

At a meeting of the MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Tate in the Chair

Councillors Barkess, D. Forbes, P. Gibson, J. Scott and T. Wright

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Copeland, M. Forbes, Mordey and Walker.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 16th July, 2009

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16th July, 2009, Part I (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Item 6 – Reference from Cabinet 25th June, 2009 – Revenue Budget and Trading Services Outturn for 2008/2009 and First Revenue Budget Review for 2009/2010

Councillor J. Scott declared a personal interest in the report as a member of the GMB Union and also as his daughter is a teacher.

Councillor Tate declared a personal interest as a member of the GMB Union and also in relation to equal pay and single status issues as his wife is an employee at a school.

Item 7 – Reference from Cabinet 25th June, 2009 – Capital Programme Outturn 2008/09 and First Capital Programme Review 2009/10

Councillor P. Gibson declared a personal and prejudicial interest as Chairman of the Board of Governors of Farringdon Community Sports College and withdrew from the meeting before the Committee gave consideration to the report.

Variation of Agenda

The Chairman moved that the Agenda be varied and that the items listed as 6, 7 and 8 on the agenda be considered prior to items 4 and 5.

2. RESOLVED that the agenda be varied accordingly.

Reference from Cabinet 25th June, 2009 – Revenue Budget and Trading Services Outturn for 2008/2009 and First Revenue Budget Review for 2009/2010

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) setting out for advice and consideration of the Committee, an aspect of the report on the Revenue Budget and Trading Services Outturn for 2008/2009 and First Revenue Budget Review for 2009/2010 namely, requesting the Council to approve the virement of funds.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

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

Reference from Cabinet – 25th June, 2009 – Capital Programme Outturn 2008/2009 and First Capital Programme Review 2009/2010

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) setting out for advice and consideration of the Committee, a report detailing the Capital Programme Outturn for 2008/2009, the outcome of the First Capital Programme Review for 2009/2010 taking account of the Capital Programme Outturn 2008/2009 and changes made to the Capital Programme 2009/2010 since its approval.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

4. RESOLVED that the Council be recommended to approve the inclusion of additional schemes and revised cost estimates for 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 as set out in the extract.

Reference from Cabinet – 9th September, 2009 – Proposals for Budget Consultation 2010-2011

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report attaching a copy of a report considered by Cabinet on 9th September, 2009 (copies circulated), proposing the budget consultation strategy and framework to inform the preparation of the Budget for 2010/2011.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

Mr. Keith Beardmore, Director of Financial Resources, briefed Members on the report, drawing attention to the proposed arrangements for undertaking consultation as detailed in paragraph 5.

Mr. Beardmore pointed out that it was also proposed to consult on the potential introduction of a Council Tax discount as detailed in paragraph 6 of the report.

The Chairman requested that at the end of the consultation period the Committee receive a report providing feedback on how it was felt the consultation on the budget has gone. He commented that he appreciated the timescales would be tight but requested that each of the Scrutiny Committees receive that part of the Corporate Improvement Plan relevant to them.

Mr. Beardmore confirmed that a report on the findings of the consultation and how they had manifested in budget could be submitted. With regard to the Corporate Improvement Plan, Mr. Beardmore stated that the financial information included in the Plan was worked on up until the budget was set. However, there were a lot of initiatives and information included in the document that were not dependent on the financial information and that he would look at what could be provided to the Committee in the run up to the budget setting, in line with the Chairman's request.

Councillor T. Wright referred to the new Area Newsletters which were currently being developed and suggested that they also be used to promote the consultation on the budget. He referred to the 'Metro' newspaper and pointed out that its readership was widening. He suggested that the Council look to use this publication and make it available at all Council buildings. He also suggested that the Council take a look at what other authorities were doing, in terms of following good practice, with regards to the means of consultation they were using, and how they were promoting the services they provided.

Mr. Beardmore stated that both were excellent ideas. Corporate Communications were producing the Area Newsletters and he would pick this up with Ms. Deborah Lewin, Director of Communications and Marketing, together with how the Council might use the 'Metro' newspaper to communicate with residents in the City. Mr. Beardmore added that officers met regularly with other authorities and not just in Tyne and Wear to ensure a robust approach to consultation on the budget.

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

5. RESOLVED that the Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Committee endorsed the budget consultation strategy and framework as set out in the report as a robust consultation process and asked that a report be submitted to the Committee following the consultation, providing feedback on the adequacy of the process undertaken.

Performance Report and Value for Money Assessment 2008/09

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with a corporate overview of the value for money assessment for the period April 2008 to

March 2009 as part of the Committee's work programme. It included findings from a range of performance information including spend, investment, improvements, residents' perception and both national and local indicators including those within the Local Area Agreement.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sarah Reed, Assistant Chief Executive, briefed the Committee on the report. She highlighted that Sunderland's total Council Tax for 2008/2009 was the lowest Council Tax in Tyne and Wear and drew Members' attention to paragraph 1.4 concerning the incentives to maximise efficiency gains and savings.

Ms. Reed pointed out that Sunderland Council was one of only 13 to have maintained the maximum rating of excellent/4 star throughout the seven years of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). In relation to Customer Focus, two in three residents agreed that the quality of Council services was good overall and on the whole satisfaction levels with local services remained high.

Ms. Reed referred Members to Section 5 of the Appendix concerning the replacement of the CPA by the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), pointing out that the assessment would look across the Council, health bodies, police forces, fire and rescue services and others who were increasingly expected to work in partnership. She advised that the first CAA results would be reported on 10th December, 2009.

The Chairman welcomed the 'Total Count' exercise which could lead to better services at less cost, taking into account the views of neighbouring authorities, such as Durham and Easington, to provide economies of scale and ensuring areas were not isolated.

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny, commented that in terms of the response to Cabinet the Scrutiny Work Programmes were looking at the issues coming through the CAA such as drug related crimes, health issues etc. and the development of the Scrutiny role with external partners also showed how Scrutiny was linking in with the CAA, looking at how well local services were working together.

Ms. Reed advised that with regard to the Total Place initiative, Sunderland was 1 of 13 pilot areas participating in the scheme. A 'Total Count' of the area covered in the pilot would be undertaken, looking at all the data to see where public money could be spent more effectively. An important element was making sure the Council received recognition for action; recognition for the services it was providing.

6. RESOLVED that the content of the report and the work the Scrutiny Committees were undertaking to link into the issues identified in the CAA be noted and included in the 2008/2009 value for money assessment to be presented to Cabinet in October 2009.

Attendance Management

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members of the Management Scrutiny Committee with the further information requested at its meeting on 16th July, 2009 in relation to the organisation's performance on sickness absence for 2008/09.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. David Rippon, Employee Development Manager, was in attendance at the meeting and referred Members to the absence data by reason of absence detailed at paragraph 3 of the report.

Mr. Rippon advised that with regard to H1N1, the distribution of the vaccine was out of the Local Authority's control, however, staff were trained up to give it as and when it became available and in-depth discussions were taking place with the Director of Public Health.

Mr. Rippon commented that there was a reduction in the number of absences categorised as other from 11.0% to 4.8% and further work was underway to reduce this figure further.

Mr. Rippon highlighted the difficulties in comparing the sickness figures across the sectors, as detailed in Section 4 of the report, advising that it was important to note that in the private sector a large company was defined as 500 employees whereas the Council employed around 14,000 people. The expectation was that there would be a higher level of sickness absence in bigger organisations.

In response to Councillors T. Wright and J. Scott, Mr. Rippon clarified that although there was an expectation that sickness levels would be greater in a large organisation this was not acceptable but this was what happened. Added to this a lot of small businesses did not do a particularly good job in recording sickness absence. All that said the Council was working hard to reduce sickness absence.

Mr. Rippon advised that the vast majority of sickness absence was as a result of more serious long term illnesses with 1.8 days attributable to short term absence from 11.3 days. As a community leader the Council had a duty to get people back to work. If an employee was lost due to sickness, the Council would potentially pick them up as a service user.

In relation to correlation of absence with school holiday periods, a slight increase had been noted which was possibly down to child care responsibilities. In order to tackle this the Council was looking to get employees to use other leave to avoid more sickness issues being recorded as sick leave and by having a single point of contact based in the Shared Service Centre. In this way all staff would be receiving the same information and advice.

Councillor T. Wright reported that there was evidence to show in the case of the Metropolitan Police that where there was early intervention with employees being contacted as soon as they went on sick leave, absenteeism was shorter and there

was a massive difference in sickness levels. He enquired whether the Council kept details of at what point employees were contacted.

Councillor J. Scott commented that during the school holidays the figures showed a rise in long term sickness.

Mr. Rippon advised that the Authority did look at best practice in tackling sickness absence. He advised that the waiting list to see the Occupational Health Physician was now down to one week and this in itself enabled early intervention in sickness cases.

In response to Councillor Gibson, Mr. Rippon stated that employees were contacted by some departments in less than two days. He advocated early contact as the way forward. With regards to the comment made by Councillor J. Scott, Mr. Rippon advised that the sickness absence within school holidays did not include teaching staff. There was a very slight increase in comparison with the average figure for the whole year however not significant to demonstrate any trend.

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

7. RESOLVED that the contents of the report and the information brought out in the discussion be noted.

Draft Protocol Scrutiny and External Partners

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) seeking the Committee's endorsement of the draft external scrutiny protocol, for inclusion in the Scrutiny Handbook, to support future working arrangements in line with good practice.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny, advised the Committee that the draft protocol had been shared with the Sunderland Partnership and had been well received. She stated that the protocol would build on the principles of the CAA and how the Council works with its partners to meet the needs of the people they serve. Ms. Burnham added that the Department for Communities and Local Government were keen to use Sunderland as a case study in relation to its approach to developing external Scrutiny. She referred Members to the next steps detailed in the report which included a Meet and Greet Event between the Sunderland Partnership, Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs, likely to be held in December 2009 and the future consideration of the five Delivery Partnerships' individual Annual Delivery Plans to be presented to the relevant City Council's Scrutiny Committees in February 2010.

8. RESOLVED that the draft protocol at Appendix A be approved for inclusion within the Scrutiny Handbook.

Overview and Scrutiny Handbook

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) seeking the Committee's comments on the draft protocol for the appointment of Co-opted Members to the Council's Scrutiny Committees, for inclusion in the Scrutiny Handbook.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny, stated that the protocol was intended to provide clarity and guidance on the appointment of Co-opted Members. She drew attention to paragraph 3 concerning the range of arrangements available to the Committee to gather information or whether to co-opt a Member to the Committee to inform its deliberations.

The Chairman suggested that the Scrutiny Chairmen of the other six Scrutiny Committees be invited to the October Management Scrutiny Committee meeting when the comments from their Committees would be referred for consideration on the protocol for Co-opted Members.

9. RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the draft protocol for appointing Co-optees is referred to all Scrutiny Committees in the next cycle of meetings for comment; substantive suggestions for change to be referred back to this Committee;
- (b) subject to the comments received from the Scrutiny Committees, the draft Protocol be endorsed and be included in the new Scrutiny Handbook; and
- (c) the Committee receive a further progress report on the development of the Handbook at its October meeting to include Role Descriptors for Scrutiny Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Scrutiny Members.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st September – 31st December, 2009

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st September – 31st December, 2009 which relate to the Management Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

A copy of the latest version of the Forward Plan published on 14th September, 2009 for the period 1st October, 2009 – 31st January, 2010 was circulated at the meeting.

Councillor T. Wright suggested Members would find it useful for the items of the Forward Plan to be sorted on the document according to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee and also for the appropriate Portfolio to be identified.

10. RESOLVED that the Committee continues to receive a copy of the Executive's Forward Plan for the appropriate period and that enquiries be made in relation to the request to sort items and include the further information as detailed above.

Work Programme 2009-2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for Members' information, the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2009-10 Municipal Year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

11. RESOLVED that the information contained in the Work Programme be received and noted.

(Signed) R.D. TATE,
Chairman.