

At a meeting of the MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 22ND OCTOBER, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Tate in the Chair

Councillors Barkess, Copeland, M. Forbes, Mordey, J. Scott and Walker.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors P. Gibson, L. Martin and T. Wright.

Also in Attendance

Councillor Heron, Chairman of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 24th September, 2009

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 24th September, 2009, Part I (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

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

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny reported that a process was in place in the Authority to feed back the views of community groups on the budget consultation and she confirmed that the report would be shared with this Scrutiny Committee.

With regard to the suggestion made by Councillor T. Wright to make the Metro newspaper available in Council buildings and use the publication to publicise Council activity, Ms. Burnham advised that this had been raised with the Communications Team and Officers were exploring the proposal with a view to including future articles in the newspaper.

(ii) Attendance Management

Councillor M. Forbes referred to the statement made by Mr. Rippon “that employees were contacted by some departments in less than two days” and queried whether the Council had a policy in relation to contacting staff and why this was not followed consistently across the Authority.

Ms. Burnham undertook to clarify the point with colleagues from the Personnel Department and to write out to Members of the Committee with the information under separate cover.

Declarations of Interest (Including Whipping Declarations)

Item 4 – Reference from Cabinet – 7th October, 2009 – Budget Planning Framework 2010/2011

Councillor Tate declared personal interests in the above report as Chair of Hetton Home Care, a Member of the Tyne and Wear Superannuation Fund, a Member of the GMB Union and as his wife works for the Authority.

Councillor J. Scott declared a personal interest in the report as a Member of the GMB Union and also as his daughters work in schools.

Councillor Walker declared a personal interest as a Member of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Reference from Cabinet – 7th October, 2009 – Budget Planning Framework 2010/2011

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report attaching a copy of a joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Financial Resources (copies circulated), seeking the views of the Committee on the proposed budget planning framework which will guide the preparation of the Revenue Budget for 2010/2011 and inform the setting of cash limits within which Directors are required to prepare draft budgets.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

Mr. George Blyth, Deputy Director of Financial Resources briefed the Committee on the report. Mr. Blyth highlighted the National Financial Outlook detailed at Section 3 of the report commenting that the country was experiencing the most extraordinary economic circumstances in decades and that inflation was forecast to go negative.

Mr. Blyth highlighted the following issues:-

- a longer term approach to realising efficiency savings was required;
- Directors and Portfolio Holders had been asked to explore and bring forward options for savings; and

- the emerging improvement agenda, the Sunderland Way of Working was seeking to address customer needs and generate savings to re-invest in services/balance the budget.

Mr. Blyth stated that the report showed the environment in which the budget was being developed. There were significant uncertainties and due to the volatile nature of the economic climate, the Council was looking to firm up its views. A number of spending priorities had been identified as detailed in Section 6 of the report. A summary of the Budget Planning Framework was detailed at Section 9.3.

Councillor Walker enquired about the progress of Phases 1 and 2 of the Single Status Agreement.

Mr. Blyth advised that Phase 2 had not been addressed in the same way as Phase 1. There was some interconnectivity between the Phases, however the Sunderland Way of Working needed to be born in mind and how the Council was looking to redesign services. He reported that a report would be submitted to the Personnel Committee on how this was to be adopted.

The Chairman remarked that there were difficult times ahead whichever Government was elected at the next parliamentary elections and enquired what financial safeguards the Council had already due the Government having committed resources.

Mr. Blyth advised that 2010/11 was the third year of the first three year settlement and it remained intact. However there had been some announcements about reductions to certain specific and special grants which would reduce as the Government reviewed its funding and spending plans and it was thought likely that after 2010/11, there would be one year settlements due to the volatility of the economic climate.

In response to the Chairman, Mr. Blyth advised that 4% efficiency savings represented £7.8m approximately. The intention was that this would not affect frontline services. Currently the target for 2 years was £18m. There was a culture within the management of the Council about getting more for each pound and doing things more efficiently.

Councillor M. Forbes stated that she would like to explore the detail around the efficiency savings identified by departments such as vacant posts etc.

Mr. Blyth advised that there was sufficient rigour around the whole process to ensure that where posts were not required and not filled that savings emerged. Each Directorate was being asked to make 4% savings without loss to frontline services and to achieve this, issues such as this, would be squeezed out when the Director of Financial Resources and his staff looked at the proposals.

The Chairman asked that the Scrutiny Committee receive the information on how savings had been achieved by Directorates.

Mr. Blyth stated that 4% efficiency savings applied to all Directorates. There would be a need to look at timetabling as to when and where the information could be provided as it was a continuous process leading up to the key reports going forward to Cabinet in January and February. He would take this back to look at how the information could be given to the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Copeland suggested that the Council have a pay freeze for staff,

The Chairman advised Councillor Copeland that there was a national negotiating body which decided on pay and terms and conditions of service.

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny suggested that Mr. Blyth take back the Committee's request for discussion as to appropriateness and to explore the comments of individual Members. She commented that she hoped the Committee was not duplicating any processes that were happening anyway.

Mr. Blyth pointed out that the Portfolio Holders would be attending the Committee's February meeting and so this avenue to explore how the efficiencies were to be delivered was already there. He added, however, that the practicalities of how the Committee's request could be done would be looked at.

Councillor Mordey suggested that when the budget was in its final phases and the efficiencies were decided upon that a report be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee.

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

2. RESOLVED that the Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Committee recognised that given the national economic position, the budget setting process for 2010/11 would be even more challenging and welcomed the longer term approach to improve and change services to address customer needs by working differently and looked forward to receiving information in due course on what is known as the Sunderland Way of Working.

Reference from Cabinet – 7th October, 2009 – Second Capital Programme Review 2009/2010

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) seeking the advice and consideration of the Scrutiny Committee on a report considered by Cabinet on 7th October, 2009 on the Second Capital Programme Review 2009/2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. George Blyth, Deputy Director of Financial Resources referred Members to Appendix A which detailed the scheme variations since the First Capital Review 2009/2010. He advised that both schemes were to be funded from specific grants.

3. RESOLVED that the Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Committee noted and supported the proposed additional schemes and revisions to scheme costs for 2009/2010 as set out in Appendix A.

Developing the Work of Scrutiny and the Community Leadership Role of Elected Members

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Members of a series of workshops to be facilitated by Professor Tony Bovaird of Birmingham University to further develop the work of Scrutiny and the Community Leadership role of Elected Members.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny encouraged Members to attend the workshops and advised that feedback and evaluation of the workshops would be provided to Members and discussed at the Informal Meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

4. RESOLVED that the series of workshops be supported and Elected Members be encouraged to attend.

Review of the Councillor Call for Action Mechanism and Proposal for the Introduction of a Selection Criteria for Dealing with Issues of Local Concern

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to review the current Councillor Call for Action mechanism and suggest the introduction of a selection criteria for dealing with non-mandatory referrals for use by the Sunderland Partnership, Scrutiny Committees and Area Committees to address issues of local concern.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny referred Members to the proposed new procedure for the consideration of non-mandatory/Councillor Call for Action referrals to Overview and Scrutiny detailed at Appendix B. She stated that the new procedure would make the process more clearer showing the relevant bodies the Committee can refer Councillor Calls for Action to such as Area Committees, the Sunderland Partnership and Scrutiny Committees.

Councillor Mordey commented that he felt the procedure would add an extra layer of bureaucracy and mean that the issue would be delayed by a month if it needed to go to the Management Committee to consider what action to be taken. He suggested that the Scrutiny Officers should be given the authority to identify which Scrutiny Committee to refer the issue to and that subsequently a report be submitted to the Management Committee to inform the Members of any referrals and which Scrutiny Committee was dealing with them.

Ms. Burnham stated that she appreciated there would be a time delay but the role of the Management Committee was to co-ordinate and re-direct issues to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee. She reminded Members that there had been two

Calls for Action submitted, one in relation to Houghton Quarry and the second concerning public toilets at Houghton and she enquired whether the Committee felt they should be subject to the new procedure.

Councillors Mordey and J. Scott were both concerned that consideration of the issues would be delayed if this was to happen and did not see the need to change how they were handled now.

Ms. Burnham stated that the general feeling was that things were not moving quickly enough and they would have more weight if they were brought into the new procedure to be re-directed.

Councillor Mordey suggested that the two Councillors who had submitted the Calls for Action be asked what they wanted to do.

Councillor M. Forbes enquired how other Authorities were handling Councillor Calls for Action.

Ms. Burnham advised that similar procedures were in place as the one the Committee was asked to revise at the meeting to make it more simplistic and that in comparison with neighbouring local authorities, Sunderland was only one of a handful of local authorities to receive two Councillor Call for Action since the introduction of the mechanism back in April 2009.

5. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) further revisions be made to the proposed new procedure for the consideration of non-mandatory/Councillor Call for Action Referrals to Overview and Scrutiny to include provision for such requests to be considered by the relevant Scrutiny Committee (in consultation with the Head of Overview and Scrutiny) in replace of the Management Scrutiny Committee as suggested; and
- (ii) the Head of Overview and Scrutiny contact the Members who have submitted the Councillor Call for Action referrals on Houghton Quarry and Houghton toilets to determine whether they would like the issues to be subject to the new procedure once the further revisions have been re-considered by both this Committee and the six other Scrutiny Committees in due course.

At this juncture, the Chairman welcomed Councillor Heron to the meeting who was attending in order to submit his views as Chairman of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee in relation to the draft Protocol on the Appointment of Co-opted Members to the Council's Scrutiny Committees.

Overview and Scrutiny Handbook – Draft Protocol – Appointment of Co-opted Members to the Council’s Scrutiny Committees

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) inviting verbal feedback from the six Scrutiny Committees on the draft Protocol for the Appointment of Co-opted Members to the Council’s Scrutiny Committee prior to its endorsement.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Heron stated that from a personal point of view that he was delighted that the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee could now co-opt experts to give impartial advice. He hoped it brought scrutiny more to the fore and gave the Council a better public press. He advised that the Committee had accepted the report without comment.

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny advised that each Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to co-opt as they felt appropriate and in respect of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee a report would be submitted to Council at the November meeting to recommend the appointment of the non-voting co-opted Members to the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Mordey commented that co-option might suit some Scrutiny Committees more than others. He stated that he had slight concerns due to the timescale needed to co-opt, pointing out that it would be the November or December meeting before Members could be co-opted in any one year.

Ms. Burnham advised that Members of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee had also expressed concerns about co-opting Members as they were not democratically elected and accountable as Elected Members were and also about the timescale in relation to co-opting Members.

In response to Councillor M. Forbes, Ms. Burnham highlighted the general principles for co-opted members detailed at paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 concerning observation of the Code of Conduct and declaration of interests.

6. RESOLVED that the Protocol be endorsed and included in the Scrutiny Handbook.

Overview and Scrutiny Handbook – Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Role Descriptors

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Scrutiny Committee with a progress report on the refresh of the Council’s Handbook for Overview and Scrutiny specifically in relation to role descriptors for Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

7. RESOLVED that the draft role descriptions be approved and incorporated into the Scrutiny Handbook as part of its refresh.

Request to Attend a Seminar – North East Regional Employers Organisation Seminar on Performance Management

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) asking the Committee to consider nominating delegates to the North East Regional Employers Organisation Seminar on Performance Management for Members to be held on 19th November 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

8. RESOLVED that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee be authorised to attend the above Conference, accompanied by the Head of Overview and Scrutiny at Durham County Cricket Club, Chester-le-Street at a cost of £120 + VAT per delegate to be funded from this Scrutiny Committee's budget.

Urgent Item

At this juncture the Chairman agreed that the Committee consider a further report requesting Member attendance at a Seminar in order to allow time for the necessary arrangements to be made.

Request to Attend Seminar – Centre for Public Scrutiny's Parliamentary Seminar Series – 1st December 2009, House of Commons

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to endorse the attendance of the Vice-Chairman to the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Parliamentary Seminar to be held on 1st December 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny highlighted that the Council had secured one place on 1st December 2009 seminar and had been added to the reserve list should any places become available on the remainder of the series. She would keep Members informed and seek nominations if spaces became available.

9. RESOLVED that the attendance of the Vice-Chairman of the Committee to the Parliamentary Seminar being held on 1st December 2009 be endorsed and that the cost of rail travel be funded from the dedicated budget of this Scrutiny Committee.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st November 2009 – 28th February 2010

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 November 2009 – 28th February 2010 which relate to the Management Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

10. RESOLVED that the Forward Plan for the above period be received and noted.

Work Programme 2009-10

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

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman requested that the Committee receive a copy of the Work Programmes of the other six Scrutiny Committees in future together with its own Work Programme.

11. RESOLVED that the information contained in the Work Programme be noted and that the Work Programmes of the other six Scrutiny Committees be submitted to each meeting of the Management Committee in future in line with the Chairman's request.

The Chairman having thanked Members for their attendance then closed the meeting.

(Signed) R.D. TATE,
Chairman.