

SCRUTINY BOARD (CENTRAL AND CORPORATE)

WEDNESDAY, 29TH APRIL, 2009

PRESENT: Councillor M Dobson in the Chair

Councillors B Chastney, P Davey,
P Ewens, C Fox, P Grahame, M Hamilton,
T Hanley, V Kendall, A Lowe, J Monaghan,
T Murray and P Wadsworth

104 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Call-In meeting.

105 Declarations of Interest

The following personal interests were declared:-

- Councillor G Driver in his capacity as a Member on the Aire Valley Homes ALMO (Agenda Item 7) (Minute 108 refers)
- Councillor P Wadsworth in his capacity as Deputy Executive Member for Environmental Services and as a Director of East North East Homes ALMO (Agenda Item 7) (Minute 108 refers)
- Councillor A Lowe in her capacity as a Director of West North West ALMO (Agenda Item 7) (Minute 108 refers)

106 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Atha, Councillor Bale, Councillor Bentley, Councillor Dowson and Councillor Selby.

The Board were informed that Councillor Murray was a substitute for Councillor Atha, Councillor Fox for Councillor Bale, Councillor Monaghan for Councillor Bentley, Councillor Grahame for Councillor Dowson, and Councillor Hanley for Councillor Selby.

107 Call-In of Decision - Briefing Paper

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report regarding the procedural aspects of the Call-In process.

Members were advised that the options available to the Board in respect of this particular called-in decision were:-

Option 1 – **Release the decision for implementation.** Having reviewed the decision, the Scrutiny Board (Central and Corporate) could decide to release it for implementation. If this decision was chosen, the decision would be released for immediate implementation and the decision could not be called-in again.

Option 2 – Recommend that the decision be reconsidered. Having reviewed the decision, the Scrutiny Board (Central and Corporate) could recommend to the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement), that the decision be reconsidered. If the Scrutiny Board (Central and Corporate) chose this option, a report would be submitted to the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement) within three working days of this meeting. The Assistant Chief Executive Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement) would reconsider the decision and would publish the outcome of their deliberations on the delegated decision system. The decision could not be called-in again whether or not it was varied.

RESOLVED – That the report outlining the Call-in procedures be noted.

108 Review of Decision - Corporate Interactive Voice Recognition Solution (Reference Number D35273)

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report, together with relevant background papers, relating to an Officer Delegated Decision D35273 of the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement) as follows:-

Procurement of a Corporate Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) Package

‘The project will deliver an Integrated Voice Recognition infrastructure within the Corporate Contact Centre that is adaptable and able to provide various levels of automated telephony to services across the Council’.

The decision had been called-in for review by Councillors J Lewis, A Ogilvie, M Rafique, S Armitage and G Driver on the following grounds:-

‘We the undersigned would like greater clarification regarding the practical issues associated with the implementation of an IVR system. Further information is needed with regard to the cost-benefit analysis of the various options considered and any public consultation informing the decision. We would also like more information as to how this system would deliver real savings without compromising service delivery’.

Councillor J Lewis, Councillor G Driver and Councillor A Ogilvie attended the meeting to present evidence to the Board and respond to Members’ questions and comments.

The following officers were also in attendance:-

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement)
- Paddy Clarke, Chief Customer Services Officer
- Anthony Derbyshire, Project Manager

The Board then questioned Councillor Lewis, Councillor Driver and Councillor Ogilvie and officers at length on the evidence submitted.

Some of the main concerns highlighted by Councillor Lewis, Councillor Driver and Councillor Ogilvie were:-

- the need for consultation to be undertaken with members of the public/ residents on the merits of the IVR system prior to implementation at the Corporate Contact Centre
- the need for greater clarification regarding the practical issues associated with the implementation of the IVR system
- the need for further information with regard to the cost benefit analysis in relation to developing an IVR application for dealing with Choice Based Letting bids and bulky waste enquiries, and on it's suitability of delivering real savings without compromising service delivery
- the need to retain staff at the Corporate Contact Centre in view of the current economic climate
- the lack of evidence available which demonstrated that the IVR system would reduce the number of complaints and the difficulties envisaged by BME/elderly residents when accessing an automated system
- the need for ALMOs to be consulted on the installation of the IVR system on Choice Based Letting bids

In explaining the reasons for the decision, officers made the following comments:-

- the need to deliver a corporate IVR package within the Contact Centre in accordance with a recent Executive Board decision taken on 14th January 2009
- the need to recognise the fact that IVR had become more sophisticated and that this would not replace people speaking to a Council representative
- the benefits of developing an IVR application which could achieve significant savings, as well as providing the customer with access to Council services outside of normal office hours
- confirmation that there would be no redundancies within the Contact Centre resulting from the implementation of the IVR system and that it was not driven by efficiency savings
- the reassurances given that members of the public could speak to an operator if they so wished and that the service would be more cost effective as more time would be allocated in dealing with complex calls

The Chair then invited questions and comments from Board Members and the main areas of discussion were:-

- clarification of the quality and risk assessment element in developing the IVR package; job guarantees and projections undertaken; consultation with ALMOs and accessibility issues around those people, with disabilities, when using the automated system
- clarification of the levels of consultation undertaken prior to the officer delegated decision and whether these had been sufficient to date

- clarification of the extended hours service/key pad operation and the need to consider data protection issues around Choice Based Letting bids and the level of security
- clarification on the technology/operation of the system; its accessibility, and the need to investigate this element further
- clarification of the procedures around rogue customers and whether this would leave the Council open to litigation
- clarification of the monitoring arrangements in relation to:-
 - usage
 - quality
 - feedback from customer
 and the need for the Board to receive a progress report on these issues in the new municipal year
- clarification if there would be a unique reference number allocated to users of the IVR system and, if not, the need to build this issue into the process
- the importance of bulky waste and Choice Based Lettings within the public domain and the need to prevent an increase in complaints to Elected Members in this sensitive area
- clarification on whether there was sufficient knowledge of the systems usage elsewhere in the country and particularly other local authorities
- clarification on whether equality impact assessments had been undertaken and considered as part of the project initiation

In summary, Councillor Lewis made the following comments:-

- the need for Board Members to address the wider implications of the officer delegated decision of the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement)
- the need for consultation to be undertaken with interested parties on the merits of the IVR system and for an interface to be introduced between IVR and bulky waste
- the need for Board Members to pursue Option 2 as part of their deliberations in this matter

The Chair thanked Councillor J Lewis, Councillor G Driver and Councillor A Ogilvie and officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED – That the report and information provided be noted.

(Councillor P Ewens left the meeting at 10.55am during discussions of the above item)

109 Outcome of Call-In

Following consideration of the evidence presented to them, and the questioning of witnesses, the Board passed the following resolution:-

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the decision be referred back to the decision maker for reconsideration.

- (b) That the decision maker be requested to reconsider the following specific areas:-
- the levels of consultation and whether these had been sufficient to date
 - whether the initial areas/themes to be piloted under the IVR scheme were the appropriate ones
 - whether there was sufficient knowledge of the systems usage elsewhere in the country and particularly other local authorities
 - whether equality impact assessments had been undertaken and considered as part of the project initiation

(The meeting concluded at 12.10pm)