

Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 8 November 2005

Present: Councillor M Perks (Chair) and Councillors Brownlee, F Culshaw, G Morgan and A Whittaker

05.COM.33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bedford, Birchall, Mrs M Gray and Mrs I Smith.

05.COM.34 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal or prejudicial interest by any of the Members in any of the agenda items.

05.COM.35 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 4 October 2005 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

05.COM.36 BUSINESS PLANS, 2005/06 - SECOND QUARTER UPDATES

The Panel received and considered the Business Plan monitoring statements for the second quarter period ending on 30 September 2005 in respect of the services and functions falling within the remit of the Panel.

(a) Development and Regeneration Unit

The Head of Development and Regeneration submitted the first Business Plan monitoring statement for the new merged Development and Regeneration Unit for the quarter period up to 30 September 2005.

The statistical information revealed that the Unit was exceeding each of its monthly development control performance targets and that only the year to date performance target on sickness absence had not been reached.

The report also indicated that the new Unit's forecast financial outturn was likely to be within the allocated cash budget. In addition, the Chief Officer highlighted a number of the major service developments and projects which were currently being pursued within the Units.

(b) Leisure and Cultural Services Unit

The Head of Leisure and Cultural Services presented his Unit's Business Plan monitoring statement for the quarter period up to 30 September 2005.

The Chief Officer pointed out that three of the Unit's four key performance indicators (KPIs) to be measured on a monthly basis were new composite indicators. While data in respect of the KPIs had been collected up to the end of September, the appropriate target would be set in the third quarter period in order to ensure that statistics were collected on a consistent and meaningful basis. The KPI relating to the annual survey of satisfaction would be reported later in the year.

The report also revealed that the Unit's forecast cash outturn for the financial year was likely to be contained within its allocated budget, and highlighted the major projects with which the Unit was currently engaged.

(c) Future Monitoring Reports

The Panel **AGREED** that future Business Plan monitoring reports should contain

- (i) only one simplified schedule showing information on the respective Unit's key performance indicators, revealing the elements of the service which were either meeting, exceeding or failing to reach their respective targets;
- (ii) a brief summary of the services being measured with a short explanation of the appropriate KPI statistic and its relevance, if appropriate, to Government grant aid; and
- (iii) a brief reference to the Unit's progress on its major tasks.

05.COM.37 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE COUNCIL'S DECISION MAKING PROCESS - SCRUTINY INQUIRY

(a) **Revision of Project Outline (Scoping document)**

The Panel was advised that, at its meeting on 8 September 2005, following its consideration of the Audit Commission's report of its Best Value Inspection on the Council's approach to Customer Access and Focus, the Executive Cabinet had agreed to request this Panel to 'analyse what approach to Area Forums would be best for the Borough based on a clear assessment of its effectiveness of current local groups and the best way to integrate them' as part of the present scrutiny inquiry into public participation in the Council's decision making process.

The Panel accepted the logic of the request, which, if incorporated into the Project Outline document, would allow the Panel to take account of the experience and perceived success or otherwise of the planned Area Forum pilot schemes to be established in three areas of the Borough.

It was **AGREED** that the Project Outline (Scoping) Document for the Panel's Public Participation scrutiny inquiry be revised to incorporate the following additional element to the Inquiry's terms of reference:

'To analyse what approach to Area Forums would be best for the Borough based on a clear assessment of the effectiveness of current local groups and the best way to integrate them.'

(b) **Reports on Sub-Group' Visits**

The Panel at its meeting on 4 October, had agreed arrangements for identified members of the Area Forums/Committees Sub-Group and the Public Speaking/Questions Sub-Group to attend a number of meetings in surrounding Lancashire Districts as part of the Panel's collation of evidence for the Public Participation inquiry.

At the instigation of the Chairman, the Members who were able to attend the selected meetings were invited to report their findings on the visits and comment on the perceived effectiveness of the arrangements adopted by the respective Authorities. In response, the following comments were proffered by the Members:

(i) Area Forums/Committees Sub-Group

- The Chairman (Councillor Perks) and Councillors Bedford, Brownlee and Morgan had attended Hyndburn Borough Council's Great Harwood Area Council on 11 October 2005.

A note on the Members' attendance at the Area Council was presented by Councillor Brownlee, who had been impressed with the organisation and operation of the Area Council, the attendance figures (approximately 70), the topics discussed and level of debate.

Councillor Brownlee considered that it would be beneficial for the Sub-Group to observe an Area Forum body whose remit encompassed a Parish area to judge its relationship with the Parish Council.

- The Sub-Group had been unable to be represented at either Pendle Borough Council's Colne Area Committee on 13 October or South Ribble Borough Council's Bamber Bridge Area Committee on 31 October.

(ii) Public Speaking/Questions Sub-Group

- The Chairman (Councillor Perks) and Councillors Mrs M Gray and Mrs I Smith had attended South Ribble Borough Council's Cabinet meeting on 12 October 2005.

A note highlighting the procedures and protocols adopted for the organisation and conduct of the meeting; issues raised at a later discussion with five Cabinet Members and Officers; and issues related to Area Committees was presented to the Panel.

The Chairman indicated how the operational arrangements, conduct procedure rules and constructive debates had impressed the visiting members. The Members had noted, in particular, the perceived benefit of the fact that the public had been prior consulted on a number of issues by way of previous discussions at Area Committees.

- The Chairman (Councillor Perks) and Councillor Culshaw had attended Ribble Valley Borough Council's Planning Committee on 27 October 2005.

One person representing the proposers and opposers of planning applications was each allowed to address the Committee for 3 minutes, provided 24 hours notice had been given.

The Members had been impressed with the layout and pleasant, comfortable ambience of the meeting venue.

- Councillors Culshaw and Mrs M Gray had attended Hydburn Borough Council's Planning Committee on 2 November 2005.

A time limit of 10 minutes was imposed for the presentations made at the meeting.

The Committee allowed one person representing the proposers and opposers of most planning applications to each address the Councillors for 3 minutes, with two persons being allowed to speak on major applications.

- The Panel noted that both Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Councils adopted the practice of allowing every planning application in respect of which objections were lodged to be presented to its Planning Committee for determination.

The Members considered that, should the Council be recommended to adopt a system to allow members of the public to speak at the Development Control Committee, it would be important to (i) stipulate a time limit for speaking; (ii) consider means of notifying applicants whenever objectors indicate a wish to address the Committee in order to allow them the same facility; and (iii) consider means of dealing with Parish Council representations.

(c) Future Visits

At the request of the Chairman, a list detailing a number of forthcoming meetings of neighbouring Authorities' Area Forums/Committees, including bodies that operated in Parish areas, was circulated at the meeting.

In addition, the Panel considered that it would be beneficial to observe another Authority's Council meeting and a Planning Committee meeting of a neighbouring Authority that had adopted a delegation scheme similar to the scheme operated in Chorley.

It was **AGREED**:

(1) That members of the Area Forums/Committees Working Group, together with Councillor Whittaker, be e-mailed with the circulated list of the impending Area Forum bodies to be held in the Pendle, South Ribble and Rossendale Districts and requested to notify the Democratic Services Section as soon as possible of the dates on which they will be available so that a timetable of further visits can be compiled with the agreement of the Chairman and arrangements made for the selected visits.

(2) That arrangements be made for the Public Speaking/Questions Sub-Group to visit an early meeting of West Lancashire District Council's Planning Committee.

05.COM.38 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2005/06

The Panel received, for information, the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2005/06, which had been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its last meeting.

The programme included the envisaged timescales for the on-going scrutiny inquiries and the planned dates for the periodic monitoring of past inquiries.

Chair