

**At a meeting of the POLICY AND CO-ORDINATION REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 23<sup>RD</sup> APRIL, 2009 at 5.30 P.M.**

**Present:-**

Councillor Tate in the Chair

Councillors Arnott, D. Forbes, G. Hall, Heron, Mordey, J. Scott, Whalen and T. Wright.

**Also in Attendance:-**

Councillor Allan, Portfolio Holder for Resources.

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors A. Cuthbert, Walker and J. Walton.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2009, Part I**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Review Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2009, Part I (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**Report of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2009, Part I**

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2009, Part I, for Members' information.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

## **Audit Commission Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Score Card 2008**

The City Solicitor submitted a report attaching a copy of the joint report (copies circulated) of the Chief Executive and the City Treasurer informing Cabinet of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and that the Council had continued to achieve the maximum four stars rating in the latest and final CPA results. The report was referred to the Committee to provide the opportunity for Members to meet with the Audit Commission lead officers who would provide an overview of the results.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

The Chairman welcomed Mr. David Jennings, Comprehensive Area Assessment Lead, and Mr. Steve Nicklin, District Auditor. Mr. Jennings thanked the Committee for the opportunity to attend the meeting. He proceeded to highlight to the Committee the key messages contained in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter. He added that overall the Council had received a very positive letter. However since it had been written there had been further developments in relation to Nissan and that he had received updates from Officers concerning allocation of funding.

Mr. Nicklin stated that the Council had received a clean opinion on the accounts and that he had had to raise very few issues. He advised that the 2007/08 Audit Certificate had not yet been issued because the Auditor had received a formal objection to the accounts in relation to car parking issues.

Mr. Nicklin went on to say that Sunderland had received four stars in relation to use of resources and in this respect was one of the top performing Councils. The process was moving on and next year would be a tougher test. Mr. Nicklin highlighted the areas which the Council needed to continue to develop detailed in paragraph 4 of the report.

Councillor Mordey enquired how the scrutiny function could help the Council to improve its overall performance.

Mr. Nicklin stated that by spending some time looking at the new Use of Resources Assessment and the challenge of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), looking at the outcomes and how well the Council was doing itself and in its working with partners.

Mr. Jennings added that consideration needed to be given to what was actually changing on the ground and what the outcomes were. CAA was an opportunity for the Council and the Audit Commission to work together. It provided an opportunity to share the knowledge of what each other was doing.

The Chairman commented that he felt it important for Scrutiny to be involved in the drawing up of the Council's Corporate Improvement Programme and that this was down to Member level and that it was understandable. The Chairman enquired as to how Mr. Jennings considered CAA could better support partners and how he saw Scrutiny taking a part in this.

Mr. Jennings stated that CAA was designed to look at the way different partners work together to try and make a difference for users. He added that when working effectively with partners, organisations maximise their chances of creating a better place to live, are able to tackle issues such as teenage pregnancy etc. The CAA process was about the Audit Commission, working with other inspection bodies such as Ofsted to produce a joint inspectorate area assessment and reporting performance. It would be a challenge for the inspectorates to work together also.

Councillor Arnott stated that the development of an Assessment Management Strategy had been identified as an area to be developed. He enquired in what way was it deficient and how Scrutiny was to improve it.

Mr. Nicklin referred the Committee to paragraph 44 of the Audit Letter. He stated that the question needed to be asked as to whether the Strategy was, for example, getting sufficient return for the assets it holds, financial or other returns such as keeping communities together, so that the public could see that the Council was making the most out of them. He suggested that when the Action Plan was in place, Scrutiny look at it and ensure that it was being followed.

The Chairman stated that he was pleased to see this was being followed up and commented that the Committee had already asked to see it once it was agreed.

Councillor T. Wright commented that he found paragraphs 4 and 7 of the Audit and Inspection Letter contradictory. He highlighted the developments in scrutiny in the Council such as the appointment of a Head of Scrutiny, the additional Scrutiny Committee which now brought the number to 7 committees and the proposals to have Opposition Member Vice Chairmen. Councillor Wright commented that the problem was not scrutiny but how to get it down to ward and neighbourhood level. Efforts were being made to devolve scrutiny downwards so people at street level get the full benefit of scrutiny. Councillor Wright pointed out that the date of the Annual Scrutiny Conference was approaching and Members wanted to make sure they were not just sitting in Committee rooms but wanted to go deeper into what partners were doing and needing to get more people involved.

Mr. Jennings stated that scrutiny needed to become ever more sophisticated, for example, on health issues, there was a need to monitor how things were going in general and at an area level and therefore scrutiny needed to do both things.

Mr. Nicklin added that it also needed to scrutinise Area Committee effectiveness.

Mr. Jennings stated that he was not sure whether the role of Auditors was to be too prescriptive. Scrutiny needed to explore how 'big picture' issues affect the Area and then for the Area to report back up. It was a perpetual circle.

Mr. Nicklin added that scrutiny needed to be constructive, advise and challenge.

Councillor Arnott asked about local authorities where the Scrutiny function was recognised as working effectively - what differentiated them at a core level as being successful.

Mr. Nicklin stated that it would be easier to identify authorities where scrutiny was doing less well – it was not that the Scrutiny function was lagging far behind in Sunderland. A similar comment was made across the piece. A clear message that was coming out was to do more with less.

Mr. Jennings stated that the CAA process was to look at areas who were managing better in the economic downturn. Part of the process was to share practice.

Councillor Mordey referred to paragraph 1 of the section entitled 'Key Messages' concerning the economic downturn and the recent successes the City had enjoyed, and enquired how to implement this.

Mr. Nicklin stated that it was a matter of bringing everything together to take a Citywide perspective and joining up the initiatives that the Council was taking.

The Chairman having thanked Messrs. Jennings and Nicklin for their attendance, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report and the information brought out in the discussion be received and noted.

### **The Sunderland Community Development Plan and Compact**

The Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) seeking the Review Committee's agreement of the proposed Community Development Action Plan and Sunderland Compact.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Jane Hibberd, Assistant Head of Community Services, provided Members with a comprehensive presentation detailing the background to the Community Development Plan, its core principles, together with the Sunderland Compact and next steps.

In response to the Chairman as to how the Community Development Plan fitted with the Area Committees, Ms. Hibberd stated that it was intended that the Area Forums aligned to the Area Committees. Sunderland Community Network operates at a City level and feeds into the Local Strategic Partnership. Work was going on to ensure the Network works at an area level. The next step was to look at how the Forums needed to develop. The Area forums were all at varying stages, some were relatively new, whereas other groups were well established. The intention was to standardise the Forums and for the Council to work with the Network to guide the existing Forums. A Community Development exchange was being developed where experience would be shared and groups would learn from each other. There were also plans to establish a bureau of advice. There would be clear points of entry for the voluntary sector to engage with the Council. Included in the next steps of the Community Development Action Plan was the future resourcing of Community Development and staffing proposals would be put forward.

Councillor G. Hall commented that there was very little support in the way of infrastructure and finance to support community groups to deliver community services. It was becoming a burden and driving volunteers away as it was becoming more onerous to do. There was a need to have the infrastructure behind community groups to support them to deliver and not burden them with 'red tape' and bureaucracy.

The Chairman commented that it was important to note that smaller organisations with less capacity would need more support.

Ms. Hibberd advised Members that the Commissioning Framework picked up this very issue in terms of smaller organisations. The funding processes for something that is very small would not be the same as those followed for larger projects in order to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.

Councillor Arnott commented that in different parts of the City it appeared that community groups worked in different ways. Officers were trying to develop a degree of uniformity. His advice was to tread carefully as often it was the individuality of the organisation that made it work.

In response to the Chairman, Ms. Hibberd advised that Elected Member workshops would be arranged to take place in the evening as well as during the day.

4. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the report and associated presentation be received and noted; and
- b) Elected Member workshops be arranged as detailed in the report.

#### **Performance Report – April to December 2008 (Progress in Implementing the Local Area Agreement and New National Indicator Set)**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members of the Review Committee with a summary position statement in relation to the first nine months of the Local Area Agreement (LAA), implementation of the new National Indicator set during 2008/09 and also the Council's plans to address findings from the Annual Mori Survey and provisional results of the biennial Place Survey.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sarah Reed, Head of Policy and Performance, briefed the Committee on the report and stated that there were a number of areas of positive performance. She highlighted the processing of new claims for Housing and Council Tax Benefit where there had been a significant improvement in performance as the new system had bedded in. She advised that in future actions would be coming back to the Committee to monitor performance. She pointed out that residents' perceptions were still a big issue for the Council. Ms. Reed added that information would be provided in future on an area basis.

The Chairman enquired as to whether there was an improvement in relation to residents from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups accessing services.

Ms. Sal Buckler, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, advised that the Council did not currently have all the information and there was a need to recommission to see if the gap had been closed. The last Mori Survey did include a booster sample of residents from BME groups and this did not highlight significant changes.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

### **Review of Operation of Overview and Scrutiny**

The Chief Executive and City Solicitor submitted a joint report (copy circulated) informing Members of the response of Cabinet to the Committees' review of Overview and Scrutiny arrangements and providing Members with an opportunity to consider and comment on revisions to the Scrutiny handbook.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Rhiannon Hood, Assistant City Solicitor, referred Members to the detail of the response from Cabinet.

The Chairman expressed his thanks for the work Cabinet had done in considering the review of Overview and Scrutiny proposals. He also thanked the Members of the Policy and Co-ordination Review Committee's Working Group, viz Councillors Mordey, J. Scott, Arnott and G. Hall for the work undertaken to develop the proposals for review. The Chairman commented that there was a change of atmosphere around Scrutiny in Sunderland in that the Cabinet now accepted that Scrutiny was a function the Local Authority needed to embrace. He added that for Scrutiny to work it had to be inclusive and Scrutiny would be strengthened by the greater involvement of opposition Councillors. He anticipated that the review proposals that had been agreed for Scrutiny would mean Scrutiny would operate a great deal better in the next twelve months than it had done in the last seven years.

Members of the Committee extended their thanks to the Chairman for the work undertaken and the manner in which he had chaired both the Working Group and the Review Committee itself and also to Ms. Karen Brown, Review Co-ordinator, for the support provided.

The Chairman having advised that a Working Group would look at the detail of the scrutiny protocols; it was:-

6. RESOLVED:-

- i) the Cabinet's response to the Working Group's recommendations be noted; and

- ii) the arrangements set out in draft at Appendix B together with the draft Handbook be noted; and any further comments provided to the Review Co-ordination Team; and
- iii) Members be involved in finalising revised protocols.

### **Annual Report of the Policy and Co-ordination Review Committee 2008-09**

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) presenting a summary of the work of the Review Committee during 2008-09.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

7. RESOLVED that the operation, achievements and impact of the Committee during 2008-09 be noted and that the report be submitted to the Council in accordance with the Constitution.

### **Policy Review: Economic Challenges – Draft Interim Report**

The City Solicitor submitted the draft Report (copy circulated) following an enquiry into the economic challenges in Sunderland and inviting the Committee to endorse the recommendations.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members noted that the summary of findings draws out recommendations relating to the key areas considered at this interim stage – regeneration of the City Centre and the Labour Market, and it was:-

8. RESOLVED that the report be endorsed with the caveat that the conclusions of the report can only reflect a position at this point in time as the longer term impact of the economic downturn are uncertain.

### **Progress Monitor and Work Programmes 2008/09**

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) setting out variations to the Review Committee work programmes and to review the Committee's own work programme.

9. RESOLVED that the variations to the Scrutiny work programme for the year, updated to reflect new additions and amendments requested by Committee as the year has progressed, be noted.

## **Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006**

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

10. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered to involve a likely disclosure of information relating to any individual, which is likely to reveal the identify of an individual, the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) or to consultations or negotiations in connection with labour relations matters arising between the Authority and employees of the Authority (Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4).

Signed        R.D. TATE,  
                  Chairman.

### **Note**

The above minutes comprise only those relating to items of business during which the meeting was open to the public.

Additional minutes in respect of other items are included in Part II.