

# **SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES**

23 January 2009

The meeting commenced at 2.30 p.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

### **Present:**

Councillor: Marjorie James (In the Chair)

Councillors: Stephen Akers-Belcher, Jonathan Brash, Rob Cook, Ann Marshall, Arthur Preece, Carl Richardson, Chris Simmons and David Young.

Resident Representatives: Iris Ryder and Linda Shields.

Also Present: Councillor Peter Jackson, Neighbourhoods and Communities Portfolio Holder.

Officers: Denise Ogden, Head of Neighbourhood Management  
Charlotte Burnham, Scrutiny Manager  
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

### **116. Apologies for Absence**

Councillors Atkinson, S Cook, Kaiser, London, McKenna, Shaw and Wright and Resident Representative Christopher Akers-Belcher.

### **117. Declarations of interest by Members**

None.

### **118. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2009**

Confirmed.

### **119. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews from Council, Executive Members and Non Executive Members**

No items.

### **120. Forward Plan**

No items.

## 121. Consideration of financial monitoring / corporate reports

No items.

## 122. Call-In Requests

None.

## 123. Portfolio Holder's Response to the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee's Final Report – Kerbside Recycling Scheme Referral *(Director of Neighbourhood Services and the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities)*

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Communities, Councillor Peter Jackson, opened his comments by thanking the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee for the report of its investigation into kerbside recycling in Hartlepool and also congratulating the department on the excellent level of services it provided. An action plan to implement the recommendations of the scrutiny investigation had already been produced and eleven of the fourteen recommendations would be in place by the summer. All of the recommendations would be implemented from existing resources, unless additional funding was required. The additional funding was proposed to come from Landfill Allocation Trading Scheme (LATS) income.

Members welcomed the comments of the Portfolio Holder and raised the following questions / comments: -

Members questioned the funding for the communications strategy. The Head of Neighbourhood Management commented that £15,000 from various sources had been identified of the strategy, including LATS monies.

The rationalisation of recycling bring centres would be based on the tonnages collected. The popular sites would be enhanced; those with lower tonnages and/or lots of complaints would be removed.

The Chair requested that the Committee's thanks be passed to the SITA Board for their support and assistance during the inquiry.

### **Recommended**

That the report and action plan be noted and welcomed.

## 124. 2009/10 Budget and Policy Framework Proposals: Feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees *(Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees)*

As part of the Budget and Policy Framework consultation for 2009/10, Members of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee and the four standing Scrutiny Forums considered the departmental pressures, contingencies,

terminating grants, priorities and efficiencies for their respective departments. The Scrutiny Manager's report included the principle comments from each Forum and the Chair invited the Chairs of the forums to comment on their meetings considerations.

Members raised concerns at the proposed savings highlighted at the meetings, particularly the additional 1% of savings proposed during this round of budget consultations. The Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum had been particularly concerned at the proposal to cease the Dial-a-Ride service. Members had indicated at that meeting that the service should not be cut, a sentiment echoed by the Coordinating Committee.

Members also commented that many of the savings being proposed in both the initial 3% savings and the additional 1% involved compulsory redundancies. Members also questioned if the Business Transformation proposals had also been factored into the budget. It was indicated at the meeting that even with the potential savings from Business Transformation, there was still an anticipated budget deficit.

Members indicated that they wished Cabinet to revisit the proposed additional 1% savings and make alternative proposals that would not affect front line services. Members expressed extreme concern at some of these additional service cuts and the associated redundancies which could severely affect, if not end, essential services to the public and could reduce the Council's representation and effectiveness in a number of external bodies. Members queried the logic behind the selection of some of the posts proposed for redundancy.

In moving on to consider the Chief Executive's Department budget proposals in detail, Members commented that they were dissatisfied at the lack of a senior officer at the meeting to respond to Members questions. The Scrutiny Manager apologised for no senior officer being in attendance although none had been requested. The Chair commented that she had requested information at the previous meeting from the Chief Financial Officer but that this had not yet been provided. The Chair considered that the lack of information and the presence of officers hampered the effectiveness of scrutiny.

In considering its recommendations to be submitted to the Executive, Members supported the submission of the comments made by the individual scrutiny forums. Members believed that the principle of the additional 1% of savings being applied to each department was inappropriate and that this should be reviewed with the focus being on the protection of frontline services. Members were also critical that the Business Transformation proposals appeared to have been absent from the budget consultations. Members were mindful of the decision of council that any savings accrued through the Budget Transformation process should be returned to the General Fund, as this would enable Council to give consideration to the utilisation of some of the savings to plug gaps created in frontline services.

Members requested that in the case of any staff being proposed for redundancy, retraining and redeployment must be considered first. Members also stated that they would wish to see the cessation of the use of agency workers wherever practicable, before the use of compulsory redundancy.

In relation to the Chief Executive's department, the Committee supported the savings proposed as they did not impact on services to the public.

The Scrutiny Manager sought the Committee's approval to the Chair being delegated authority to finalising the wording of the response to the Executive due to the Cabinet timescales. This was supported by all present.

**Recommended**

1. That the proposed feedback set out in Appendix 1 to the report, together with the further comments made by Members at this meeting, be approved as the formal response in relation to the Executive's Budget and Policy Framework proposals for 2009/10 to be presented to the Cabinet on 9 February 2009; and
2. That the Chair be delegated authority to approve the content of the formal response to enable its submission to the Cabinet on 9 February 2009 in accordance with the agreed timetable.

The meeting concluded at 4.15 p.m.

CHAIR