

At a meeting of the MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 14TH JULY, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Tate in the Chair

Councillors Anderson, G. Miller, Mordey, Oliver, Stewart, S. Watson, Wilson and Wood.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Rolph and Walker.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 16th June, 2011

(i) Annual Health and Safety Report

Councillors Wood and G. Miller enquired as to whether any progress had been made in getting a resolution to the remedial actions needed in relation to the diving facilities at the Sunderland Aquatic Centre, as a result of the diving accident which had occurred in October 2010.

Mr. Malcolm Page, Executive Director of Commercial and Corporate Services confirmed that the estimated financial resources necessary to complete the repairs were available and that the issue was being addressed and he would take this up with the Executive Director of City Services in the meantime. He also advised the Committee that discussions were ongoing between the contractor and the Council in a wider context and that they were being managed robustly on the City's behalf.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16th June, 2011 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record and that the above information and proposed action be noted.

Declarations of Interest (Including Whipping Declarations)

Item 5 – Reference from Cabinet – 22nd June 2011 – Revenue Budget Outturn for 2010/2011 and First Revenue Review 2011/2012

Councillor Tate declared a personal interest in the report as Chair of Hetton Home Care, as a Director of Newcastle International Airport Holding Company and as a Member of Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust.

Councillor Mordey declared a personal interest in the report as a Director of the Port Board and a Member of the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust.

Councillors Oliver and Stewart declared personal interests as Members of Wearside First Credit Union and the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust.

Councillor S. Watson declared a personal interest as a Member of the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust.

Reference from Cabinet – 22nd June 2011, Capital Programme Outturn 2010/2011 and First Capital Review 2011/2012 (including Treasury Management)

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report attaching an extract (copies circulated), from the report of the Capital Programme Outturn for 2010/2011 and First Capital Programme Review 2010/2011, providing details of an additional scheme for 2010/2011 which had been added to the Capital Programme since it was approved and which was referred to the Scrutiny Committee for advice and consideration in the context of inclusion of additional schemes costing over £250,000.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Malcolm Page, Executive Director of Commercial and Corporate Services briefed the Committee on the report referring Members to the extract detailing the additional scheme to undertake pothole repairs.

Councillor Anderson expressed support for the scheme commenting that the contrast between the good condition of the roads in Sunderland and those of neighbouring authorities was noticeable.

Councillor Wood enquired to what extent the Council took the option to resurface roads rather than to fill in the potholes.

Councillor Miller advised that the Council resurfaced approximately 1% to 1.5% of the City's roads and that resurfacing was very expensive. Unless there was a massive increase in funding the Council would not be able to increase the percentage of roads that were resurfaced as part of the rolling programme.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Ms. Sonia Tognarelli, Head of Financial Resources advised that there had been a 50% cut in highways maintenance funding and that the service would need to continue to review its programme of works and prioritise schemes accordingly.

Full consideration having been given to the report it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the Council be recommended to approve the inclusion of an additional scheme for 2011/12 as set out in the extract to the report.

Reference from Cabinet – 22nd June, 2011 – Revenue Budget Outturn for 2010/2011 and First Revenue Review 2011/12

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report attaching an extract from the Revenue Budget Outturn for 2010/2011 and First Revenue Review 2011/12, together with a full copy of the report (copies circulated), which was referred to the Scrutiny Committee for advice and consideration on the issues of virement only, prior to seeking Council approval.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Malcolm Page, Executive Director of Commercial and Corporate Services briefed the Committee on the report highlighting the Budget Savings and Transitional Costs 2011/2012 detailed at paragraph 5.3 of the report. Mr. Page advised that in summary the budget represented a very challenging programme to deliver however he was confident that it would be achieved.

In response to Councillor Oliver, Mr. Page advised that the Strategic Investment Reserve was made up from the proceeds of the Housing Stock Transfer and Airport Share sale when they had taken place a number of years ago, however these two areas were no longer contributing to the reserve.

In response to Councillor Wood, Mr. Page advised that a provision of £8.3m had been made in the budget in respect of SWITCH. With regards to Parking Services, Mr. Page advised that car parks did cover their costs and further detail on this could be provided if required.

In response to Councillor Oliver, Ms. Sonia Tognarelli, Head of Financial Services advised that the total cost of the Customer Service Centre refurbishment was in the region of £300,000 which had been approved by Cabinet.

Mr. Page added that the £150,000 detailed at Appendix A showed the sum transferred to Reserves for the project. The remainder of the provision was held in contingencies in order to take care of the scheme.

Full consideration having been given to the report; it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the Council be recommended to approve the issues of virement as set out in the extract to the report.

Policy Review 2011/2012 : Draft Scoping Report – Self Regulation

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) putting forward proposals and seeking Members agreement in relation to the scope of the policy review into the Council's approach to Self Regulation.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer briefed the Committee on the report highlighting the key principles central to the approach to the review and that the overall aim was to look at the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Council's Self Regulation Framework and in particular how the scrutiny function could contribute to performance improvement.

Mr. Mike Lowe, Head of Performance Improvement commented that the review would provide an opportunity to keep Members up to speed with the developments nationally over the next twelve months. The service reviews that would be submitted to the Scrutiny Committees would provide an opportunity to reflect on any areas of service delivery that could be improved upon.

Councillor Miller commented that it was important to have self regulation to show that the Council was performing well and providing value for money and the policy review would show that the Authority was maintaining its high standards.

4. RESOLVED that the scope of the Management Scrutiny Committee's policy review into the Council's Approach to Self Regulation for 2011/2012 as outlined in the report be approved.

Policy Review 2011/12 : Draft Scoping Report – Money Lending

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) putting forward proposals and seeking the views of Members on the potential for a mini policy review into the effects of illegal loan sharks and money lenders on local communities.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer briefed the Committee on the report.

Councillor Miller stated that he would like to see the Committee engage with the City's Members of Parliament on the issues as part of the policy review.

Councillor Mordey advised that the East Area Committee had commissioned a review of the services offered by the Welfare Rights Service and that information from this may assist the Scrutiny Committee with its policy review and vice versa.

In response to Councillor Oliver, Mr. Cummings advised that the Officers from Birmingham City Council who would be investigating and instituting legal proceedings against illegal money lenders would be invited to feed into the policy review.

The Chairman having highlighted that additional working group meetings may be required to complete the evidence gathering; it was:-

5. RESOLVED that subject to the inclusion of the local MPs to the list of witnesses, that approval be given to the scope of the Management Scrutiny Committee's policy review into the effects of illegal loan sharks and money lenders on local communities for 2011/12 as outlined in the report.

Annual Scrutiny Conference 2011 – Evaluation of Feedback from Delegates

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) summarising the feedback from Members, Officers and partners who attended the 4th Annual Scrutiny Conference on 19th May, 2011 at the Crowtree Leisure Centre in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members discussed the Scrutiny Conference for 2011 and the consensus was that the venue had not been as successful as the venue for the 2010 Conference. There was a mixed reaction to the suggestion that the Conference for 2012 be held at the National Glass Centre with some Members of the view that it was too small and the Seaburn Centre, the Stadium of Light, the Civic Centre and the University of Sunderland were all suggested as possible alternatives. Members were agreed however that the event should continue to be held on an evening in order to maximise attendance from both Councillors and partners.

Full discussion having been given to the report; it was:-

6. RESOLVED that a further report be submitted to the Committee providing a list of suggested venues at which to hold the Annual Scrutiny Conference for 2012 for Members to decide which would be the most appropriate; the National Glass Centre to be kept on the longlist for the moment and the event to be held on the evening of 17th May, 2012.

Centre for Public Scrutiny 9th Annual Conference Feedback

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Committee with feedback from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) 9th Annual Conference which was held on 2nd June, 2011.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

A paper providing detailed feedback on the keynote speakers and panel discussions was circulated at the meeting and presented by Ms. Helen Lancaster, Scrutiny Officer who had attended the Conference in London.

Councillor Miller commented that attendance at the Conference had been low compared to the previous year. He felt that the tone and balance had not been appropriate with five out of the six speakers talking about the Localism Bill and the Big Society Agenda. Councillor Miller stated that the Committee needed to be confident that next year's Conference was going to be of greater value before it decided whether to send any delegates.

7. RESOLVED that the feedback from the Conference delegates be received and noted.

Scrutiny Committees Work Programmes for 2011-12

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for information the variations to the Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2011/12 and providing an opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2011/12.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer drew Members attention to Appendix 3 which outlined the policy reviews for each of the Scrutiny Committees for the Management Scrutiny Committee's information.

8. RESOLVED that the variations to the Scrutiny Committee's programmes for 2011-12 and to its own work programme be noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st July, 2011 – 31st October, 2011

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items in the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st July, 2011 to 31st October, 2011 which relate to the Management Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

9. RESOLVED that the Executive's Forward Plan for the above period be received and noted.

(Signed) R.D. TATE,
Chairman.