

SCRUTINY BOARD (CENTRAL AND CORPORATE)

MONDAY, 7TH JULY, 2008

PRESENT: Councillor M Dobson in the Chair

Councillors B Atha, J Bale, S Bentley,
B Chastney, J Dowson, P Ewens,
M Hamilton, G Latty, B Selby and
P Wadsworth

7 Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of personal interests were made:-

Councillor M Dobson – Agenda Item 7 – Scrutiny of the Budget - and Agenda Item 8 – ALMO's – Meeting the Equality Standard and Preparing for Inspection (Minute Nos 11 and 12 refer) – in his capacity as a member of the Aire Valley Homes Outer SE Area Panel;

Councillor J Dowson - Agenda Item 7 – Scrutiny of the Budget - and Agenda Item 8 – ALMO's – Meeting the Equality Standard and Preparing for Inspection (Minute Nos 11 and 12 refer) – in her capacity as a member of the Leeds East/North East Homes Inner NE Area Panel;

Councillor G Latty - Agenda Item 7 – Scrutiny of the Budget - and Agenda Item 8 – ALMO's – Meeting the Equality Standard and Preparing for Inspection (Minute Nos 11 and 12 refer) – in his capacity as a member of the Leeds West/ North West Homes Outer NW Area Panel.

(NB See also later Minute No 11).

8 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P Davey and A Lowe.

9 Minutes - 9th June 2008

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th June 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

10 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Work Programme 2008/09 – Sources of Work and Establishing the Board's Priorities (Minute No 4 refers).

In response to a query by Councillor Atha, Doug Meeson, Chief Officer (Financial Management) stated that Councillor Atha would shortly be receiving the information he requested at the last meeting, relating to the total amount of resources the Council received from Central Government, and in relation to which services, and for a breakdown of Council expenditure on a Ward by Ward and service by service basis. It was agreed that all Board Members should receive this information, and that the Director of Resources should consider circulating it to all Members of Council.

The Chair reported that he had recently met with Nicole Jackson, Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) to discuss likely Terms of Reference for the Board's possible Inquiry into elections/electoral registration, once the Council's Electoral Working Group had reviewed progress, and these would be reported to the Board in due course.

(N.B. Councillor Bale, joined the meeting at 10.08 am, during the course of this item).

11 Scrutiny of the Budget - Performance Outturn 2007/08

Further to Minute No 5, 9th June 2008, the Board considered the Director of Resources' recent report to the Executive Board on 11th June 2008 relating to the financial performance outturn figures for 2007/08.

Doug Meeson, Chief Officer (Financial Management), was present at the meeting and responded to Members' queries and comments. In brief summary, the main points of discussion were:-

- The underlying reasons behind overspends and underspends on various services;
- The rationale behind and reasons for the levels of reserves in respect of the ALMO's and Education Leeds;
- The nature of the legal relationship, degrees of control and liability levels between the Council and the ALMO's and Education Leeds;
- The effect of the downturn in the economy and the Stock Market on the Council, particularly in terms of the pension fund, and the Council's future pension liabilities;
- Council Tax collection statistics, the scope for possible incremental improvements at this high level of collection/performance, and advice given to taxpayers relating to benefit entitlements;
- Commercial services difficulties, previously relating to property maintenance and more recently related to the school meals service;
- Savings in staffing costs e.g. community safety, and whether this posed a risk in terms of increased stress on staff and sickness absence;
- The costs to the Council of leasing and renting office space, and whether better use could be made of Council-owned property.

In response to various queries, Mr Meeson undertook to circulate details of staffing costs on a Departmental basis, including details of the costs of using agency staff, and also details of buildings costs, including the rationale regarding why the Council leased or rented office space.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be received and noted, and Mr Meeson be thanked for the manner in which he responded to Members queries and comments;
- (b) That the Board agrees to conduct an Inquiry into the legal relationship between the Council and the ALMO's and Education Leeds, including the Council's role and powers as Strategic Landlord, receiving evidence from those organisations as well as the Council's officers;
- (c) That the Board also looks at the current levels of ALMO Reserves and the rationale and reasons behind current levels;
- (d) That the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development organises Working Group meetings to explore these issues and draft Inquiry Terms of Reference, and further reports be submitted to the September meeting.

(N.B. Councillor Wadsworth joined the meeting at 10.25 am, during the discussion of this item and declared a personal interest in this item and Agenda Item 8 – ALMO's – Meeting the Equality Standard and Preparing for Inspection (Minute No 12 refers) in his capacity as a Director of East/North East Leeds Homes ALMO).

12 Report of Scrutiny Board Working Group - ALMOs - Meeting the Equality Standard and Preparing for Inspection

The Board considered the report and recommendations arising from the meeting of its ALMO's Working Group held on 24th June 2008.

RESOLVED – That the findings and recommendations of the Working Group be approved and be forwarded to the ALMO's for their information/comment as appropriate.

13 Work Programme 2008/09 and Inquiry Draft Terms of Reference

Further to Minute No 5, 9th June 2008, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report regarding the Board's draft work programme 2008/09, draft Terms of Reference for proposed Inquiries into sickness absence management and the outsourcing of services and attaching copies of the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 11th June 2008 and an

extract from the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st July to 31st October 2008.

It was agreed that the Working Party meetings referred to in Minute No 11 could take place if necessary during August, in order to report back to the September Board meeting.

It was agreed that the proposed Inquiry into the Council's use of consultants should be a separate Inquiry to the one on outsourcing, and that the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development, in consultation with the Chair, should draft proposed Terms of Reference for reporting back to the September meeting.

In respect of the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into sickness absence management, it was agreed that the Board should receive evidence relating to internal team variations in performance, to see if there were lessons to be learnt, as well as from a private sector HR Manager and an OH provider.

With regard to the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into outsourcing, it was agreed that these needed to be broadened to encompass 'outsourcing', 'commissioning' and 'procurement of services', and that reference also needed to be included to the training of staff drawing up contracts, the proper level of contract monitoring and means of incorporating in contracts the Council's core values in terms of issues such as equality, diversity, H & S, staff training and retention. It was accepted that in order to assess this, the Board might need to access and assess existing contracts, minus details of a financially confidential nature. The Board would also wish to receive evidence from private contractor(s).

RESOLVED – That subject to the above comments, and any other changes which may be necessary as a result of today's meeting, the report be received and noted and the work programme be approved.

14 Dates and Times of Future Meetings

Monday 8th* September 2008, at 14.00 (Pre-meeting at 13.30)

Monday 6th October 2008

Monday 3rd November 2008

Monday 1st December 2008

Monday 5th January 2009

Monday 2nd January 2009

Monday 2nd March 2009

Monday 6th April 2009

All except * at 10.00 am (pre-meetings at 9.30 am)

*Please note change of date and time for this meeting from original schedule

