to train and progress on the job. The Member asked that it would be helpful for a number of examples of such action to be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

On completion of the questioning, the Committee requested that a further update on the contract be submitted in six months' time.

Resolved - That the report be noted and that a further update on the Pertemps contract be submitted in early 2009.

15. **Report on Achievements of Green and Built Environment Directorate - Capital Programme 2007/08 and Targets for 2008/09**

The Assistant Director, Transport and Planning made a presentation to the Committee on the Directorate's major achievements on its capital programme during the previous financial year. Members discussed the following issues:-

- A Member was extremely concerned at a number of issues around the "Art at The Centre" project in the High Street including health and safety issues

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for pedestrians, access issues for the disabled and the blocking of buses and taxis by private cars that should not be in the area. She felt that the planning of the project appeared to be poor and asked what action Officers were taking to alleviate the problem.

The Assistant Director acknowledged that there had been some difficulties but that any construction project where people and vehicles were still present would give rise to inconvenience. The Member had been taken on a tour of the works and Officers believed that the site was safe and a number of issues raised by the Member had been addressed. The contractor had to work in a safe manner and Officers would stop them if any unsafe practices were seen.

- Access was acknowledged to be a problem. The only vehicles that should be entering the High Street were buses, hackney carriages and disabled vehicles but this was being abused regularly and the Council was reliant on the Police to enforce it. The Council would need to take on those powers through an Act of Parliament if it was to take over the role of policing the High Street and it would be possible to use number plate recognition cameras to deal with vehicles entering the High Street illegally. However, this was not a possibility in the short term. Following further discussion on this item, it was agreed that a full report be submitted to the September meeting of the Committee on progress with the Art at The Centre scheme.
- A Member sought information on the total number of street lights in the Borough, on how many had been upgraded to date and the priority list and this information would be sent to him. It was also suggested that future reports should show the total budget and the percentage over or under-spent so as to put the budget spend into context and this was agreed.
- Further information was provided on the alley gating scheme. This was a small budget with a few alleys being gated each year under a five year programme. The design of the gates varied according to the location but they were generally considered to be a success by local residents. Where such schemes caused difficulties locally in respect of access, Officers asked Ward Members to advise them accordingly and they would look into the matter.
- Clarification was sought as to the thinking behind the introduction of 20 mph schemes in relatively small areas across the Borough and whether it would not have been more financially advantageous to introduce a number of much larger schemes. The Officer explained that because local distributor roads could not be included within 20 mph schemes, it was necessary to address the issue on a piecemeal scale and some 35 zones had been planned across the town. If Government legislation changed to introduce such zones on a widespread basis in urban areas, a different approach could be taken. It was further noted that discussions were taking place with Buckinghamshire County Council with regard to the rationalisation of speed limits on either side of the Borough boundary.

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- A Member referred to difficulties with the Hoppa 2 bus service and complaints were being received concerning a change to the route which meant that it no longer stopped at Farnham Road surgery. Officers undertook to look into the matter with the Ward Member.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

16. Office Accommodation Strategy - New Headquarters Office Procurement

The Head of Asset Management submitted a report updating the Committee on progress with regard to the Council's procurement of new town centre office headquarters and the steps taken to ensure compliance with European procurement directives. The report explained that the procurement process involved a two stage award procedure. The first was the pre-qualification stage used to narrow down a field of candidates whilst the second stage was the tender process where selected companies were invited to tender for a contract which, in this case, would be for a developer to provide offices to the Council on the basis of a 15 year lease on commercial terms. The process to be followed was explained and the timetable for the procurement process was outlined with the target for completion of the agreement for the lease being set at March, 2009. The target date for the completion of the selected building was towards the end of 2011 with the Council taking possession during 2012.

Members asked whether it would be possible for Officers to shorten the timescale for agreeing the lease to the end of 2008. Officers undertook to look into this possibility although it was explained that the process was quite complex and sufficient time needed to be given for the developers to submit their tenders.

Members expressed the view that the location of the new Town Hall was extremely important and that it needed to be a "high visibility" site close to transport links. Officers acknowledged the importance of this and confirmed that this would form part of the process for assessing bids.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

17. Financial, Performance and Human Resources Monitoring 2008/09 and Future of Bar at Haymill Centre

The Strategic Director of Resources submitted his report outlining the Council's overall performance in financial and performance management terms. The report focused on revenue and capital monitoring and outlined the financial risks facing the Council in 2008/09. It also contained human resources monitoring statistics.

Particular attention was drawn to the continuing losses on the bar at the Haymill Centre with a budget pressure of £43,000 anticipated in the current financial year. This was in addition to similar losses over several years. The Committee was asked whether it wished to make a recommendation to the Cabinet on the possible closure of the bar.

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Some Members of the Committee expressed the view that the Council could not continue to maintain what was a loss making facility and that, in any case, it was inappropriate for there to be a bar in a youth and community centre. A Ward Member expressed his disappointment that Members were being asked to make a decision on this issue without the benefit of a comprehensive report on the facility given the comments of the Leader of the Council at the previous meeting that Scrutiny should be looking in depth at such issues. He raised the following points in his comments:-

- The bar and youth elements of the facility were completely separate and there was no crossover between the two.
- The Committee should have been presented with an analysis of bar usage together with details of losses and/or profits over previous years. Options should have been presented of ways in making what was a community facility profit making. He believed that the bar had been run down over a number of years and that it could have proved profitable if properly managed.

A proposal that the Cabinet be recommended that the Haymill bar is closed was put and carried. Councillor Munkley requested that his concerns that the Cabinet was being asked to make this decision without the benefit of a comprehensive report be placed on record.

Resolved – (Councillor Munkley dissenting on (b) below) -

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the Cabinet be recommended to close the bar at the Haymill Centre in view of the losses being incurred.

18. Forward Agenda Plan

The Committee noted its agenda plan for future meetings. It was noted that a report would be presented to the September meeting on the Art at the Centre scheme.

A Member requested that a report on the training of neighbourhood wardens should be presented to the next meeting of the Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel in view of some health and safety concerns and this was agreed.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that arrangements were being made for representatives of Bracknell Forest Borough Council to visit Slough on 24th July at 2.30 p.m. to outline best practice in that authority in respect of Overview and Scrutiny and all Members were urged to attend.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 9.00 p.m.)

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF SCRUTINY BODIES (AMENDED JULY 2008)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Overall policy and strategic direction issues including budgetary strategy
- Organisational development/Human Resources
- Performance Management
- Equalities issues
- Audit issues
- Corporate Communications
- IT and E-government Strategy
- Property and Assets Management Strategy.

Health Panel

- Adult Social Services
- Children's Social Services (Secondary responsibility where involves health related issues)
- Community Care
- Parenting/Family Services
- Health Links/Partnerships
- Asylum Seekers/Refugees
- Substance Misuse Strategy
- The functions of the Authority to review and report on matters relating to local health services as set out in Local Authority (Overview and Scrutiny Committees Health and Scrutiny Functions) Regulations 2002.

Community, Leisure & Environment Panel (formerly Community & Cultural Services)

- Careline Services
- One Stop Shop/Customer Service Centre
- Benefits/Council Tax
- Resident/Community Participation
- Voluntary Sector issues
- Leisure (including libraries, sports, arts, community facilities, parks and open spaces)
- Community Cohesion/Community Celebration/Community Information
- Inclusion of Excluded Groups
- Agenda 21 Issues
- All Environmental Services
- Environmental Health and Trading Standards
- Licensing Issues

Neighbourhoods & Renewal Panel (formerly Green & Built Environment)

- All Planning, Highways & Transportation Issues (including Regional Planning and Local Development Framework)
- Emergency Planning
- Community Safety Strategy
- All Housing issues including Neighbourhood Housing
- Tenant Services
- Economic Development

Education and Children's Services Panel

- All Education issues (including Adult Learning)
- Children's Social Services (Lead)
- Youth Services/Young People's Centres
- Youth Offending Team