

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 19 January 2006

Present: Councillor J Walker (Chair), Councillors T McGowan (Associate Chair) and Councillors E Bell, P Goldsworthy and R Parr

Also in attendance: Councillors D Edgerley

06.OS.01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Davies, Perks and Mrs Wilson.

06.OS.02 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

None of the Members disclosed any interests in relation to matters under consideration at the meeting.

06.OS.03 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 December 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

06.OS.04 SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES - PREFERRED OPTIONS DOCUMENT AND DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

Further to minute 05.OS.76, of the meeting held on 15 December 2005, the Committee invited the Executive Member for Customers, Policy and Performance to the meeting to clarify the request that the Executive Cabinet had made at its meeting on 1 December 2005 for this Committee to ask the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel to examine how the Council could encourage the use of renewable energy within the Borough and how the Council could take a lead on this issue on a cost neutral basis.

Members received a document entitled "Renewable Energy Information for Scrutiny Members" that had been compiled by the Energy Saving Trust providing answers to many frequently asked questions by Scrutiny Committees.

The Committee **AGREED** that a small group be established comprising the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Chair of Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Executive Member for Customers, Policy and Performance to examine the areas the Environment Overview and Panel could pursue with recommendations, for the Panel to proceed through the topic selection criteria.

06.OS.05 REVENUE BUDGET 2005/2006 - MONITORING

The Committee received a report of the Director of Finance setting out the current financial position of the Council, compared against the budgets and efficiency saving targets it set itself for 2005/2006 for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

The report revealed that officers continued to reduce the overspend with the forecast overspend having been reduced to £126,000 from £164,000 since the previous monitoring report.

The Director of Finance responded to questions from Members on the specific areas of procurement savings particularly in relation to recruitment, advertising and corporate savings in general. The authority was successful in providing savings from procurement.

The Committee **AGREED** to note the report and the action being taken to identify savings.

06.OS.06 SCRUTINY OF THE DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2006/07

The Committee received from the Director of Finance the proposals for the budget for revenue spending and Council Tax for the General Fund for the 2006/07 financial year. The proposals contained the many factors and risk issues which will be assessed and considered before the final budget was determined at the Council meeting on 7 March 2006.

The purpose of the item was to give initial consideration of the proposals and seek the Committee's views on the Executive Cabinet's draft budget proposals.

This was part of the consultation exercise and further consultation would be made to a special meeting of this committee on 16 February 2006 when feedback will be received from the three Panels and review of the budget consultation documents.

The Committee was reminded of the series of meetings including the Environment, Customer and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panels when the areas of Environment Services, Planning Services and Revenues and Benefits will be looked at in detail by the respective Panels. These services have been identified by the Audit Commission as they appeared as upper quartile costs in the Value for Money Self Assessment.

The Committee examined issues relating to the savings strategy and growth options as well as the effect of stock transfer on the budget and the Director of Finance responded to the questions raised.

The Committee **AGREED** to note at this stage the draft budget proposals for the 2006/07 financial year.

06.OS.07 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2005/2006 - PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received from the Group Director a progress report of the 2005/06 Capital Programme and outlining the achievements of the Capital Programme Board.

The report identified the proposed additional schemes that had been made to the Programme and the split of the programmes into categories based on the stage of approval of the schemes.

Members focused their attention on the work of the Capital Programme Board made up of management that maintained a strategic oversight of the Capital Programme.

Members expressed concern at the problems being experienced in some areas of the borough, with the Council's refuse and recycling collection service as well as the effects on local residents of the lorry park at the Fleet Street Car Park and the disturbance they receive from lorries starting up at around 5.00am to 6.00am.

The Committee **AGREED** to refer the issue of the Council's refuse and recycling collection service to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the problems of the use of lorries using the Friday Street Car Park to the Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel with the Executive Member invited to attend the respective Panel meeting.

06.OS.08 CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2004 - 2007 (V.9) UPDATE

The Committee received a report of the Group Director on the current position in respect of the delivery of the Corporate Improvement Plan 2004-2007 with an updated plan attached.

The report indicated that the latest version of the Plan had shown good progress being made across a broad range of areas and that many of the planned actions were either completed or on track to be completed.

This was the last update of the Plan in this current format as the new Corporate Strategy was an all embracing document and will include all key action relating to the achievements of the Council's strategic objectives. Once this had been adopted by the Council, progress against this will be reported regularly to this Committee.

The Committee **AGREED** to note the report.

06.OS.09 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and noted the work programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its three associated Panels for the remainder of 2005/06, which illustrated the status of current inquiries, ongoing items and issues currently being monitored.

06.OS.10 GREEN ENERGY ISSUES

The Chairman accepted as urgent, consideration of this item, not included on the agenda in order to consider the reference in a recent press article to a possible decision taken by an Executive Member relating to the Council adopting the use of green energy.

A member of the Committee indicated the press article implied that an Executive Member had recently taken a decision on this issue and he expressed concern that the decision had not been notified to those concerned and had been subject to the call-in procedure.

The Committee **AGREED** that officers examine whether or not an Executive Member decision had been taken on the issue raised in the press article and inform the Chair of this Committee as soon as possible.

Chair