

SCRUTINY BOARD (CENTRAL AND CORPORATE)

MONDAY, 7TH DECEMBER, 2009

PRESENT: Councillor P Grahame in the Chair

Councillors J Bale, S Bentley, P Ewens,
M Hamilton, V Kendall, J Lewis, A Lowe,
A McKenna, A Parnham and D Schofield

Apologies Councillors B Chastney and A Hussain

45 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by any Member.

46 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B Chastney and A Hussain.

47 Minutes - 2nd November 2009

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd November 2009 be confirmed as a correct record.

48 Questions to the Executive Board Member (Central and Corporate) - Financial Health Monitoring 2009/10 Half Year Report and Performance Report 2009/10 - Quarter 2

The Board received and considered the report of the Director of Resources, submitted to the Executive Board on 4th November 2009, on Financial Health Monitoring 2009/10 – Half Year Report, together with the 2009/10 Quarter 2 Performance Report, submitted by the Head of Policy and Performance.

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

- Councillor Richard Brett, Joint Leader of the Council and Executive Member (Central and Corporate).
- Alan Gay, Director of Resources.
- Doug Meeson, Chief Officer (Financial Management).
- Helena Phillips, Chief Officer (Resources and Strategy).
- Steve Carey, Acting Chief Officer (Revenues and Benefits).
- Kathy Kudelnitzky, Chief Officer (Leeds Initiatives and Partnerships).

Minutes approved as a correct record
at the meeting held on Monday 11th January 2010.

- Lee Hemsworth, Chief Officer (Business Transformation).
- David Almond, Head of Human Resources.

In brief summary, the main issues discussed were:-

- What strategies were in place to deal with the estimated year-end budget deficit of £5m?

Councillor Brett made reference to the effects of the national and international economic recession on the economy, and the fact that local authority budgets were likely to remain under pressure for the foreseeable future due to predicted government actions on public spending levels. Directors were re-doubling their existing efforts to identify efficiencies and savings, and action plans were being drawn up in all service areas. An effective freeze had been imposed on external recruitment.

Councillor Brett repeated the assurance given at the Board's September meeting that everything possible would be done to protect front-line services, especially those relating to children and vulnerable adults.

- Asked to comment on a recent statement by Councillor Andrew Carter, Joint Leader of the Council, regarding the possibility of developing joint service provision involving partner local authorities in the Leeds City Region, Councillor Brett stated that it made economic sense to explore whether there were efficiencies of scale which might be achieved by local authorities, or other partner organisations, sharing common services, e.g. HR and payroll. This type of suggestion was in line with the Government's 'Total Place' initiative, integrating and the co-ordination at local level of all public sector services.
- In response to questions regarding the costs of and other issues relating to the recent industrial action in Leeds involving refuse collection and street cleansing staff, Councillor Brett stated that the latest figures indicated that, overall, the Council had made a saving of approximately £50,000. This was calculated on the basis of a total saving in wages/costs amounting to £2.744m, less costs of £2.44m for providing an alternative, emergency service, and approximately £254,000 communication costs. These figures did not take account of any additional landfill charges which the Council might face as a consequence of the industrial action, which were currently unknown. He acknowledged that there had been some areas of the City which had suffered greater disruption to services than others but, overall, he regarded that the emergency alternative provisions which had been put in place by the Council had worked very well and had prevented a difficult situation getting worse. He confirmed that he was happy for Members to receive a copy of the consultant's report on revised collection rounds and collection rates, unless the officers were aware of any good reason why this was not possible, likewise a written breakdown of the costs of the dispute.

- Reference was made to the difficulties of trying to protect front-line services whilst, at the same time, achieving significant budget savings. It was suggested that the traditional method of 'salami slicing', say, 10% from each budget was unlikely to fit the bill, and that a more radical and fundamental review of service provision was necessary, involving a wholesale zero-budgeting exercise.

It was confirmed that just these sorts of issues were being discussed as part of the Council's Business Transformation review, and reference would be made in the draft Budget Report due for publication and for consideration by this Scrutiny Board in January.

- Reference was made to the possible effect on Council provided services of the personalisation agenda in terms of Adult Social Care services. Reference was also made to recent inspection reports in respect of Children's Services in Leeds. Councillor Brett gave an assurance that front-line services to safeguard children would be protected and maintained.
- Members requested details of the scheme and associated current costs of any enhanced pensions for staff who were leaving the Council's employment before normal retirement age.
- It was agreed that Members would also be supplied with an explanation regarding the £160,000 cost to the Housing Revenue Account associated with the removal of care ring equipment from sheltered warden properties.
- It was also agreed that Members would be supplied with information regarding the monitoring of private care providers used by the Council, and penalties for poor or non-performance.
- Lee Hemsworth outlined the Council's proposed involvement in a DECATS service review (Delivering Effective Corporate and Transactional Services), including the involvement of outside consultants. Members again requested that further details be circulated separately to them.
- In response to a query regarding whether the Executive Board/officers were planning for a 'worst case scenario' budget, involving an extensive and comprehensive service review in anticipation of the possible need for drastic service revisions, it was confirmed that officers were aware of this possibility and were involved in the process of drawing up contingency plans. The Board indicated that it would like to be involved in the process at the appropriate time and would like a report on this at a future meeting.
- BP11 – % of customer e mails receiving a substantive response within 10 working days - It was reported that extra resources had been allocated to cope with an increase in individual enquiries and requests for advice and assistance prompted by the economic recession. Members asked to be supplied with up to date information on this performance indicator.

- The Board also requested greater clarity in future performance reports in relation to amber-coloured indicators, and whether performance in these particular areas was stagnant, improving or deteriorating.
- One of the issues which the Board indicated it would like to address at the February meeting was what efforts were being made to improve the Council's strategic co-ordination of consultation and engagement within local communities and with the Council's local partners in public service provision.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked Councillor Brett and the officers for their attendance and the manner in which they had responded to Members' queries and comments.

RESOLVED – That, subject to the above comments and requests for additional information, the reports be received and noted.

(NB: Councillor Hamilton joined the meeting at 10:32 am, during the consideration of this item.)

49 Scrutiny Inquiry - Consultant Engagement - Session Two

Further to Minute No. 27, 7th September 2009, the Board considered a report submitted by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development relating to best practice in relation to the engagement of consultants by local authorities, and the work currently being undertaken on this subject by the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP).

In attendance at the meeting and responding to Members' queries and comments was Malcolm Foster, Corporate Procurement Unit.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development, in consultation with the Chair, select 4 contracts (2 high value and 2 low value) for more detailed investigation and reporting back to the Board, to ascertain whether the Council's current arrangements do coincide with the best practice guidelines developed by RIEP.

(NB 1) The meeting was adjourned for 10 minutes during the course of the consideration of this item.

- 2) Councillor J Lewis left the meeting at 12:07 pm, at the conclusion of this item.)

50 Work Programme, Executive Board Minutes and Forward Plan of Key Decisions

Minutes approved as a correct record
at the meeting held on Monday 11th January 2010.

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 December 2009 to 31st March 2010 and the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Board held on 4th and 24th November 2009.

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

51 Dates and Times of Future Meetings

Monday, 11th January 2010*

Monday, 1st February 2010

Monday, 1st March 2010

Monday, 29th March 2010

All at 10.00 am (pre-meeting at 9.30 am), except *11th January 2010 which will be at 2.00 pm, pre-meeting 1.30 pm.