

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

MINUTES

20 March 2009

The meeting commenced at 2.00 p.m. at the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Marjorie James (In the Chair)

Councillors Rob Cook, Ann Marshall, Chris McKenna, and Chris Simmons

Resident Representative: Christopher Akers-Belcher.

Also Present: In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2, Councillor Griffin was present as a substitute for Councillor Shaw and Councillor Rogan as substitute for Councillor Richardson.

Officers: Chris Little, Assistant Chief Financial Officer
Peter Turner, Principal Strategy Development Officer
Keith Lucas, Asset and Property Manager
Charlotte Burnham, Scrutiny Manager
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

142. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Atkinson, S Cook, Kaiser, London, Preece, Richardson, Shaw, Wright and Young and Resident Representatives Iris Ryder and Linda Shields.

143. Declarations of interest by Members

None.

144. Confirmation of the minutes of the meetings held on 13 February 2009

Confirmed.

145. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Reports of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

No items.

146. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews from Council, Executive Members and Non Executive Members

No items.

147. Forward Plan

No items.

148. Draft Corporate Plan and Revenue Financial Management Report 2008/09 *(Assistant Chief Executive / Chief Financial Officer)*

The report set out the collective responses of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee and the four standing Scrutiny Forums following their recent consideration of the Authority's Draft Corporate Plan for 2009/10. Each of the forums and committees comments were set out in detail within the report.

Recommended

That the feedback of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in relation to the Draft Corporate Plan for 2009/10 be noted and be utilised to prepare a formal response to the Cabinet.

149. Quarter 3 – Corporate Plan and Revenue Financial Management Report 2008/2009 *(Assistant Chief Executive / Chief Financial Officer)*

The report informed the Committee of the progress made towards achieving the Corporate Plan outcomes through identified actions and of the progress against the Council's own 2008/2009 Revenue Budget, for the period to 31st December, 2008. The report had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 23rd February, 2009.

Members raised the following questions / issues –

- The statistical information relating to teenage pregnancies was questioned by Members and Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum indicated that at their meeting, they had been informed that the performance indicator (PI) for teenage conceptions had started to increase again. Members sought written confirmation.
- The costs associated with the setting up of the internal Bailiffs Services appeared to show that £30,000 had been spent to create a saving of £30,000. Also, had the service received certification? The Assistant Chief Financial Officer indicated that there were some one-off costs associated with the establishment of the service, and these had been

funded by reserves. Using the Council's own Bailiff's service would save around £30,000. Clarification on this and the certification of the service would be confirmed in writing.

- Members sought clarification of the entries relating to the works undertaken within the Civic Centre and whether they were all within the originally approved budget and why they had been split in the way they had been in the accounts. The Assistant Chief Financial Officer indicated that he would confirm those issues in writing to Members.

Recommended

That the report be noted and that the information requested be forwarded to members.

150. Quarter 3 – Capital and Accountable Body Programme Monitoring Report *(Assistant Chief Executive / Chief Financial Officer)*

The Assistant Chief Financial Officer commented that in relation to capital expenditure there were still quite a large amount of expenditure to be incurred though this was normal for this time of the year. There were no known problems in relation to the accountable bodies.

Members questioned the refurbishment contracts for schools when 'Building Schools for the Future' was on the horizon. Officers indicated that the Council still had an obligation to keep the current school buildings in a good and safe condition. These schemes were being managed to ensure no 'unnecessary' expenditure was incurred. Members understood that there was no intention to demolish Brierton once it was vacated as a school. Officers indicated that it was intended to use the Brierton site as a decant location for Dyke House School while that under went reconstruction. It may also be used during other schemes, so therefore there would be continued expenditure on the buildings.

Members raised the costs of the refurbishment works on the Civic Centre and the way these were reflected in the accounts. The scheme had been broken down into component elements and members were concerned that this was massaging the overall figures. The Assistant Chief Financial Officer commented that this was not the case. The scheme had been broken into its constituent parts but was being managed against the overall sum approved by Council. Members commented that it never seemed as though the council came below budget on any scheme; they were always over budget. Why were the original estimations not correct? The Assistant Chief Financial Officer indicated that the scheme was very complex, and until work had started it was difficult to tell on some elements how much needed to be done. The estimations were based on what was anticipated from the investigations that were done in advance. There were also costs to undertake those investigations.

Members indicated their concerns in relation to the works and the costs of

them. There was also comment at the meeting that after the extensive works to the roof, there were still leaks. Officers indicated that the works to the roof had been more extensive than at first anticipated. Once the original roof materials had been removed, the works required were found to be more extensive than initial inspections had suggested and hence the cost had increased. There were no indications that there were still leaks but if there were, these could be addressed under the terms of the guarantee.

Members questioned the use of SCRAPT (Strategic Capital Resource and Asset Programme Team) funds and the unallocated funds for the current year. Officers indicated that the team managed capital resources of £1.2m allocated over three years which were used to fund the capital schemes that didn't attract grant funding. The programme of works was approved each year by Council. Members requested that a schedule of the approved works be circulated.

Recommended

That the report be noted and that the information requested by Members be circulated following the meeting.

151. 2009 – 2012 Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan *(Director of Neighbourhood Services and Chief Financial Officer)*

The Asset and Property Manager reported on the draft Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan for 2009 – 2012. The Asset Management Plan is very much a tool to ensure the Council is approaching asset management in a clear, structured and inclusive way and it continues to develop as a working document moving away from the prescriptive content approach to asset management planning arrangements and processes previously required by Government Office and is produced and written to reflect the "good practice" guidance of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

There would also be significant work in relation to asset management through the Business Transformation programme which was addressing the management of the council's assets. As the refurbishment works on Level 3 of the Civic Centre were completed, there would be trails of new space and desk allocations.

Members questioned further the use of SCRAPT monies and were informed that once schemes had been approved by Cabinet, they would be reported to this Committee. Member also asked if the Council was considering the acquisition of land in light of the falling prices due to the recession. Officers indicated that much depended on the timescales involved in the particular proposals.

Recommended

That the report be noted.

152. Requests for Items for Discussion – Joint Cabinet / Scrutiny Meeting of 31 March 2009 *(Scrutiny Manager)*

The Scrutiny Manager reported that the next Joint Cabinet / Scrutiny Meeting had been scheduled to be held on Tuesday 31 March 2009, at 4.30 pm in Committee Room B of the Civic Centre. Members were requested to give notification of any specific items that Members wished to discuss at the meeting. However, the Mayor was now unable to attend on that date and an alternative would be sought and Members informed as soon as possible.

The Chair commented that the issue of the funding of conference/seminar costs from the Dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Budget rather than the main conferences budget should be addressed. Members also suggested that access to and decision making on SCRAPT funded schemes may also be an issue that should be raised.

Recommended

That once an alternative date for the meeting was identified, conference costs and SCRAPT be added to the agenda for the meeting.

153. Requests for Funding from the Dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Budget *(Scrutiny Manager)*

The Scrutiny Manager reported on two requests for funding from the Dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Budget. Both related to the Children's Services scrutiny Forum. The first was for £110 for the costs associated with the site visits to various supported accommodation schemes in Hartlepool. The second was for £800 and related to the visit to Westminster, London to gain evidence from Iain Wright MP. This visit was to be undertaken by the Chair, young peoples representatives and the scrutiny Support Officer.

Recommended

That the requests, totalling £910.00 from the Dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Budget, as reported, be approved.

154. Call-In Requests

No items.

155. Any Other Business

The Chair informed the Committee, that the Scrutiny Manager, Charlotte Burnham, would be leaving the authority in April to take up a new post at Sunderland City Council. The next meeting of the Committee on 24 April, 2009 would therefore be Mrs Burnham's last scrutiny meeting in Hartlepool. The chair and the Members present congratulated Mrs Burnham on her new post and wished her every success.

The meeting concluded at 3.05 p.m.

MARJORIE JAMES

CHAIR