

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 8TH APRIL, 2008

PRESENT: Councillor P Grahame in the Chair
Councillors S Bentley, J Chapman, B Gettings,
T Hanley, A McKenna, W Hyde and R Pryke
Apologies Councillors B Anderson and E Minkin

96 Chair's Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the last OSC meeting in the current municipal year.

97 Late Items

In accordance with her powers under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair indicated that she had agreed to accept, as a late item of urgent business, information relating to **Group Office expenditure** (Minute No 106 refers) in view of the fact that this issue had been raised at OSC several times during the year, and this was the last scheduled meeting of the Committee in the current municipal year.

98 Declaration of Interests

No Member declarations of interest were made.

99 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Anderson and Minkin.

The Chair reported that **Councillor Minkin** was ill, and would also miss her last Council meeting, on 9th April, prior to retiring from the Council. She paid tribute to Councillor Minkin for all her hard work on OSC and her years of dedication to the Council and her constituents.

100 Minutes - 11th March 2008

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th March 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

101 Matters Arising from the Minutes

- (a) ALMO Working Group (Minute No 89(b) refers)
Disappointment was expressed that, due to Members' other commitments, it had not proved possible to find a convenient date for a

meeting of the **ALMO Working Group**. There were several loose ends which needed to be tied up, either by attempting again to arrange a meeting before the Annual Council Meeting or by following them up in some other manner.

(b) **Wharfemeadows Park Otley – River Safety Management (Minute No 90(a) refers)**

Further to Minute No 90(a), 11th March 2008, Councillor Hanley again expressed his dissatisfaction (a) that he had still not been contacted by the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) regarding the unresolved Recommendation 2 of the Scrutiny Board (Culture and Leisure) Inquiry on this subject and (b) at the amount of time being taken to resolve this matter by the Executive Board. The Chair supported Councillor Hanley in his remarks.

It was reported that although this matter had remained unresolved in effect for one cycle (it had been deferred at the Executive Board on 8th February and had only briefly been reconsidered at the next meeting on 12th March), no timescale for a further report back had been set on 8th February. The matter was, in fact, due to be reconsidered at the next Executive Board meeting, on 16th April 2008.

Councillors Bentley, Chapman, W Hyde and Pryke made it clear that they disassociated themselves from the criticisms voiced by Councillor Hanley.

102 Minutes - Executive Board - 12th March 2008

RESOLVED –That the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 12th March 2008 be received and noted.

103 Planning Performance - Update on Review of Plans Panels

Further to Minute No 43, 9th October 2007, and Minute No 53, 6th November 2007, the Chief Planning Officer submitted a progress report on the implementation of the Action Plan arising from the 2007 review of Plan Panels performance.

Phil Crabtree, Chief Planning Officer, and Helen Cerroti, City Development Department, attended the meeting and responded to Members' queries and comments. In brief summary, the main points of discussion were:-

- The Chief Planning Officer highlighted the main points contained in the report. Two further meetings of the **Joint Member-Officer Working Group** were scheduled, after which proposals would be submitted to the Plans Panels and go out for public consultation. OSC would also be kept updated on progress;
- **Agenda review** – the proposals for the timing of agenda items was welcomed, even if this proposal was no more refined than 'before' or 'after' the break. It was also suggested that the order of the agenda

items should reflect the degree of public interest in the matter, with 'high profile' items being dealt with first to prevent the public having to wait around before those items were considered;

- **Public speaking** – The proposed changes to the protocol on public participation at Plans Panel meetings, and the development of **information leaflets**, were noted;
- **Meeting venues** – The suitability of Committee Rooms 6 and 7 for Plans Panel meetings was discussed. Apart from the alleged technical issues referred to in the report, the size and configuration of the rooms presented problems when large numbers of people attended meetings, and perhaps alternative venues, such as the Council Chamber, should be considered where there was prior knowledge of a high level of public interest. The timing of items might help to ease occasional overcrowding issues. From OSC's point of view, the rooms were suitable for purpose, apart from concerns regarding the poor quality of the sound re-production in the public gallery. It was agreed that Mike Davenport, Head of Facilities, should be given the opportunity to respond to the comments regarding the alleged technical shortcomings;
- **Pre-application presentations** – The proposals relating to the development of pre-application procedures and a protocol were welcomed;
- **Site visits** – The proposals to prioritise site visits, and to focus visits on sites where this can add the most value to the process, were noted. The Chief Planning Officer explained that this did not mean that visits to smaller sites/applications would be precluded, because sometimes a relatively small application could have significant local impact, but requests for site visits needed to be evaluated, and Members requesting site visits would be asked to provide justification on planning grounds for the request. Plans Panel Members who did not attend a site visit would not be precluded from considering that particular application, as long as they were conversant with all the facts, and obviously from this aspect, attendance at site visits was preferable. Site visits were proposed to take place on the morning of Plans Panel meeting days, therefore this represented quite a commitment for Members on these days;
- **Digital mapping/CGI presentations** – In response to comments regarding digital mapping and the development of CGI presentations, to assist Members to better appreciate how a proposed building would look in reality and would relate to/impact upon its immediate environs, it was reported that both areas were being developed. Members could certainly look forward to having computer access to digital plans in the foreseeable future;
- **Number of Plans Panels** – In response to a query regarding the existing Plans Panel arrangements/boundaries in Leeds, it was stated that some cities operated with only one Panel, which met several times a month. This helped to develop expertise amongst the panel of Members trained to sit on that Panel and arguably aided consistency, but perhaps these arrangements lacked the local sensitivity of the

present Leeds set up. The importance of having a City Centre Plans Panel in a place like Leeds was emphasised;

- **Materials** – The problem of the use of suitable building materials and the sometimes rapid deterioration of the appearance of buildings after construction was referred to. The Council had scope to specify particular materials, say in the case of Listed Buildings, but in terms of other developments then ‘reasonableness’ had to be taken into account. Maintenance of buildings, or lack of it, also played a large part in a building’s appearance;
- **Affordable housing** – The suitability of off-site and on-site affordable housing units was mentioned, and the fact that each case had to be judged on its merits, dependent on factors such as position, site suitability and degree of need;
- Reference was also made to concerns over **garden developments** and **multi-occupation properties**, and policies in this regard.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted, and the work carried out to date be endorsed;
- (b) That a further progress report be submitted to OSC in six months time;
- (c) That the views of Mike Davenport, Head of Facilities, be sought regarding the comments about the technical aspects of Committee Rooms 6 and 7.

104 Leeds Strategic Plan 2008 - 2011

Further to Minute No 91, 11th March 2008, the Head of Policy, Performance and Improvement submitted a report relating to the draft performance indicators and targets contained in the Plan, which were due to be considered by the Executive Board on 14th May and Full Council on 2nd July 2008.

Steve Clough, Head of Policy, Performance and Improvement, and Martyn Long, Chief Executive’s Department, attended the meeting and responded to Members’ queries and comments. In brief summary, the main issues discussed were:-

- **Performance Indicators** – It was explained that a key component of the LAA element of the Plan were the up to 35 improvement targets which represented priorities shared with the national government. These were known as ‘designated’ targets, as opposed to the others, which were ‘local’ targets. Discussions had commenced with the Government regarding the proposed 31 designated targets for Leeds..

In response to Members queries, it was reported that although Members had contributed to the process of selecting appropriate indicators, there was broad acceptance that a range of sensible and appropriate indicators had been selected. With regard to the **Cultural indicators**, a national debate had been taking place over a number of years, to which Leeds was contributing, regarding agreement over suitable indicators which could be applied nationally, and the current

suggestions in the Plan were the best indicators the Council currently had to work with.

Some of the proposed indicators, such as **educational attainment** levels, were still being developed. All targets, whether 'designated' or 'local' were equally important, and the Council and its partners would have the same duty to deliver, the only difference being that achieving 'designated' targets would attract a small 'Performance Reward Grant'. The head of Policy, Performance and Improvement undertook to circulate separately to Members details of which Directors/ Departments/partners were responsible for delivering on each target.

- **Target Setting** – In response to a query regarding whether proposed targets were challenging enough, it was reported that targets were all evidence-based and therefore should be realistic and justifiable. It was legitimate for Members to challenge targets and seek that justification, and perhaps the most appropriate way to do that would be via individual Scrutiny Boards;
- **'Perception Indicators'** – Reference was made to a new Government initiative around so-called 'perception indicators', people's perception of how well a local authority was doing or how a service was being provided. This concept was difficult to predict, interpret and establish targets.

RESOLVED – That, subject to the above comments, the proposed performance indicators and targets contained in the draft Leeds Strategic Plan 2008-2011 be noted.

105 Council Business Plan 2008 - 2011

Further to Minute No 73, 8th January 2008, the Assistant Chief Executive (Policy, Planning and Improvement) submitted a report regarding the planned outcomes and improvement priorities set out in the Council Business Plan 2008-2011. In basic terms, this document set out what the Council needed to achieve internally to fulfil the Leeds Strategic Plan outcomes.

Steve Clough, Head of Policy, Performance and Improvement, and Heather Pinches, Chief Executive's Department, responded to Members queries in the following area:-

- **Democratic engagement** – The respective roles of the Executive Board and Scrutiny Boards and the relationship between the two and the possibility of conducting a Member survey to gauge perceived levels of involvement and identify possible areas for improvement.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

106 Members Support - Group Office Costs

Further to Minute No 75, 8th January 2008, and Minute No 94, 11th March 2008, the Committee considered, as a late item of urgent business, information relating to the costs of operating the political group offices in 2007/08 and the 2008/09 budget. Nick de la Taste, Chief Democratic Services Officer, attended the meeting and responded to Members' queries and comments.

Councillor Hanley expressed his concern regarding the length of time it had taken for this item to officially appear on the agenda and for the requested information to be supplied. He also highlighted discrepancies in the costs of supporting Members from different groups. On his calculations, based on the information supplied, the cost of supporting Labour Group Members, the largest political group on the Council, worked out at £8,886 each p.a. whereas for Conservative Group Members the figure was £17,071 and for Liberal Democrat Members it was £16,755. According to his calculations, Councillor Hanley estimated that savings of approximately £369,000 p.a. could be achieved if costs were averaged out on the same current level as that for Labour Group Members.

The Chief Democratic Services Officer reminded Councillor Hanley that the 2007/08 figures had been supplied to him a year ago, when he had been Labour Group Chief Whip. This information had also subsequently been circulated to all OSC Members last year by the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development, when this issue had been referred to at OSC. The 2008/09 figures had only just become available following formal Council approval of the 2008/09 budget. Reference was also made to the historic situation, prior to 2004, when the group offices were relatively small and Executive Member support was provided separately. Support to the Executive and the ruling Council administration was now subsumed into the Group Offices, and Group Office costs had risen and resources been allocated accordingly. Support was also supplied, of course, to the Green Party and the Morley Borough Independent Members. It had proved almost impossible to draft a finite formula for the allocation of these resources which would meet every possible political permutation, but the present allocation and budget for 2008/09 had been agreed after extensive discussion and consultation with the Whips and Group Officer Managers, and had involved the reallocation of resources from 2007/08.

In response to Members queries, the Chief Democratic Services Officer stated that he could supply a more detailed breakdown, showing separately the costs of supporting the Executive, but this would take a few weeks to produce. Members confirmed that they would like this information, together with a comparison showing the same detail for 2003.

RESOLVED – That the Chief Democratic Services Officer be instructed to supply at the earliest opportunity the additional information requested by Members.

107 Scrutiny - Draft Annual Report to Council 2007/08

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on 8th July 2008 (provisional)

RESOLVED – That the Foreword to the 2007/08 Annual Report, the OSC section of the Report, progress towards meeting the 2007/08 Action Plan and the draft Action Plan for 2008/09 all be received and approved.

108 Chair's Closing Statement

This being the last OSC meeting in the 2007/08 municipal year, the Chair thanked Members and officers for all their hard work and support.