

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 20 February 2007

Present: Councillor Dennis Edgerley (Chair), Councillors Thomas McGowan, Kenneth Ball, Terry Brown, Francis Culshaw, Mrs Marie Gray, Harold Heaton, Greg Morgan, Geoffrey Russell, Mrs Iris Smith and Christopher Snow

Also in attendance: Councillor Eric Bell, Executive Member for Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment

07.OS.12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Thomas Bedford.

07.OS.13 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

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

07.OS.14 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 January 2007 be received as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of the following words in the resolution of Minute 07.OS.09 "requesting that Chorley Borough Council receive a fair share of representation on the Council of Governors".

07.OS.15 EXECUTIVE DECISION "CALL-IN" REQUEST

The Committee received a report of the Director of Customer, Democratic and Legal Services on a 'call-in' request submitted by Councillor K Ball in respect of an Executive decision taken by the Executive Leader.

The decision related to proposals to revise the staffing structure of the Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate.

The 'call-in' request was received on 31 January 2007 requesting the Committee to recommend that the Executive Leader or the Council should reconsider the Executive decision.

In accordance with the 'call-in' procedure, the request was considered by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and it was agreed that the request be referred to this Committee for consideration.

The report set out the objections, the alternative decision/proposal and the case for the alternative.

RESOLVED – That the 'call-in' request be rejected.

07.OS.16 PRESENTATION BY COUNCIL'S RELATIONSHIP OFFICER

The Committee received as part of its inquiry on the Council's performance against the key lines of inquiry to be assessed by the Audit Commission during CPA and Direction of Travel, a presentation from the Council's Relationship Manager (Audit Commission), Mike Thomas. The presentation highlighted:

- The re-categorisation model.
- An assessment was required as to why we required to be re-categorised.
- The background to the Council's CPA inspection in 2003 and the significant improvements that have been made in the way the Council delivers its service.
- Specific areas of weakness had been identified which would require action if the Council's bid for re-categorisation was successful.

07.OS.17 FEEDBACK ON DELIBERATIONS OF THE SUB GROUPS

The Committee received from the Chair of the Capacity/Achievement Sub-Group and the Chair of the Equality and Diversity Sub-Group reports on the current position regarding their deliberation on the key issues of Overview and Scrutiny function and the Equality Standard for Local Governance relating to the CPA.

Significant progress had been made at meetings of these Sub-Groups.

The Capacity/Achievement Sub-Group had looked at the Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan and had received information on the provision of Overview and Scrutiny Training Sessions for Members and Officers aimed at reviewing and updating the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Structure and Toolkit to ensure that it was fit for purpose and in line with best practice.

The Sub-Group had carried out a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis into the Council's current Overview and Scrutiny function and the results would be examined, particularly those areas of weakness and threats to established methods of improvements.

The Equality and Diversity Sub-Groups had looked into Equality and Diversity as an aspect of Comprehensive Performance Assessment with Members made aware of the Council's existing gaps and areas of under performance which may impact upon the Council's performance in any future CPA assessment.

RESOLVED – That the reports be noted.

07.OS.18 PROVISION OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRAINING SESSIONS

The Committee received a report of the Director of Customer, Democratic and Legal Services on the proposal to provide Overview and Scrutiny Training Sessions for Members and Officers by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in June 2007.

The report indicated that following the completion of the Centre for Public Scrutiny Self Assessment Framework for Overview and Scrutiny, an Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan had been produced which had identified two key actions. The training sessions would be based around general Overview and Scrutiny issues, charing Overview and Scrutiny and Financial Strategies.

RESOLVED – That the provision of Overview and Training Sessions for Members and Officers by the Improvement and Development Agency in June 2007, be approved.

07.OS.19 PLANNING SERVICES BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS-DECISIONS ON MAJOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Further to Minute 07.OS.03(2) the Committee received a report of the Director of Development and Regeneration advising on the impact of the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPs) on major planning application decisions.

The report outlined the practices and procedures in dealing with planning applications with limited time to deal with them. The majority of applications are dealt with within 8

weeks but major planning applications are more complex and they have 13 weeks in which to be determined. During that process it may become apparent that further information or amendments necessary before it may be considered acceptable such as requirement under the Habitats Directive. In these circumstances the applicants are advised to withdraw the application or it will be refused on the basis of lack of information or an unacceptable scheme.

The report set out the three BVPIs and how these are reported to the Department of Communities and Local Government and in turn can reflect the amount of Planning Delivery Grant and on the Council's Comprehensive Performance Re-Assessment.

RESOLVED – That the current practices and procedures continue and the report be noted.

07.OS.20 COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT SERVICE PERFORMANCE TOOLKIT

The Committee received a report and a presentation from the Director of Policy and Performance outlining the key messages emerging from the recently published CPA Performance Information Toolkit from the Audit Commission.

The report indicated that those District Councils that felt that they had made significant progress could apply for CPA reassessment and that the authority was currently working on a possible submission date of 10 October 2007. The strength of case for re-categorisation would be the primary driver for determining whether a request for re-assessment was accepted.

The Audit Commission toolkit looked at each of the performance indicators in the CPA Basket in detail, examining individual performance trends and quartile position. This information would be utilised going forward to identify areas of improvement for target setting and to inform resource targeting.

The document produced by the Audit Commission was a powerful tool for us in demonstrating that we were delivering on our commitment to continuous improvement and to show that in terms of service performance we were an excellent Council.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

07.OS.21 EXECUTIVE CABINET - 22 FEBRUARY 2007

No reports on the agenda for the Executive Cabinet meeting held on 22 February 2007 were considered for discussion.

07.OS.22 THIRD QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT, 2006/07 - MONITORING REPORT FOR PERIOD ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2006

The Committee received the third quartile performance management report indicating the Authority's performance in relating to both the Best Value Performance Indicators and the Council's Corporate Key Performance Indicators.

The report indicated the full list of Best Value Performance Indicators that were relevant to this Council and which are collected in accordance with definitions issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The report impacted on all of the Corporate Priorities as the areas of performance covered by the report related to all four of the Council's priorities.

Overall, the performance of key projects continued to be good within the majority of projects performing as planned. Performance against BVPI's show 71% of our indicators are currently meeting targets, a significant improvement on quarter two

(66%) and fewer of our indicators were showing deteriorating performance than in the second quarter (20 as opposed to 22).

The report indicated that the organisation continued to perform well and service performance levels remain high with the Council maintained in a good quartile position. Even though our quartile position remained high our relative position had dropped slightly in this quarter.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

07.OS.23 POLICY AND PERFORMANCE THIRD QUARTER BUSINESS PLAN MONITORING STATEMENT

The Director of Policy and Performance submitted the Business Plan Monitoring Statement relating to her Directorate, identifying the progress made against the key actions and performance indicators for the period 1 October to 31 December 2006.

The report indicated the activities of the Directorate and reported that good progress had been made with further strengthening of the Directorate's approach to performance management with the aim of driving forward real improvements.

Focus remained on evaluating the current position and preparation for a future CPA re-inspection as well as raising the profile of the Council with a view to raising citizen understanding of the work of the Council and of the services it provides with the aim of improving public perception.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

07.OS.24 BUDGET SCRUTINY BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS

The Committee received a report of the Director of Finance that had been submitted to both Scrutiny Panels on the way forward for the budget scrutiny for 2007/08 that had been suggested by the Committee at its meeting on 4 December 2006.

The 2007/08 budget of the Scrutiny Panels would concentrate on the following:

- To receive an update on the high cost areas that had been identified during the 2006/07 budget scrutiny relating to Planning Services, Environment Services and Revenue Benefits.
- To review the 2006 cost profiles prepared by the Audit Commission as compared to those in 2005 for the Planning Services and Environmental Services.
- To review the likely impact of the efficiencies and savings on the Council's ability to deliver the Corporate Plan.
- To review the low cost areas where a small increase in cost may bring a relatively bigger improvement.

The Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel had also examined the areas of recharges relating to ICT and Human Resources which would affect the overall costs.

The Audit Commission had undertaken some benchmarking of costs compared with previous years to provide analysis for the scrutiny review.

The Committee received from both Scrutiny Panels a number of questions and comments which would form part of this year's budget consultation exercise.

RESOLVED – That the undermentioned questions and comments received from the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and be submitted to the Executive Cabinet as part of the 2007/08 budget consultation exercise:

- 1. That the Executive Cabinet be requested to examine the calculation of secondary charge (recharges) as in the case of Planning Services they have resulted in a distorted view of the Directorate's budget.**
- 2. That the Executive Cabinet be asked if it is content with a decrease in design quality leading to a reduction in customer satisfaction as a result of the proposal to delete the post of Urban Designer in the Development and Regeneration Directorate.**
- 3. That the Executive Cabinet be asked if the reduction in the cost of the Neighbourhood Wardens Team of £228,000 will have an impact on the service and provide a lower level of service delivery.**
- 4. That the Executive Cabinet be asked if the savings made and the introduction of charges for all pest control services will have a benefit to rodent control.**
- 5. What will be the impact of disestablishment of one of the Executive Director posts, in particular, relating to the important work on Equality and Diversity?**
- 6. How will the reduction of ICT Helpdesk support affect Members? How and what will be different?**
- 7. A number of proposals include outsourcing functions (Health and Safety and Property). How will these arrangements work and what will be the impact on the day-to-day operation of services?**
- 8. Satisfaction with some services appears low. Is this being measured regularly and if not, how can we monitor this and take appropriate action?**
- 9. What can be done to collect information on the costs of the Central and Democratic Core and Revenues administration to enable comparison in the future?**
- 10. How will the impact on Members of the removal of the Yearbook and Diary be mitigated?**

07.OS.25 REVENUE BUDGET 2006/07 - MONITORING

The Committee received and considered a report of the Director of Finance setting out the current financial position of the Council compared against the budgets and efficiency savings targets it had set itself for 2006/07 for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

The report confirmed an improved position in respect of the General Fund with the projected outturn forecast an overspend of just £12,000 compared to the figure of £67,000 reported at the last monitoring report. The report showed the areas of significant improvements since the last monitoring report.

Progress continued to be made towards the Corporate Savings Targets with £338,000 savings from management of the establishment and efficiency savings with further savings possible as the year progresses.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

07.OS.26 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2006/07 - MONITORING

The Committee considered a joint report of the Executive Director for Corporate and Customer and the Director of Finance on the committed Capital Programme for 2007/08 to 2009/10 which listed the Category C bids for inclusion in the programme, together with a number of recommendations from the Corporate Improvement Board which the Executive Cabinet would have to consider.

The report indicated that the Board was continuing to make good progress ensuring a more controlled and successful delivery of the programme. The latest Capital Programme forecast for 2006/07 showed an increase in the programme of £2,928,060 to £13,767,340 with slippage from 2006/07 of £2,402,730 to be added to the approved Capital Programme for 2007/08 to 2009/10.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

07.OS.27 TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2007/08

The Committee received a report of the Director of Customer, Democratic and Legal Services which included the draft schedule of dates for meetings to be held during the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED – That the draft schedule of dates for meetings to be held during the 2007/08 Municipal Year be endorsed.

07.OS.28 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received the Council's Forward Plan setting out details of the key executive decisions expected to be taken between 1 March 2007 and 30 June 2007.

Members indicated that one area for possible examination by the Scrutiny Panels in the future would be the Strategic Housing function.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

07.OS.29 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee were presented with the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2006/07.

The programme included the envisaged timescales for the ongoing scrutiny inquiries and the planned details of the periodic monitoring of past inquiries.

The programme would shortly be revised to incorporate the stages and dates of the inquiries.

Chair