

SCRUTINY BOARD (RESOURCES AND COUNCIL SERVICES)

MONDAY, 5TH SEPTEMBER, 2011

PRESENT: Councillor P Grahame in the Chair

Councillors S Bentley, A Blackburn,
J L Carter, B Chastney, R Grahame,
J Hardy, A Khan, A Lowe, C Macniven and
R Wood

17 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed all in attendance to the September meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Resources and Council Services) and invited those present to introduce themselves.

18 Late Items

The Chair admitted to the agenda as supplementary information, a copy of the report in relation to financial health monitoring 2011/12 – month 4. The report was only being considered by Executive Board on 7th September 2011, and was therefore not available at the time of agenda despatch. (Minute No. 22 refers)

19 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Ron Grahame declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 7, Financial Health Monitoring 2011/12 – First quarter report, in his capacity as a Director of East North East Homes ALMO, and as a Member of the GMB Union. (Minute No. 22 refers)

Councillor Khan declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 7, Financial Health Monitoring 2011/12 – First quarter report, in his capacity as a Member of East North East ALMO Area Panel, and as a Member of the GMB Union. (Minute No. 22 refers)

Councillor Hardy declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 7, Financial Health Monitoring 2011/12 – First quarter report, in his capacity as a Member of West North West Homes ALMO, and as a Member of the GMB Union. (Minute No. 22 refers)

A further declaration of interest was made at a later point in the meeting. (Minute No. 23 refers)

20 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors Dawson and Gabriel. Notification had been received that Councillor Khan was to substitute for Councillor Dawson and Councillor Ron Grahame for Councillor Gabriel.

21 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th July 2011 be confirmed as a correct record.

22 Financial Health Monitoring 2011/12 - First Quarter Report

The Director of Resources submitted a report which presented the financial health of the authority after three months of the financial year in respect of the revenue budget and the housing revenue account.

The following officers attended the meeting and responded to Members' questions and comments:

- Doug Meeson, Chief Officer, Financial Management
- Sandie Keene, Director of Adult Social Services
- Sarah Sinclair, Deputy Director of Children's Services
- Ann Hill, Head of Finance – Adult Social Care.

In brief summary, the key areas of discussion were:

- Budget pressures facing Adult Services, particularly in relation to residential and day care costs.
- Concern about the reliability of Children's Services budget estimates and the rising cost of independent foster care and external placements.
- Investment in improvement work since the announced inspection in 2009.
- Budget priorities, including maintaining a weekly check on the number of referrals and driving down procurement costs.
- Concern about increased numbers of LCC foster carers leaving the service and the over-reliance on independent foster agencies. It was advised that a review of payments to LCC foster carers was currently taking place.
- Confirmation that the average cost of looked after children was £2,200 per week.
- The role of family group conferencing, particularly in terms of supporting the wider family network.

RESOLVED – That the report and information appended to the report be noted.

23 Best Value Review of ICT

The Chief Officer of ICT submitted a report which informed the Scrutiny Board of the outcome of the Best Value review of ICT undertaken earlier in the year.

Appended to the report was a copy of the Best Value review, which had been undertaken by the consultancy company, Mouchel Management Consultancy.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting, Tim Bollands, Mouchel Management Consultancy, and the following officers:

- Dylan Roberts, Chief ICT Officer
- Ian Jones, Senior ICT Consultant.

In brief summary, the main areas of discussion were:

- Confirmation that Tim Bollands was attending the CLT meeting on 26th September 2011, to provide feedback on the review of ICT services.
- Concern that the IT needs of Members had not been fully met.
- Ensuring that IT training formed part of the appraisal process.
- The need to develop in-house services and other revenue streams.
- Perceived differences in attitudes across directorates in managing the necessary business changes associated with successful adoption of IT solutions
- Performance issues in relation to case management.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report and information appended to the report be noted
- (b) That the Scrutiny Board be provided with feedback following the discussion at CLT
- (c) That the Chair writes to the Chief Executive regarding IT training and appraisals.

(Councillor J L Carter declared interests in this item in his capacity as Director of Netpremacy Ltd and as a Partner of Solution Software. On the basis that the interests were prejudicial, he withdrew from the meeting during the consideration of the item.)

24 Officer Registration of Interests 2011/12

The Head of Human Resources submitted a report in relation to Employees' declarations of interest, which had been referred to this Scrutiny Board by the former Scrutiny Board (City Development), at its meeting held on 17th May 2011.

Appended to the report was a copy of the guidance notes in relation to 'identifying high risk posts' and 'reviewing register of interest declarations'.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor John Proctor, Chair of the former Scrutiny Board (City Development), and the following officers:

- Dave Almond, Head of Human Resources
- Neil Hunter, Head of Audit
- Mark Turnbull, Head of Property, Finance and Technology.

In brief summary, the key areas of discussion were:

- Concern that officer's registration of interests were not publicly available, particularly in light of the increase in delegated decisions and the need to apply the same rules to officers as Elected Members.
- Confirmation that the response rate from officers in high risk posts was 98%. The only outstanding responses related to those officers on career breaks, long term sickness or maternity leave.
- Legal background to officer registration of interests – reference was made to a freedom of information request involving Bolton Council.
- The resource implications associated with introducing compliance and monitoring checks.
- Confirmation that a training session was being provided in relation to the localism bill.
- Clarification whether officer's declarations of interest were included within officer delegated decision reports and the consideration of proposed changes to officers contract of employment.
- Acknowledgement that the publication of officers interests would not eliminate the risk of inappropriate activity.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report and information appended to the report be noted
- (b) That a report be submitted to Executive Board reflecting the Scrutiny Board's recommendations in relation to public disclosure of officer interests.

(Councillor Lowe left the meeting at 12 noon during the consideration of this item.)

25 Work Schedule

A report was submitted by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development which detailed the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the current municipal year.

Appended to the report for Members' information was the current version of the Board's work programme, the minutes from the Executive Board meeting held on 27th July 2011, together with an extract from the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st August to 30th November 2011.

The Scrutiny Board agreed to establish a budget working group. It was suggested that the group met on a monthly basis around the time that the monthly budget report to Executive Board was published. Members discussed focussing on a particular service directorate starting with Children's. The relevant Executive Board Member and Scrutiny Chair would also be invited to attend. Councillors Bentley, Blackburn, Hardy and Macniven expressed initial interest, however, all Scrutiny Board Members would be invited to attend in due course.

RESOLVED – That the work programme, as amended, be approved.

26 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Minutes approved at the meeting
held on Monday, 3rd October, 2011

Monday 3rd October 2011 at 10.00 am with a pre-meeting for Board Members at 9.30 am.

(The meeting concluded at 12.38 pm.)