

## **BEST VALUE SCRUTINY PANEL**

**1<sup>st</sup> March 2005 at 6 p.m.**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Harris (Chair), Councillors Dolling, Johnston, Mead and Roden.

### **12 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)**

An apology for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor McKenzie.

### **13 MINUTES (REF: 2.1)**

**Resolved:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2005 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **14 PRESS RELEASES ISSUED BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (REF: 5.1)**

The Chair referred to a Press Release which had been issued following the meeting of the Panel held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2005, and suggested, that in light of the manner in which this had been handled, the issue of press releases by Scrutiny Committees on matters considered to be of significant public interest should be referred to the Scrutiny Board for consideration.

The Director of Scrutiny explained that, following the meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2005 he had, at the Chair's request, prepared a Draft Press Release on the outcomes of that meeting. The draft Press Release had been very frank about the issues which had been discussed at the meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> February.

The Draft Press Release had been submitted to the Council's Communications Team for them to prepare a news release. The finalised version of the Press Release was then issued but the Chair felt that it had not fully reflected the issues discussed at the Panel meeting.

The Chair had subsequently discussed this matter with the Chief Executive and felt that, in accordance with Part 16 of the Council's Constitution, Scrutiny Committees should be free to issue Press Releases on the recommendations arising from their meetings, where it was felt to be in the public interest to do so. He felt that the matter should be referred to the Scrutiny Board for consideration.

**Resolved:** That the Scrutiny Board be requested to concur that Scrutiny Committees should be free to issue press releases on the recommendations arising from their meetings where it was considered to be in the public interest to do so, in accordance with Part 16 of the Council's constitution.

**15 CORPORATE DIRECTORS MANAGEMENT TEAM UPDATE REPORT (REF: 7.1)**

The Director of Scrutiny presented the CDMT Update Report and stated that the Improvement Plan would be reviewed in May.

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

**16 REGENERATION SERVICE BEST VALUE REVIEW – SCOPING AND PROJECT PLANNING (REF: 7.2)**

The Acting Head of Regeneration presented the Proposed Scope and Project Plan for the Regeneration Service Best Value Review. She explained that as a service, Regeneration provided a broad range of activities (indicated in the report) including encouraging businesses and involvement with the community and voluntary sectors. The key issues for the review were shown as key themes in the report. Two of the issues to be challenged as part of the review were (a) what the role of the service should be in the longer term and (b) should the service deliver more projects itself.

The Project Team was being led by the UK Funded Programmes Manager and staff were supportive. The project plan and timescale had been produced and the next stage of the review was due to be carried out in August and September.

A supplementary sheet showing the comments of Corporate Directors Management Team (CDMT) on the scope of the review was circulated. The suggestion from CDMT that someone from outside the Department be brought on to the Project Team was drawn to the Panel's attention.

A Member referred to Table 1 of the report and asked what the higher priorities were for the service and which tasks would be worked on first.

The Acting Head of Regeneration replied that it was proposed that the three main themes of Environment, Economy and Deprivation become much more of a focus of priority. For Environment it was aimed to deliver projects as now. For Economy it was planned to generate jobs and businesses and support entrepreneurs and innovative businesses. The Butterfield Innovation Centre was a key project which the service was leading on and would be a priority in 2005. In terms of deprivation whilst Objective 2 and Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) were still available it was planned to continue to engage the community in accessing that money.

A Member pointed out that there must have been the need for a lot of consultation between Departments of the Council. He felt that liaison between Departments was sometimes patchy and asked whether or not any problems in obtaining responses from other Council Departments had been experienced.

The Acting Head of Regeneration stated she had not experienced any problems with liaison between the different Council departments and that information was submitted regularly to CDMT where issues such as lack of responses could be raised.

The Chair shared the concern about priority setting and suggested that the scoping document could include looking at a framework to determine priorities and order of work. This could be used to assist in determining future priorities also. He also suggested that the scoping include how the framework could be used to determine priorities if funding was reduced or show how reduced funding would affect the work of the service.

A Member discussed the role of the Regeneration Services in assisting departments in obtaining external funding for projects.

The Acting Head of Regeneration indicated that at present the service operated as a resource for the Council in obtaining funding. It could be that the service should become more business minded and seek recompense for work carried out on other departments' behalf. It could also be an option that resources were bought into the Regeneration service to deliver projects rather than just co-ordinating and accessing external funding.

The Chair suggested that the scoping report also look at all options for alternative ways of operating for the Regeneration Service, from accessing and co-ordinating all funding at one end to fully charging for the services provided.

**Resolved:** (i) That the proposed scope and project plan for the Regeneration Services Best Value Review attached at Appendix A to the Acting Head of Regeneration report (Ref: 7.2), be approved subject to:

- (a) the inclusion of the comments of the Corporate Directors Management Team (CDMT) as set out in the supplementary paper circulated at the meeting.
- (b) the inclusion of a framework for :
  - assessing and determining priorities and order of work
  - determining priorities if funding was reduced
  - showing how reduced funding would affect the work of the service.
- (c) the inclusion of exploring options for alternative ways of operating for the Regeneration Service to include all options from providing a service to Departments to attract funding to fully charging Departments for that service.

(ii) That the Acting Head of Regeneration circulate the revised Project Plan and Scoping Report to all Members of the Panel.

## **17 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FAMILY QUARTILE DATA 2003-04 (REF: 7.3)**

The Head of Policy and Performance presented to the Panel the Family Group quartile for each Best Value Performance Indicator. This provided the annual comparison of indicators and showed where the Authority had declined and where it had improved compared with other authorities.

The Chair asked specifically what the Council had declined in.

The Head of Policy and Performance replied that there had been deterioration in the speed and accuracy with which housing benefit claims had been dealt with and in the level of satisfaction in how claims were handled. The percentage of planning applications determined on time to meet Government deadlines, and the percentage of planning applicants satisfied with the service received had deteriorated. The Council was also struggling to achieve significant improvement for educational attainment.

In relation to public satisfaction with the performance of the Council, Members asked if 'like for like' data was being measured in order to provide an accurate portrayal. The Head of Policy & Performance indicated that the statistical validity of the opinion survey data was checked and a confidence interval of about 3% was considered reasonable. The raw data might be different to last time (different people would have been asked this time) but the gap in satisfaction rates between this survey and the last time it had been conducted was large enough to indicate there had been a genuine decline in public satisfaction with the performance of the Council.

A Member asked if data could be compared through league tables so we could check how we had performed against other authorities. There had previously been a list showing how we compared to other similar authorities.

The Head of Policy and Performance indicated that a list of comparator authorities could be included next time. In response to a further question the Head of Policy and Performance indicated that a list showing the ranking of the Council compared to others could be produced but suggested this not be provided for services with a low number of indicators, for example services with less than 5 indicators.

The Chair indicated that as Portfolio Holder he had used the criteria of (a) those services which had deteriorated and (b) those services within the lower quartile who needed to work harder to move up, to select the areas to monitor and seek future improvement. He suggested that the Panel use this as the method of selecting indicators to monitor and that the Executive be recommended to use a similar process.

In relation to deteriorating performance, it was accepted that the data could be misleading, for example if there were no comparative figures from the

previous three year period or where raw data had been adjusted in the past but not in the latest figures used.

The Chair suggested that the Head of Policy and Performance prepare a table showing those indicators which showed a genuine deterioration in performance and those which were in the lower quartile, to be signed off by the Chair. He suggested that the Executive be requested to:

- (a) note that the Best Value Scrutiny Panel would be monitoring these during 2005/06
- (b) consider addressing performance improvement in these services and
- (c) consider applying the same criteria as the Panel in choosing which services should be monitored during the year namely those genuinely deteriorating services and those services which fall into the lower quartile of performance as compared with other authorities in the family group.

The Chair further suggested that the information be reported back to the next meeting of the Panel.

A Member enquired about some descriptions which were confusing, for example support given by the Council to organisations which provide legal advice.

The Head of Policy and Performance explained the definition of the indicator, and that performance had not really deteriorated; it was simply that the source of some of the funding supplied had switched from the Council to the airport company.

A Member enquired about people living in temporary housing who are awaiting housing benefits. As private landlords are not prepared to allow their rents to go into arrears the Council will have been responsible for paying the rent for these properties until the benefits are paid. It was confirmed that the Council had paid the rent to private landlords while homeless people were kept waiting for their benefits to be assessed.

**Resolved:** (i) That the Head of Policy and Performance prepare and agree with the Chair of the Panel a list of those indicators which showed a genuine deterioration in service areas (shown by a down arrow) and those indicators which had not moved out of the lower quartile.

(ii) That the list referred to in the above recommendation (i) above be submitted to the Executive and the Executive be requested to:-

- (a) note that the Best Value Scrutiny Panel would be monitoring these during 2005/06

- (b) consider addressing performance improvement in these services and
- (c) consider applying the same criteria as the Panel in choosing which services should be monitored during the year namely those genuinely deteriorating services and those services which fall into the lower quartile of performance as compared with other authorities in the family group.

(iii) The Head of Policy and Performance submit the list submitted to the Executive to a future meeting of the Panel.

## **18 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (REF 7.4)**

The Director of Scrutiny referred to the Panel's Work Programme. He indicated that the programme would be updated in by including the Panel dates for the next municipal year and the key dates for Best Value Reviews.

The Panel was also reminded that the work programme would need to be updated to include the outcomes of the meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2005.

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

## **19 BEST VALUE REVIEW OF ENGINEERING AND TRANSPORT – VISION (REF: 7.5)**

The Head of Engineering and Transportation presented his report and updated the Panel on progress of the Engineering and Transportation Best Value Review and sought approval to the draft Stage 2 Vision report.

The Panel was advised that progress had been good so far, that the review was on target and it was hoped to complete in the 26 week target (end of March/beginning of April 2005). All areas of the Division are covered by the review with the exception of highway maintenance and the passenger transport unit.

The Division was now working on Stage 3 of the Review. The draft Stage 2 (Vision) report has been before Corporate Directors Management Team (CDMT) who were pleased with the work and had made some suggestions around market testing, seeking out best working practice etc. This is to be discussed further with the Head of Policy and Performance and the Corporate Procurement Manager.

The draft Stage 2 (Vision) report was now before the Panel. The key issues were summarised at Paragraph 13 of the report to the Panel and discussed in detail in Section 5 of the review document.

Members were pleased to see a full and frank account, both positive and negative, of the issues around consultation on traffic schemes in particular in relation to Dallow Road and the Guildford Street Traffic Trial. A Member stated that he had received comments from his constituents that they had thought the issues had not been dealt with properly.

A Member acknowledged that staff vacancies of up to 50% within the Division had contributed to the difficulties, as identified on Appendix G.

It was suggested these issues needed to be raised with Executive (with reference to Appendix G) so that they were made aware of the problems and had the opportunity of addressing the issues of concern so that a repeat of the problem could be avoided for the future. It was also felt that whilst there was a lesson to be learned, consideration should be given to what could be done to mitigate the worst of the effects caused.

The Head of Engineering and Transportation advised that delays had occurred though lack of resources although it was recognised that things could have been improved and that this would be included in the improvement plan for the Division. He also commented that there was a difference between notification and consultation. Notifications had taken place and people were told what was happening. Access needs had been taken into account.

A Member asked what consultation had taken place on the movement of the bus stops to Silver Street as this did not seem to be a very good location for people, particularly regarding access from the Arndale shopping centre for people with disabilities and parents of young children.

The Head of Engineering & Transportation advised that he had consulted the Disability Advisory Forum and the Bus Company. Whilst there had been initial resistance, when the objective of the changes was explained, consultees had been happier about the proposals after details were clarified. It was suggested that bus passengers should have been consulted and that the matter should have been addressed at the Area Committees.

The Panel was advised that Bus Stops would be closer to the Arndale Centre than under the current arrangements.

The Chair pointed out that the main issue was the traffic flow, especially the congestion in Telford Way and how people would negotiate driving to the north of side of Luton, where he felt congestion would occur. He would like to have seen consultation on this.

The Head of Engineering and Transportation advised that the town centre operated at full capacity at peak hours and had a tendency to become very congested.

**Resolved:** (i) That the report be noted and officers thanked for the robustness of the report.

(ii) That the progress being made on the Engineering and Transportation Best Value Review be noted.

(iii) That the concerns raised at the meeting in particular the issues of lack of consultation on major traffic schemes, be recorded.

(iv) That the Draft Stage 2 Vision report be approved.

(v) That the Executive be requested:

- (a) to acknowledge the concerns of the Panel about the lack of consultation on major traffic schemes and to learn this lesson for the future in advance of the Best Value Improvement Plan,
- (b) to consider how the worst effects of the failure to consult effectively could be mitigated,
- (c) to consider the circumstances described in Appendix G to the head of Transportation and Engineering's report (Ref: 7.4)

(vi) That the Head of Engineering and Transportation write to the Chair of the Panel to answer his question about access to the Town Hall's basement car park at Gordon Street.

**(Note: The meeting ended at 8.10 pm).**