

SCRUTINY BOARD (CENTRAL AND CORPORATE)

MONDAY, 1ST DECEMBER, 2008

PRESENT: Councillor M Dobson in the Chair

Councillors B Atha, J Bale, S Bentley,
B Chastney, J Dowson, P Ewens,
M Hamilton, V Kendall, A Lowe, B Selby
and P Wadsworth

48 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially the numerous students from Trinity College who were observing the meeting.

49 Declarations of Interest

Prior to the meeting Councillor Lowe declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 11 – Scrutiny Board Working Group – ALMO Finances, in her capacity as a Director of West North West ALMO (Minute 52 refers).

Prior to the meeting Councillor J Dowson declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 11 – Scrutiny Board Working Group – ALMO Finances, in her capacity as a Panel Member of East North East ALMO (Minute 52 refers).

50 Minutes - 3rd November 2008

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 3rd November 2008, be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

Minute 43 – Declarations of Interest. Councillor A Lowe requested that her declaration should include ‘..... and were advised to leave the meeting due to their prejudicial interests’.

51 Scrutiny Inquiry - Member Development - Session 1 - Setting the scene

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report to set the scene for the first session of the Inquiry into Member Development.

The following documents were appended to the report:

- The Terms of Reference for this Inquiry as agreed at its meeting held on 8th September 2008.
- Member Development Strategy 2008/2011.
- Member Development Budget for 2008/2009.
- Benchmarking Statistics for Local Authority spend on Member Development.

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development also tabled a letter from Councillor G Latty – Chair of the Member Development Working Group and Councillor P Gruen – Member Management Committee offering their comments on Member Development.

Kay Sidebottom, Member Development Officer presented the report and, together with Peter Marrington, Head of Scrutiny & Member Development responded to Members' questions and comments.

A lengthy discussion ensued and in brief, the main issues raised were:

- Clarification as to what involvement if any Member Development will play in getting members of the public interested in becoming Councillors. In response, the Officer informed the meeting that this was part of a new White Paper legislation encouraging people to become Councillors especially those associated with unrepresented groups.
- Further clarification of the total expenditure for Member Development. Members requested the Member Development Officer to provide their Working Group with calculations on the budget spent on inhouse training.
- Clarification on the value for the Council achieving the CharterPlus standard.
- Clarification of how many Councillors are currently taking advantage of having a personal development plan.
- Clarification of the potential work that could be done to attract new people on to the Council and how would Officers achieve this without compromising the role of political parties/groups and the democratic process of election and re-election of Councillors as a measure of their effectiveness.

The Chair thanked Kay Sidebottom for her attendance.

RESOLVED -

- (a) That the contents of the report and the agreed terms of reference at Appendix 1 be noted.
- (b) That a Working Group be set up to progress this inquiry.

Note: Councillor M Hamilton joined the meeting at 10.15 a.m. during discussions on the above item.

Councillor A Lowe left the meeting during consideration of the above item.

52 Financial Health Monitoring 2008/09 - Half-Year Report

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report informing Members of the financial health of the authority after six months of the financial year in respect of the revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account and capital programme.

Appended to the report were the following documents:

- Appendix 1 – The Director of Resources report on Financial Health Monitoring 2008/2009 – Half Year Report submitted to Executive Board meeting held on 5th November 2008.
- Appendix 2 – Outturn Reserves Statement 2007/2008

The Chair welcomed Doug Meeson, Chief Officer (Financial Management) and Helen Mylan, Head of Accountancy to the meeting who responded to Members' questions and comments.

A brief overview of the key points detailed within the report were provided and Members sought clarification on the following points:

- Clarification on what the general reserve figures and why this money is not being used. Members also requested a summary of the reserves for PFi Schools.
- Clarification of the mechanisms for using those reserves from the ALMOs and why is the Council not using those reserves to cover some of the Council's other expenses.
- Clarification of how much schools are allowed to hold in reserve and for how long.

Members felt that the figures in the Outturn Reserves Statement were rather confusing as they did not seem to add up. The Chief Officer (Financial Management) gave a brief explanation of the figures and informed the meeting that he would take on board their comments in terms of how financial reports are presented.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED -

- (a) That the projected financial position of the authority after six months of the new financial year and the proposed actions to mitigate against budget pressures, together with the impact on reserves should directorate spending not be maintained within approved estimates be noted.
- (b) That any outstanding issues referred to above be dealt with by those officers now identified within the minutes and reported back to Board Members.

53 Scrutiny Inquiry - Procurement, Outsourcing and Commissioning Services - Session 2

Referring to the meeting held on 6th October 2008, the Chief Procurement Officer a report outlining the next steps in developing the 'One-Council Approach to Commissioning' presented at the first session of this inquiry; details of the planned and ongoing work in the areas of concern and to

highlight suggested improvement areas that Board Members may wish to consider when formulating their recommendations resulting from this inquiry.

The Chair welcomed Wayne Baxter, Chief Procurement Officer to the meeting who responded to Members' questions and comments.

A brief overview of the key points detailed within the report were provided and the main areas of clarification and discussion were as follows:

- The approach currently being undertaken to improve contract management through training and development on generic contract skills.
- The certificate of competency and the 25 Council officers being trained in Specification writing, Tender Evaluation Skills and Contract Management Skills and the proposals .
- Incorporated contract management in the pre-contract procurement phase of a project and the basic guidance and training made available to council officers that 'operate' services such as the ALMOs and Education Leeds.
- Quality assurance on contract arrangements and the need to be socially responsible ie greener issues taken into consideration.
- The negotiation of contracts and procurement rules taking into account European regulations.

The Chair thanked Wayne Baxter for his attendance.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

Note: Councillor J Dowson left the meeting at approximately 11.55 a.m. whilst the above item was being discussed.

54 Income Collection

The Director of Resources submitted a report providing information and data on collection performance in relation to Council Tax, Business Rates and Sundry Debt and compares performance against other Core Cities.

Appended to the report were copies of the following documents for the information/comment of the meeting:

- A table showing ultimate collection rates for Council Tax (Appendix A refers).
- A table showing Payment Trends at 21st March 2008 (Appendix B refers)
- A table showing Payment Trends for Council Tax as at 31st March 2008 (Appendix C refers).
- Outturn Reserves Statement 2007/2008 (Appendix 2 refers) was distributed to Members under separate cover.

The Chair welcomed Steve Carey, Resources Department who provided a brief overview of the key points detailed within the report and responded to Members' questions and comments.

In brief, the main issues discussed were:

- The collection performance in respect of Council Tax and Business Rates for Leeds compared with other core cities.
- The success of the Council's preferred option of payments by Direct Debit.
- The collection of business rates and the changes relating to empty properties and empty business premises and the downturn on in year collection rates.
- The impact on investment into IT.

The Chair thanked Steve Carey and Peter Hutchinson for their attendance.

RESOLVED - That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.

55 Scrutiny Board Working Group - ALMO Finances

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report of the Scrutiny Board Working Group – ALMO Finance, especially following the recent Call In of an Executive Board decision to make adjustments to capital programme expenditure and resources.

Members also noted the briefing note on the Scrutiny Working Group – ALMO Finance attached at Appendix 1.

RESOLVED - To note the contents of the report and endorse the report of the working group.

56 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report inviting Members to consider and approve the current work programme for 2008/2009.

Appended to the report was a schedule of items for future Scrutiny Board meetings, an extract from the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions relating to this Board's portfolio for the period 1st December 2008 to 31st March 2009 and a copy of the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 5th November 2008.

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

57 Dates and Times of Future Meetings

That the following schedule of meetings were noted:

*Tuesday	-	6 th January 2009
Monday	-	2 nd February 2009
Monday	-	2 nd March 2009
Monday	-	6 th April 2009

*All meeting schedule for 10.00 a.m. (Pre-Meetings at 9.30 a.m.) **except** for the re-arranged meeting to be held on Tuesday, 6th January 2009, which will commence at 2.00 p.m. (Pre-Meeting at 1.30 p.m.).

(The Chair thanked Members for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 12.30 p.m.).