

At a meeting of the MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 16TH JULY, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Tate in the Chair

Councillors Copeland, A. Cuthbert, M. Forbes, P. Gibson, L. Martin, Mordey, J. Scott, T. Wright and Walker.

Apology for Absence

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor D. Forbes.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 23rd June, 2009

Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes 2009-2010

The Chairman asked that in response to the comment that it was important that the policy review topic selected by the Prosperity and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee looked at how the Council could kick-start the economy and come up with a 'Plan B', that it be noted that Councillor Mordey had confirmed at the meeting that the Scrutiny Committee would consider this.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23rd June, 2009, Part I (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the above inclusion.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Item 5 - Asset Management Review

Councillor P. Gibson declared a personal interest in the report as Chairman of the Management Committee of Silksworth Community Centre.

Attendance Management

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing information to Members of the Scrutiny Committee on the organisation's performance on the number of working days lost due to sickness absence for 2008/09.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sue Stanhope, Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development advised the Committee that performance was continuing to improve with sickness absence levels lower than they had been in the last six years. She highlighted significant improvements made in Health, Housing and Adult Services with the Directorate achieving a reduction of 2.26 days. The overall average per employee for the year ending 2008/09 was 11.31 days. Ms. Stanhope referred Members to the Directorate targets detailed at paragraph 3.0, advising that the overall Sunderland City Council target for 2009/10 was 10 days.

The Chairman enquired as to what arrangements the Council would be making to vaccinate staff against the H1N1 virus.

Ms. Stanhope advised that the Council vaccinated certain groups of employees, such as those working with older people, with the flu vaccine every year. The H1N1 vaccination programme was different and the Council would be working with the STPCT to identify the most appropriate groups to be vaccinated. There was potential for teachers to be in the target group as they would be coming into touch with a vulnerable grouping i.e. 4-14 year olds.

Councillor L. Martin enquired as to what the Council was doing differently to speed up performance, seeing as it had been stated that performance was at a slower rate than that required and also as to how it compared with that of other Authorities.

Ms. Stanhope advised that all Local Authorities measured in terms of working days lost. This had until recently been a Best Value Performance Indicator but it was no longer. Sunderland was in the top half of the bottom quartile as were like size Councils across the country. In Tyne and Wear, Sunderland was one of the better performers. Sickness levels had links with deprivation levels. In Sunderland, performance was not improving as quickly as the Council would have liked. There was a Business Improvement Programme project looking at a whole set of interventions. One of these interventions was to have a single point of reporting to be set up through HR and Payroll. Work was also being done to look at other forms of leave to avoid employees resorting to sick leave. Work was being done with the Shared Service Centre with the hope of bringing in a range of options by the end of September.

Councillor Gibson referred to Appendix 1 of the report which detailed the organisation's performance from 2003/04 to 2008/09 and requested that future reports provide details as to the target set as well as the figure achieved.

Ms. Stanhope advised that this information could be provided for a future report with the caveat that departments had changed and this would need to be borne in mind.

In response to Councillor Copeland, Ms. Stanhope advised that there were a whole range of reasons why staff were off sick and a range of interventions to be employed; this was the complexity of absence management. However better management and more training for managers would assist the Council to improve performance. Staff did receive pay when they were off sick; this was part of the national Conditions of Service. After 1 year's employment, staff were entitled to six months' sick leave on full pay and six months' sick leave on half pay. She reminded Members that half of the Council's total workforce had taken no days off on sick leave over the last year. In her opinion the sick pay scheme was not per se the reason for staff being on sick leave but was there to support staff financially when they were ill.

The Chairman advised the Committee that the Scrutiny Committee had done an in-depth study into absence management four years ago and had received regular update reports detailing the incentives to encourage staff not to be absent from work.

Councillor M. Forbes commented that gradually muscular skeletal illnesses/related absence should reduce as a direct result of the types of jobs people were doing. She stated that she would be interested to know where the biggest rise was in types of sickness and as a comparator, how the public sector fared against the private sector in terms of sickness levels.

Councillor A. Cuthbert enquired whether Council application forms asked applicants to provide details as to their sickness record.

Ms. Stanhope confirmed this was included in the standard application form and the Council also undertook a pre-employment health check before people started working for the Authority.

Councillor Walker commented that the number of long term sickness cases had a bearing on sickness performance in that it distorted the numbers, adding that not all employees had eleven days off on sick leave.

Ms. Stanhope confirmed that a lot of time and work had been carried out to bring staff back to work, looking at different duties they could undertake and early interventions.

Members having discussed the report fully it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the performance for 2008/09 and the target set for 2009/10 be noted; and
- (ii) a further report be submitted to the September meeting of the Scrutiny Committee providing the following:-

- a) information as to the frequency and length of absences;
- b) the correlation between sickness absence and school holidays;
- c) information on what is the biggest rise in terms of sickness type;
and
- d) how the Council compares with the private sector.

Asset Management Review

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) providing an update to the Committee on a review undertaken of the Council's Industrial Portfolio.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Colin Clark, Head of Land and Property briefed the Committee on the report. In response to Councillors L. Martin and M. Forbes, Mr. Clark advised that the Council's Industrial Portfolio refers to the industrial units held and options to reduce or expand the portfolio, which estates were suitable for job creation or retention in relation to the manufacturing sector and how they were performing financially. The Industrial Portfolio did not refer to broader issues such as industrial land in the City such as the Port of Sunderland. This was a separate issue.

Mr. Clark added that the Community Assets Review would be looking at how the Council's Property Portfolio was currently being used and how to use it in the future. The review would not include the Council's leisure facilities. The review would lead to the development of a policy for the provision and support of community development activities which are sustainable in the long term.

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

3. **RESOLVED that:-**

- (i) the information contained in the report be noted;
- (ii) the Committee agree to receive a further report on the review of the Industrial Portfolio in October 2009; and
- (iii) the Committee agree to receive a further report on the review of Community Assets in due course.

Overview and Scrutiny Conference 2009

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing feedback from the Scrutiny Conference held on 11th June, 2009 at the Stadium of Light, Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Scrutiny briefed the Committee on the report. She informed Members that suggestions for next year's Scrutiny Conference included inviting the Council's partners to be represented and the introduction of world café style workshops. She also hoped to secure external speakers. A tentative date for the Conference of 20th May had been proposed in an attempt to get arrangements underway and was for Members to discuss at this meeting and to be considered further by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs at their informal meeting on 27th July, 2009.

Members discussed the proposed arrangements for the 2010 Conference and in an attempt to secure as many Members to attend as possible, the consensus was for the event to be held on an evening to allow those who worked the opportunity to attend.

It was recognised however that it was possible that there would be a General Election in June 2010 and likely that the Local Elections would be held the same day. If this was the case the Conference would be able to proceed to discuss potential items, however membership of the Scrutiny Committees would be subject to change.

Ms. Burnham advised that she would report the discussion around the date and time of the Scrutiny Conference for 2010 at the informal meeting of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

4. RESOLVED that feedback from this year's Scrutiny Conference be noted and that it be recommended that arrangements be made for next year's Conference to be held on 20th May with an evening start time.

Overview and Scrutiny Handbook

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.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Scrutiny highlighted to Members that it was proposed that revisions to the Handbook be taken in a phased approach and referred Members to the priorities to be addressed and implementation dates detailed in paragraph 4 of the report. Ms. Burnham advised Members that draft protocols would be submitted to the Management Committee for approval.

The Chairman suggested that the Schedule of Scrutiny meetings for the year ahead be included in the Handbook.

Ms. Burnham advised that the Vice-Chairman had suggested that information on the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the regional and national arrangements be included in the Handbook.

Ms. Burnham took the opportunity to inform the Committee that the two new posts of Assistant Scrutiny Officer and one new post of Trainee Scrutiny Officer would be advertised over the summer with a view to making appointments in September.

Ms. Burnham confirmed that the Handbook would also be available on the Council's website.

5. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the phased approach to refreshing the new Handbook be endorsed; and
- (ii) the recommendation to use all seven Scrutiny Committees' budgets, in equal portion, to publish the new edition of the Handbook, be supported.

Developing Effective Roles and Relationships with Cabinet, Scrutiny, Officers and Partners

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) updating Members on the work currently being undertaken with Professor Bovaird from the Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, as part of the ongoing development of effective roles and relationships with Cabinet, Scrutiny, Officers and Partners.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Scrutiny commented that the Committee was very fortunate to secure the services of the nationally recognised Professor Bovaird from September 2009 who would assist the Council with the development of its Scrutiny arrangements.

6. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the future involvement of Professor Bovaird, by way of external support and assistance in developing effective roles and relationships with Cabinet, Scrutiny, Officers and Partners be endorsed; and
- (ii) as a key area for improvement, the Committee agree to receive regular progress reports on such developments.

Enhancing Local Democracy Conference Feedback

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing feedback from the Enhancing Local Democracy Conference.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman informed the Committee of the sessions they had attended some of which were beneficial, others being more geared to issues of relevance only to Local Authorities located in the South of England. It was felt that aspects of the Conference would have been useful if not for all Scrutiny Members, then certainly for all Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen and that Members would benefit from further Scrutiny training.

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Scrutiny commented that Conferences were one avenue of providing training and information to Members and that the work to be undertaken with Professor Bovaird would also provide an opportunity for Member development; together with the Scrutiny Network. Ms. Burnham advised that she had offered Sunderland as a venue for future Scrutiny Network meetings.

Ms. Burnham took the opportunity to update Members with regard to the improvements to be made to the sound system in Committee Room 1 with installation of the equipment anticipated to take place during the August recess.

The Chairman commented that this was a priority issue.

7. RESOLVED that feedback from the Conference together with the above information be noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st July – 31st October 2009

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st July – 31st October 2009 and seeking the views of Members on the value of the Committee continuing to receive the Forward Plan on a regular basis.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Scrutiny introduced the report and suggested that in future the Forward Plan include a reference on each entry as to the most appropriate Scrutiny Committee in terms of remit.

Ms. Burnham advised that the other Scrutiny Committees had asked to receive only those entries which fell into their particular remit.

Following discussion on the report and Members having recognised the value of the Scrutiny Committees continuing to receive the Forward Plan on a regular basis; it was:-

8. RESOLVED that the Management Scrutiny Committee continue to receive a full copy of the Forward Plan and the other Scrutiny Committees receive a copy of the entries only which fall into the individual Scrutiny Committee remits;

arrangements be made for the Forward Plan to be amended to identify the most appropriate Scrutiny Committee in relation to each entry.

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).

9. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme be received and noted.

(Signed) R.D. TATE,
Chairman.