At a meeting of the POLICY AND CO-ORDINATION REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 22ND JANUARY, 2009 at 5.30 P.M.

Present:-

Councillor Tate in the Chair

Councillors Arnott, D. Forbes, Heron, Mordey, J. Scott, Walker, J. Walton, Whalen and T. Wright.

Also Present:-

Councillor Ball, Vice Chairman of Regeneration and Community Review Committee
Councillor Errington, Vice Chairman of Culture and Leisure Review Committee
Councillor Miller, Chairman of Environmental and Planning Review Committee
Ms. Nonnie Crawford, Director of Public Health

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors A. Cuthbert and G. Hall.

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Committee held on 11th December and of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Committee held on 23rd December, 2008

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Review Committee meeting held on 11th and 23rd December, 2008, Part I (copies circulated), be confirmed and signed as correct records.

Declarations of Interest

Item 6 – Revenue Budget 2009/2010

Councillor Heron declared a personal interest as a Member of Hetton Town Council.

Councillor Tate declared a personal interest in the item as a Member of the Local Government Pension Fund, as a Member of the GMB Union and as an Elected Member of Hetton Town Council.

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

Councillor T. Wright declared a personal interest as both he and his wife are Members of the Local Government Pension Scheme and of the GMB Union.

Report of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 3rd December, 2008, Part 1

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 3rd December, 2008, Part 1, for Members' information.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Variation of Agenda

The Chairman moved that the Agenda be varied and Item 8 – Scrutiny Review, be considered as the next item as the Chairman and Vice Chairman of three of the other Review Committees had attended the meeting in order to participate in the discussion of this item, and it was:-

3. RESOLVED accordingly.

Scrutiny Review

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) providing a summary of the findings and recommendations resulting from a Review of Scrutiny undertaken by a Task and Finish Working Group of Members of the Policy and Co-ordination Review Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman thanked the Members for their contribution to the review and invited Ms. Karen Brown, Review Co-ordinator, to brief the Committee on the report.

Ms. Brown outlined the national context of the review undertaken, the need for scrutiny to be more aligned with the strategic priorities of the Local Area Agreement and the expectation that partner organisations will take account of the scrutiny role and respond to scrutiny recommendations. Ms. Brown advised that further guidance was awaited in relation to the 'duty to enforce' and 'duty to co-operate' in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, however, Government had

said not to wait for this but to develop relationships and she advised that partners were already co-operating in this respect.

Ms. Nonnie Crawford, Director of Public Health, commented that scrutiny was much more complicated than just looking at performance indicators. Scrutiny was becoming more complex as it needed to be more cross-cutting to help in the drive for improvement. She referred Members to an example she used in relation to the obese child where a range of partners were working together to tackle the issue and the partners would be accountable for their individual actions to the Scrutiny Committee.

Members were in agreement that Scrutiny Committees needed to hold partners accountable and be cross cutting, looking at a range of services where they fitted into a theme. Scrutiny needed to be more strategic and not become involved in the detail of operational activity.

Members welcomed the recommendations of the report and in particular those relating to:-

- the exchange of information with Cabinet;
- the relocation of the scrutiny function to the Chief Executive's department and the appointment of a Head of Scrutiny;
- the arrangements to be put in place for Quality Assurance;
- the co-option of partner representatives to the Scrutiny Committees.

Councillor Arnott referred to the unresolved issues detailed in paragraph 4.3 of the report. He commented that he felt the option of a second Vice Chairman attached to each Review Committee drawn from the minority parties was a modest, fair and achievable proposal. He reported that the Scrutiny Committees in Newcastle were all chaired by Opposition Members. In relation to Option 2, he felt to appoint a lead Opposition Member was contradictory in that scrutiny was supposed to be non-political.

Councillor Mordey suggested that a more appropriate title in relation to Option 2 would be 'Ranking Member' drawn from the minority parties. He added that Option 2 had been developed as a compromise. He expressed his disappointment that this had been dismissed as he felt it would have moved the situation forward.

Councillor Miller was of the view that neither Option 1 or 2 was acceptable. Members of the Committee discussed the two options, however, could not agree.

In response to Councillor Heron, the Chairman stated that the position with regard to the attendance of Cabinet Members at Review Committee meetings would be clarified with them and they would be invited to attend on a regular basis.

Ms. Brown advised that the Working Group report identified fundamental ways in which to improve scrutiny in the Council, however, further work was required to establish the structural framework required.

Full consideration having been given to the report it was moved by the Chairman and duly seconded by Councillor T. Wright that it be recorded that having discussed the unresolved issues detailed at paragraph 4.3 and the proposed amendment as detailed above in relation to Option 2, the Review Committee decided not to make a determination on either option.

This was agreed unanimously.

The Chairman then moved that the remainder of the report be endorsed by the Committee and this was carried with two abstentions.

4. RESOLVED that the report be endorsed by the Committee and the Cabinet be recommended to support the recommendations detailed in the report and give consideration to the unresolved options arising from discussions in the Working Group.

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

The Chief Executive (Designate) submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with a position statement in relation to the first six months of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and implementation of the new National Indicator set during 2008/2009 for services within the Committee's remit.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sarah Reed, Head of Policy and Performance, drew the Committee's attention to Appendix 1 of the report. She stated that a key link with the LAA for this Committee was economic growth. The indicators around this were shown as high risk as they were based on the extent to which the Council could control and influence improvement. The updated data would be available around February and a report would be provided in the next quarter.

The Chairman enquired as to whether the report could in future be provided on a themed approach in line with the City Strategy in order to show the effect across the strategic objectives. The Chairman suggested that a representative from Job Centre Plus be invited to attend a future meeting of the Review Committee.

Ms. Reed confirmed that a comparative position had been looked at with other authorities and through the Sunderland Partnership they were looking at best practice and sharing issues.

The Vice Chairman commented that it would be possible to identify through the performance figures where there was an issue and who was accountable.

Ms. Reed stated that this would be difficult where there was a combination of partners working together. She added that the Council's Strategic Directors had been given the Executive Leads on Areas within the City so there was accountability in the Council.

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

5. RESOLVED that the information contained in the report be received and noted and arrangements be made for a representative from Job Centre Plus to attend a future meeting of the Review Committee.

Revenue Budget 2009/2010

The City Solicitor submitted a report attaching the following reports considered by the Cabinet (copies circulated);-

- a report on the Revenue Budget for 2009/2010;

- a report on the calculation of the Council Tax Base in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992; and

- a report on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2009/2010.

The reports on the provisional budget proposals had been submitted as the basis for consultation, prior to the receipt of the final Local Government Finance Settlement and Members' views were requested in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members raised the following issues/questions:-

- the position with regard to equal pay.

Mr. Keith Beardmore, City Treasurer, advised that the Council was engaged in an Employment Tribunal case that was expected to run to May 2010 and was split into 3 tranches. The first tranche was in respect of the operation of bonus schemes and whether they were operated in a discriminatory fashion. A judgement on this was anticipated at the end of February and the indication was the Council had a valid defence and was continuing to make a strong case. The outcome could not, however, be prejudged.

- The proposed appointment of additional Enforcement Officers was welcomed.

Mr. Beardmore advised that 12 had now been recruited and were "hitting the ground". The proposed move to 5 areas of the City from 6 had provided the opportunity to increase the number to 3 officers in each giving a total of 15.

- Did the Revenue Budget take account of the new post of Head of Scrutiny?

Mr. Beardmore stated that this was not mentioned explicitly, however, provision had been made and was held in contingencies.

- What was the position with regard to the CCTV cameras planned for the Coalfield Area?

Mr. Beardmore advised that funding had been identified in the Strategic Investment Plan and finance put aside. He was not aware of the progress made with regard to the installation of the CCTV and would refer the matter to the Director of Development and Regeneration to respond. He advised that provision had been made from mainstream revenue funding to replace funding from NRF and NDC that was no longer available to meet the operating costs of existing CCTV installations.

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

6. RESOLVED that the Cabinet be advised that the Review Committee agreed that the Council be recommended to endorse the provisional budget proposals and accepted the assurances of the City Treasurer regarding continuation of funding.

Capital Programme – Third Review 2008/2009 and Provisional Resources 2009/2010

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) setting out for advice and consideration details of the outcome of the Third Review of the Capital Programme for 2008/2009 which sets out changes to the Capital Programme since the Second Capital Review 2008/2009 and the provisional allocation of resources for 2009/2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members raised the following questions:-

- How challenging was it in the current economic climate to know where to invest?

Mr. Keith Beardmore, City Treasurer, advised that the Council normally agreed a lending list which worked well and was reviewed on a quarterly basis. However, because of the situation the economy was in, lending money required a daily involvement and it was becoming increasingly difficult. Every possible step was being taken to know what they could be expected to know. The Council's lending list was approved by Cabinet and Council, however, they were lending to a few number of institutions within the lending list.

- The wood boiler installation – South Hylton House, was this not going ahead?

Mr. Beardmore advised that the introduction of wood based boilers had been deferred as the economic circumstances made this even less viable. In the meantime, the Development and Regeneration Directorate were investigating other innovative ways of achieving sustainable energy and recyclable materials.

7. RESOLVED that the Cabinet be advised that the Review Committee endorsed the report and agreed that the Council be recommended to approve the proposed additional schemes for 2008/2009 as set out in the extract to the report.

Progress Monitor and Work Programmes 2008/09

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) on the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2008-09 Council year and the variations to the Work Programmes for all 6 Review Committees.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman requested that a report on the Asset Management Plan be incorporated into the Work Programme when it was submitted to the Cabinet.

Councillor Heron proposed that it would be appropriate given the current economic climate for the Committee to receive a report on Job Linkage.

Ms. Karen Brown, Review Co-ordinator, stated that information on Job Linkage could be included in a report on Job Centre Plus to be submitted to the Committee at the March meeting and suggested that Mr. Vince Taylor, Head of Strategic Economic Development, also be asked to attend.

The Chairman advised that the February meeting would start at the earlier time of 4.30 p.m. Cabinet Portfolio Holders had been invited to attend to speak to Members on the key improvement objectives within their portfolio. The programme would be circulated to Members in advance of the meeting. The other Review Committee Chairmen and Vice Chairmen would be informed of the arrangements and invited to attend the meeting.

8. RESOLVED that:-

i) the information contained in the Work Programme be noted and that:-

   a) a report on the Council's Asset Management Plan be scheduled to the Review Committee's Work Programme;

   b) a report on Job Centre Plus and Job Linkage be submitted to the March meeting; and

   c) arrangements for the February meeting as detailed above be noted; and

ii) the variations to the Corporate Annual Work Programme for 2008-09 be noted.

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

9. 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.