

Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday, 24th July, 2007.

Present: Cllr Robert Gibson (Chairman), Cllr Beall (Vice Cllr Coleman), Cllr Mrs Ann Cains, Cllr Dick Cains, Cllr Mick Eddy, , Cllr David Harrington, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Mrs Maureen Rigg, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Mrs Allison Trainer, Cllr William Woodhead

Officers: M. Waggott, J. Trainer, M. Henderson (LD); H. Dean (PP); B. Simpson (R)

Also in attendance: None

Apologies: were submitted on behalf of Cllrs Coleman, Mrs Fletcher, Narroway, Nesbitt, Mrs O'Donnell, Smith and Womphrey

EXC Declarations of Interest

12/07

Councillor Mrs Cains declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in item 5 entitled 'Financial Position Update' as she was a school governor of Redbrook Primary.

EXC Minutes For Signing

13/07

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30th May 2007 were signed by the Chairman.

EXC Draft Minutes

14/07

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th June 2007 were confirmed as correct record.

EXC Performance Update

15/07

Members considered a report on 2006/2007 year end performance. As previously requested the Committee was also provided with a document detailing Corporate Basket indicators that were maintaining or declining in performance.

Members discussed the contents of the report and specifically:-

- Commendations and Complaints in Social Services and Tristar Homes were the main areas of complaints. Across the Council as a whole Complaints had gone down and Commendations had increased.
- An improvement in the number of Adults and Older people in receipt of direct payment, which the Committee commended.
- Issues surrounding the target of 7 days for the delivery of Equipment and Adaptations. Members queried how the 7 days were calculated i.e. did officers include the day equipment was ordered or delivered, were weekends, bank holidays included in the calculation. It was noted that this was critical in terms of whether the Council met or failed to meet this target. Officers agreed to investigate and inform Members of how the calculation was made.

- Recent flooding of parts of the country and how this was very likely to detrimentally affect the Council's performance relating to the rectification of street lighting faults.
- Indicators relating to the number of Children and Young People who had ceased to be looked after during 2006. Members drew attention to the fact that the indicator had exceeded its target whereas the financial report had indicated underspend in this area because of problems with delayed placements. Officers would look into this.
- Gershon Quality Checks – these were indicators that were monitored in an attempt to establish whether efficiency savings made had caused drops in performance. Members noted that drops in performance had been recorded in 3 areas i.e. Child Protection, Pupil Attendance and Disabled Access. These areas were being monitored, however it was not considered that the drop in performance had a direct link with efficiency savings.
- Indicators relating to Young Offenders re offending – Members queried what influence the Council could realistically exert to influence this indicator. It was explained that the Council did work with young offenders. Numbers of people involved were small and therefore the indicator was very easily affected.

Members noted that further information, referred to in the report, was available from the Head of Policy and Performance or via the Council's Web Site.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and officers feedback any additional information requested.

EXC **Financial Performance Update**
16/07

Members considered a report that presented information on final outturn, the medium financial position and raised developments in Local Government Finance which may impact on the 2008/2009 Settlement.

It was explained that the Statements of Accounts had been approved by Audit Committee on 28th June. Members noted that a full copy of the Statement of Accounts and a summary Statement were available in the Members' Library and on the Council's Website, for information.

Members were provided with details of key movements within the Medium Term Financial Plan. It was noted that with regard to Fostering Allowance/Adoption there was an underspend of £114,000 caused by delayed commencement of placements. Members felt this was an important area and were concerned that an underspend existed. It was suggested that this was an issue that the Children and Young People's Select Committee may wish to consider as part of its Stage 2 review of Corporate Parenting and interview relevant officers. It was agreed that this issue would be highlighted with the Children and Young People Select Committee.

Members noted that it was likely that Gershon savings would be raised to 3% (all cash releasing). It was explained that this would be difficult to achieve, as it needed to be made on services that already exceeded earlier Government target of 2.5% (half cash releasing). The Committee was concerned at the

potential affect this would have on Services' Budgets. It was noted that 3% equated to approximately 4.5 million based on outturn. Added to this it was anticipated that the Local Government Financial Settlement would continue to reduce.

Members queried where the Council was in terms of the introduction of Single Status. It was explained that a report would be presented to Cabinet, at the end of August that would provide Members with some firm news on the current position and way forward.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The report be noted.
2. Issues relating to the underspend on the Fostering Allowance/Adoption budget be highlighted with the Children and Young People Select Committee.

**EXC
17/07** **Forward Plan**

Members discussed the latest version of the Forward Plan.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

**EXC
18/07** **Review of Corporate Parenting**

Members were provided with a draft copy of the Select Committee's Report on Corporate Parenting, which would be presented to Cabinet on 2nd August 2007.

Members discussed the report and endorsed its recommendations.

Reference was made to recommendation No 4, 'at the first governing body meeting of each school year all school governing bodies should sign up to the Council pledge accepting their corporate parenting role. Members noted that Cabinet had no powers to require compliance with this recommendation, it was therefore important that it was highlighted with governing bodies and they be invited to sign up to the pledge. It was suggested that this could be achieved, in part, by a short report being taken to meetings school governing bodies at the start of a school year.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**EXC
19/07** **Review Updates by Chairman**

Members considered updates on current reviews: -

Arts, Leisure and Culture – River Based Lettings

Members were reminded that this review related to a 13 plus mile stretch of the river, stretching from Low Worsall to Newport Bridge. It was explained that Press Releases was being produced. An important aspect of the review would be to dispel any negative views of the river. This was one of the best stretches of river in the country and lent itself to many activities that could not be undertaken on other stretches of water. It was home to salmon and was visited by seals. In addition it was anticipated that the river would be a venue for training in certain

waterbased events ahead of and during the 2012 Olympics. Reference was made to large amounts of floating rubbish in the area surrounding the Kellington and the Castlegate Quay. It was indicated that the Council's contact at British Waterways would be made aware of this.

Housing and Community Safety – Neighbourhood Enforcement Service

The Committee was meeting on 26th July 2007 and would consider a presentation from the Security Service Manager. Members were informed that staff discussion and Viewpoint focus groups were to be planned for the month of August.

Environment – Management of Memorials

It was explained that a site visit, to Durham Lane Cemetery, had been organised for Members to view a topple test and the press had been invited to attend. A meeting was planned for week commencing 27th July to take evidence. The sensitive nature of this review was reiterated.

Adults Services and Health

It was explained that the Select Committee had started its review of Alcohol Services and had received an overview from invited witnesses including, the Director of Public Health. The Select Committee would look at gaps in service with a view to identifying ways of addressing them and informing the public of what levels of support were available. Possible outcomes would be, improved publicity and reduction in incidence. The Committee would need to stay focused, as it aimed to report to Cabinet in December in order to feed into financial planning for 2008/2009 should any future investment plans be identified during the review.

Regeneration

Noted that the Committee was gathering information and the Committee's next meeting would receive evidence from Government Office North East, Job Centre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council. Members discussed issues relating to Remploy and it was noted that an update on the current position would be fed into the review.

RESOLVED that the updates be noted.

EXC 20/07 Other Issues

Members noted that there were no reports to come to the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 21st August 2007 and agreed that it be cancelled. It was explained that a meeting to consider issues surrounding Community Calls for Action would be delivered at the end of September. A Member had requested that consideration be given to a Select Committee undertaking a review of Taxis. Further specific details were required.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

