

At a meeting of the MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 17TH MARCH, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Tate in the Chair

Councillors M. Forbes, Heron, Miller, Mordey, Rolph, Stewart and S. Watson.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Morrissey and Walker.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 17th February, 2011

Councillor Rolph, Vice Chair of the Committee, congratulated the Governance Services Officer, Mrs. Christine Tilley, on the quality of the minutes which she stated would have been very difficult to write due to the level of detail discussed at the meeting.

Members of the Committee concurred with Councillor Rolph's comments.

i) Reference from Cabinet – 16th February, 2011 – Budget Service Reports

Councillor Rolph queried the point in the minutes which stated that Sunderland was rated in the top 25 local authorities for the standard of maintenance of its highways. Councillor Miller advised that Sunderland was in fact in the top 25% or top quartile in this respect.

Councillor Rolph referred to the number of extra care units quoted in the Minutes and clarified that there were 127 units in the City as a whole, 117 of which were currently occupied.

The Chairman requested that a letter be sent to the Leader, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holders thanking them for attending the Management Scrutiny Committee meeting and for presenting their priorities for the year ahead; and it was:-

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 17th February, 2011 (copy circulated), be confirmed and

signed as a correct record subject to the above amendments and that a letter of thanks be forwarded to the Leader, Deputy Leader and the Portfolio Holders as requested above.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no interests declared.

Variation of Agenda

The Chairman proposed and it was agreed, that item 6 of the Agenda, a feedback report on the Local Government Information Unit Seminar, be considered next on the Agenda as the Head of Scrutiny and Localism needed to leave the meeting following consideration of the item.

LGIU – Rewriting the Script: Preparing Overview and Scrutiny for the 'New Localism' Feedback – 8th February, 2011

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) advising that the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee and the Head of Scrutiny and Localism had attended the above Seminar on 8th February, 2011 and would provide verbal feedback to the Committee at the meeting.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman advised that the programme had included case studies on Rotherham and Barnsley Councils showing how they had developed their scrutiny arrangements. The case studies had not provided anything new however which the Council might wish to adopt in Sunderland. In fact, it had shown that scrutiny in Sunderland was well developed and the event had helped to raise the Council's profile.

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Scrutiny and Localism, added that discussions had been held on how the new health and wellbeing boards would operate and that everyone had a different opinion on what 'Localism' meant at this stage. She advised that she would circulate the presentation which they had received at the seminar for Members' information.

Members having commented that the event had been useful in the sense of confirming that development of the scrutiny arrangements were well in hand in Sunderland, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the content of the report and the feedback from the event detailed above be noted.

Policy Development and Review 2010/2011: Draft Report

The Chief Executive submitted the first draft report (copy circulated) from the evidence gathered in relation to this year's policy review on Smarter Working.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, introduced the report and referred the Committee to the recommendations detailed at paragraph 5.

Ms. Helen Townsend, Smarter Working Project Manager, and Mr. Trevor Robson who had been recently recruited from the SWITCH Team were in attendance to answer any questions Members may have in relation to Smarter Working.

Ms. Townsend advised the Committee that the Council had been operating the Smarter Working Project since September 2010 and that 500 employees had been enabled to work smarter since then. The Chief Executive had asked to meet with representatives from the teams involved to evaluate how things were going and this was scheduled for early April. Ms Townsend explained that Trevor Robson who had formerly worked in ICT had been recruited from the SWITCH Team to assist staff with the initial setting up of computer hardware and software and accessing the Council Network and drives to enable them to work from home whilst having the full range of files they would normally have access to in the office.

In response to Councillor Heron, Ms. Townsend clarified that it was anticipated that car mileage savings would result from staff not needing to return to the office in between meetings during the working day to write up case notes etc. as they would have access to the Council network through the VPN technology at home or in touch down office space. This would mean they could access any information on files they required. As a result the majority of staff were saving approximately 18 miles a week in car journeys. Ms. Townsend added that the Council did not pay staff to travel to and from their place of work and home and that the staff met these costs themselves.

In response to Councillor Miller, Ms. Townsend advised that a target for car mileage savings had not been set but that there were plans to look at what had been saved after the first year and set a target to reduce this further for next year.

Ms. Townsend advised, in response to Councillor Stewart, that currently staff were provided with Council equipment which was encrypted in order to meet the requirements around data security, however, the policy around this was currently being reviewed.

Councillor Miller referred to paragraph 6.5.7 of the report concerning the possibility of moving the emphasis from the traditional 9 am – 5 pm working day to a more flexible arrangement as Councillors operated in a 24/7 role and that this potential move could further enhance the service provided to customers and residents of the City.

Ms. Townsend advised that service redesign and delivery was a bigger project and that the Council would need to reach agreement as to what service levels and access to services including operating hours it wanted to achieve. This was not within the scope of the Smarter Working Project. The Smarter Working Project enabled staff to work more flexibly within the service levels already operating.

In response to Councillor M. Forbes, Ms. Townsend advised that a number of private companies as well as local authorities were adopting smarter working practices such as homeworking. In 2007 a Smarter Working Toolkit to assist Managers and staff in moving to new ways of working was developed. The stringent efficiency agenda was now driving the Council to look at the new ways of working to deliver efficiencies by reducing the number of buildings it currently occupies and reducing the operating costs on those that remain.

Productivity levels of staff working at home could be monitored in a variety of ways such as having a work programme to be completed, deadlines and targets to be met which can be discussed and agreed at one to one meetings between the member of staff and their Manager. Productivity could also be managed through usage on the Council network. Ms. Townsend added that the presence of a member of staff in the office was no guarantee of performance and effective management was needed no matter where that member of staff was located.

With regards to smarter working reducing sickness absence, it was difficult to prove the correlation without being able to extrapolate other factors. Discussions had taken place with colleagues from Occupational Health who knew the sickness hotspots and this would be analysed to see whether smarter working was a contributory factor. Salford City Council, BT and central government departments had noticed a reduction in sickness absence levels and had attributed this to smarter working practices.

In response to Councillor M. Forbes, Ms. Townsend confirmed that staff were entitled to apply for a maximum tax relief of £200 per annum. However, a HMRC focus group had revealed that a number of people had not claimed the tax relief due to the lengthy paperwork involved.

Members of the Committee expressed concern that staff were not claiming the allowance and commented on the increasing costs they were facing due to rising fuel bills and the fact that their pay had been frozen.

Ms. Townsend advised that the Council needed to be aware of the additional burden on the staff concerned. Homeworking was not mandatory at the moment and Managers were asked to be sympathetic if this was not appropriate. Many households had reduced from two incomes to one income over recent months as their partners worked in Local Government also and had lost their jobs due to Councils having to make efficiency savings.

In response to Councillor Rolph, Ms. Townsend stated that the Council had a very ambitious timescale with regards to the targets set to rationalise the property

it holds. She confirmed however that the targets for 2010 had been met and they were on target for the closures for 2011. They were now managing the internal moves for staff required due to the recent departmental restructures.

With reference to paragraph 7.5, Councillor Rolph asked that commentary be included about recovery of documents and the resilience of records management. Councillor Rolph added that a better records management process tended to improve the recognition of the Council.

Ms. Townsend confirmed that the processes and procedures were in place to ensure data was secure.

2. RESOLVED that the above comments be included in the draft report and the amendments made and that a final review report be presented to the Management Scrutiny Committee for approval at its meeting in April 2011.

Annual Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) seeking approval to the Annual Report of the Management Scrutiny Committee as part of the overall Scrutiny Annual Report for 2010/11 to be presented to the Council.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

4. RESOLVED that the Management Scrutiny Report 2010/11 be approved for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st March, 2011 – 30th June, 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 March, 2011 – 30th June, 2011 which relate to the Management Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

A copy of the Forward Plan for the period 1st April, 2011 – 31st July, 2011 published on 14th March, 2011 was circulated at the meeting.

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

Scrutiny Committees' Work Programme for 2010-11

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for information, the variations of the Scrutiny Committees' Work Programmes for

2010/2011 and providing an opportunity to review the Committee's own Work Programme for 2010/2011.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sarah Abernethy, Acting Assistant Scrutiny Officer, briefed the Committee on the report.

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, highlighted on the Management Scrutiny Committee Work Programme that a report on the Annual Audit Letter had been postponed and would now be involved in the agenda for the April meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Miller commented that the Scrutiny Committees had covered a huge amount of work over the year and that the Members of these Committees should be applauded for this, and it was:-

6. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the variations to the Scrutiny Committees' Work Programmes be noted;
and
- ii) a letter be forwarded to all Scrutiny Committee Members thanking them for the work undertaken over the course of the year.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) R.D. TATE,
Chairman.