

SCRUTINY BOARD (CENTRAL AND CORPORATE)

MONDAY, 5TH OCTOBER, 2009

PRESENT: Councillor P Grahame in the Chair

Councillors J Bale, S Bentley, B Chastney,
A Hussain, V Kendall, J Lewis, A Lowe,
A McKenna, A Parnham and D Schofield

Apologies Councillor P Ewens and M Hamilton

29 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

30 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P. Ewens and M. Hamilton.

31 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th September 2009, be confirmed as a correct record.

32 Matters Arising from the Minutes

(a) **Staffing levels** (Minute No. 25 refers)

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development undertook to forward to a Member the information previously circulated regarding staffing levels, requested under Minute No. 25.

(b) **Current Industrial Action** (Minute No. 25 refers)

In response to a Member's query regarding a situation update and a breakdown of the costs associated with the current industrial action involving refuse collectors and street cleaning staff, the Chair stated that the Leader of the Council would be requested to attend the Board.

33 Interpretation and Translation Services

The Board received and considered a report submitted by the Chief Customer Services Officer, updating the Board regarding progress in implementing the recommendations arising from the 2006 Inquiry carried out by the former Transforming Services Scrutiny Board.

In attendance at the meeting, and responding to Members' queries and comments, were :-

Paddy Clarke, Chief Customer Services Officer
Susan Murray, Head of Face to Face Contact
Jayne Grant, Head of the Central Interpretation and Translation Unit (CITU)

In brief summary, the main areas of discussion were :-

- **Budget** – Concern was expressed that, following a substantial budget overspend, the centralised, service-specific budget established as a result of the previous Inquiry had now, in effect, been de-centralised again, with individual Departments responsible for deciding the level of service they required, or could afford, from CITU, and paying for this from their Departmental budgets.

It was explained that the annual budget for the service was £70,000, but in 2008/09 over £300,000 had actually been spent, due to the demand for the service from Departments. The CITU still had this £70,000 budget, and this had been used to fund the service for the first quarter of the current financial year. However, it had been agreed with Departments that from quarter 2 onwards, it would be the responsibility of individual Departments to request and pay for the service on a case by case basis, to avoid the previous overspend.

Members questioned whether this approach was fundamentally flawed. The previous Inquiry had identified the importance of the Council providing and funding this service to an adequate and appropriate level, and the principle of establishing an adequate central budget, controlled by the CITU, was to re-inforce the need for, and importance of, this service, and not to leave it to the discretion of individual Departments or officers whether or not to provide this facility based purely on cost considerations. The danger of reverting to relying on Departmental budgets was that cost considerations might outweigh other factors, service provision may be restricted due to this, and Departments might once again seek to use customers' relatives to provide interpretation. This was the very situation the previous Inquiry had sought to address.

It was reported that the use of the service would be closely monitored by CITU to ensure that the service was used effectively and appropriately at all times. CITU would undertake regular independent checks to ensure that the service was not compromised by budgetary considerations, and would feed back regularly to Departments to ensure that the service continued to be used responsibly;

- In terms of **encouraging residents to learn English**, where customers presented at Council premises and were assisted in their primary language, then they were given information cards encouraging them to learn English and informing them of assistance available in this regard. Of course, there was no element of compulsion, and services

would not be denied if the applicant could not speak English, or did not want to avail themselves of the opportunity to learn English;

- The costs of implementing Recommendation (f) of the previous Board, which related to **video conferencing and access to a British Sign Language interpreter**, had been found to be prohibitive. A national video conferencing service was available via a centre in London, at a fee, and need was assessed on a case by case basis. Currently, the Council, the Police and the local NHS were jointly trying to address the issue of the provision of a sign language interpretation service which all local public services could utilise.

RESOLVED – (a) That subject to the above comments and concerns, the update report be noted;

(b) That a further update report be submitted to the Board in six months time, which includes reference to the issues referred to above.

(N.B. Councillor Bale joined the meeting at 10.20am, during the consideration of this item).

34 Communications, Report Writing and Plain English

Further to Minute No. 26, 7th September 2009, the Board received and considered a report submitted by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development, and received evidence from the following officers, who responded to Members' queries and comments :-

Andy Carter, Acting Head of Communications
Alex White, Communications Manager (Strategic Communications and Marketing).

In brief summary, the main points of discussion were :-

- The poor use of English and the over-use of jargon, officialese and acronyms in Council correspondence, publications and reports, often to the detriment of the intended aim of the document;
- The need to be customer-focussed when considering the method and content of communication from the Council, and above all, the need to communicate as plainly and simply as possible;
- The imminent launch of a free, on-line Plain English training course as part of a high level campaign being co-ordinated by the Council's Corporate Communications Team.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted, and an update report be submitted to the Board at a later date.

(N.B. Councillor Schofield left the meeting at 10.45am, during the consideration of this item).

35 Request for Scrutiny - Woodhouse Moor - Park Byelaws

Minutes approved at the meeting
held on Monday, 2nd November, 2009

The Board considered a request from Friends of Woodhouse Moor for a Scrutiny Inquiry into the enforcement, or lack of enforcement, of the Council's byelaws for pleasure grounds and open spaces, in terms of their application to Woodhouse Moor.

The following people presented the request, and responded to Members' queries and comments :-

Tony Paley-Smith, Friends of Woodhouse Moor
Richard Hellowell, Friends of Woodhouse Moor
Bill McKinnon, Friends of Woodhouse Moor

The Board agreed that there was prima facie evidence of the need for such an Inquiry, and it was –

RESOLVED – (a) That the request for an Inquiry be approved;
(b) That the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development arrange for appropriate reports to be submitted and witnesses invited to the next meeting.

36 Scrutiny Board (Central & Corporate Functions) - Work Programme, Executive Board Minutes and Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted the Board's work programme, updated to reflect decisions taken at previous meetings, together with a relevant extract from the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st October 2009 to 31st January 2010 and a copy of the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 26th August 2009.

In addition to the matters added to the work programme at today's meeting – reports back on the Translation and Interpretation Service, Corporate Communications and Byelaw enforcement – reference was also made to the following –

- Gambling Act 2005 – Review of Statement of Licensing Policy (November meeting);
- Scrutiny Inquiry – Use of Consultants – Session 2 (November meeting);
- Treasury Management Policy (Executive Board referral)(November meeting);
- Use of Section 106 monies (currently unscheduled);
- Print Service (currently unscheduled);
- Working Group on Employment and Training of 16-18 year olds (final report).

RESOLVED - That subject to any changes necessary as a result of today's meeting, the Board's work programme be approved.

37 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday 2nd November 2009, 10.00am (Pre-Meeting 9.30am).