

## **CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

Thursday 23 October 2008 at 6.00pm

**Panel Members Present**                      Councillor M Longhi (Chair)  
    Councillor M Bird  
    Councillor H Sarohi  
    Councillor M Yasin

**Officers Present**     James Walsh- Assistant Director, Finance  
                                 Helen Dudson- Acting Head of CPM  
                                 Paul Smith- Head of HRD  
                                 Kevin Kendall- Head of Property Services  
                                 Jim Ball- Service Manager, Building Services  
                                 Neville Hannington- Service Manager, Procurement & Systems  
                                 Michael Tomlinson- Corporate Finance & Treasury Manager  
                                 Colin Teasdale- Performance and Scrutiny Officer

### **33/08 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cook, Flower, Nazir and Turner.

### **34/08 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

### **35/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting

### **36/08 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Performance and Scrutiny Officer informed the panel that an amended set of minutes for the meeting held on 8 October were tabled for their approval

### **Resolved**

**That:**

- 1. The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**
- 2. The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October, copies having been**

**tabled at the meeting, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

### **37/08 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

The Chair informed the panel of the available forthcoming training opportunities as detailed in the papers circulated (annexed) and advised them to contact the Scrutiny Team if they wanted and further details.

#### **Resolved**

**That the available training opportunities be noted.**

### **38/08 FORWARD PLAN**

The forward plan as at 9 October was submitted (annexed.)

#### **Resolved**

**That the Forward Plan as at 8 October 2008 be noted.**

### **39/08 MAINTENANCE OF COUNCIL PROPERTY- TENDER PROCESS**

The Chair informed the panel that this issue had been brought from the Procurement Working Group, where a member had identified concerns regarding the procurement process. The members of the working group had identified 4 key questions they wanted answering regarding the tender process:

1. How many applied for the contract?
2. How carried out the evaluation?
3. What criteria were applied?
4. What were the criteria for going outside of the framework contract?

Members confirmed that their main concern was with the size of the tender documentation and how this would put off small to medium sized businesses from applying as they would not have the resources to support a bid.

The Head of Property Services informed members that a pre-qualifying questionnaire (PQQ) had been sent out prior to the tender documentation which was much smaller and simpler to fill in. The tender packs themselves contained a lot of compulsory reference material so the actual tender documentation that had to be filled in was only a part of this.

Officers also explained to Members that 16 separate lots were available to be tendered for so the size of the documentation that some may have had to return could have been as a result of them applying for multiple bids.

In response to questions from members about the locality of the companies who had tendered, officers confirmed that all 7 were West Midlands based; 4 of these in Walsall and 3 in the Birmingham area.

The Chair informed the panel that he had previously seen, through the Procurement Working Group, a presentation from Keith Stanley from the Black Country Chamber of Commerce on an initiative called Walsall.com which was a website designed to promote local business. He suggested that Keith Stanley be invited back give an update to the whole panel, following a suggestion from the Acting Manager of Corporate Performance Management it was also agreed that Members of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel should be invited along.

Members commented that they were pleased to hear that all unsuccessful bidders were offered feedback on their bid as this would help them in preparing future bids. Members then asked if the council was collecting feedback on its own performance and as officers confirmed that there was no specific questionnaire that was sent out members suggested that this could be adopted as standard practice to help the council learn from the experiences. The Head of Property Services said he would liaise with Corporate Procurement to see if there was anything they currently used that could be adopted.

#### **Resolved**

- 1. That the Chamber of Commerce be invited to present to the panel an update on progress with Walsall.com**
- 2. That members of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel also be invited along to this meeting.**
- 3. That the Head of Property Services liaises with Corporate Procurement concerning the possibility of using a feedback questionnaire to monitor the council's own performance in tender processes.**

#### **40/08 Member Development**

The Head of Human Resources and Development (HRD) delivered a short presentation to the panel (annexed) outlining the work of the member development team and the member steering group and informed the panel that the steering group would be meeting to review the programme for the next 12 months at its meeting on 17 November so any views from the panel could be fed into this.

Members commented that it was important that any training was tailored

to individual needs and aspirations, and felt that the current generic training courses were pitched either too low or too high for most members. They also stressed the importance of making sure that enough information was given on what the training covered and who it was aimed at and that it was promoted to members in a way that made it more appealing.

The Head of HRD said that it was important that they maintained the right balance with value for money in promoting opportunities but agreed that more could perhaps be done to pick out the important points of courses to make them more attractive to members.

Members also commented that, for some, a training course with a recognised qualification at the end of it would provide greater incentive to attendance as well as benefit the council where those members were in positions on committees where specialist knowledge would be advantageous.

The Acting Manager of Corporate Performance Management informed members that she had attended the Member steering group and discussed the idea of how best to capture the learning that took place during a members council work, as opposed to on formal training. For example during a scrutiny review members would hear lots of evidence and detailed information on a particular service or process. It was suggested that as part of the review something could be put in place to allow time to reflect on what had been learnt during the process. Members felt that this suggestion would be a good idea

The Head of HRD suggested to members that if they wished this item could be brought back on a more regular basis to seek their views on how improvements were going.

## **Resolved**

- 1. That the views of members of the panel be reported back to the Member steering group to help inform the review of the member development programme.**
- 2. That the scrutiny team look to develop a procedure to capture learning that takes place during scrutiny reviews.**
- 3. That Member Development be brought back to the panel on a regular basis to discuss progress and seek additional views on improvements**

## **41/08 Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring**

The Panel agreed that item 10 on the agenda 'Quarter Two Budget

Monitoring' should be moved up the agenda to be moved up to be considered next..

The Corporate Finance and Treasury Manager presented to the panel an update on the current financial position of the services within the Panel's remit and outlined the known budget pressures that could present a risk to the budget before the year end which were those brought about by the current global financial downturn that were affecting income generated in areas such as right to buy receipts and land search charges as well as increased workload within the benefits service. He informed the panel that as things currently stood they expected to be able to manage those risks and come in on budget but it was important to be aware of them.

## **Resolved**

**That the Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring Report be noted.**

## **42/08 LAA Monitoring**

The panel were advised that no-one from the partnership was in attendance to talk through this item and take questions but a briefing note (annexed) had been circulated with the papers which the panel had a number of points they wished to know more about.

In response to questions concerning NIS1 'Number of People from different backgrounds who get on well together in their local area' Members were informed that this was part of a national 'place survey' that was currently taking place and the baseline for this had been taken from a similar survey (Best Value survey) that last took place in 2006/07 which was why no more up-to-date baseline data was available.

The Chair raised a question regarding the crime indicators (NI 16, NI 19, NI 20 and NI 30) in light of reports that had come out that day about the underreporting of crime figures by police. Members were concerned that if figures had been underreported to the council this could mean targets were missed because they had been set too high based on what was originally reported.

Members were informed that the Council had the power to renegotiate targets if the baseline changed but that it was too early to say if the outturn was accurate.

Members wanted to seek assurances on the robustness of data and information on how any changes to this data would affect the target position, if necessary by writing a letter from the panel to the Chief Superintendent.

*Councillor Bird left the meeting at 7.20pm*

Members also raised concerns regarding what appeared to be unchallenging targets for NI 56 and NI 116 ('Obesity among primary school age children in year 6' and 'Proportion of children in poverty') They felt that these targets were un-ambitious for such critical issues and wanted to know how the targets had been set. The panel were told that some of these targets had been set whilst the necessary data from the audit commission was still unavailable and were directed to the last column on the appendix which showed that in these two areas the council had already requested a re-negotiation of these targets at the first refresh scheduled for March,

It was agreed that as much of the information members were seeking required a representative from the partnership to attend that the item should be brought back to the next panel meeting and that answers to the specific concerns would be sought and circulated in between.

## **Resolved**

### **That:**

- 1. The Director of the Walsall Strategic Partnership be asked to attend the next normal meeting of the panel to answer members questions on the LAA refresh;**
- 2. That officers seek assurances over the robustness of crime figure used and the affect and changes to these may have.**

## **43/08 Budget Setting**

The Chair informed the Panel that the information in their papers contained the summary slides from all the other panels in preparation for their decision conferring in December. He requested that the Corporate Finance and Treasury Manager pick out some examples from graphs on the slides to explain to members so that they could take them away and be able to interpret it for themselves in time for that meeting.

The Corporate Finance and Treasury Manager talked through some of the slides and the Chair thanked him for his input. Members felt that the information provided was a significant improvement on previous years and should be a useful tool.

## **44/08 Date of Next Meeting**

The panel were informed that the next two meetings would take place on

consecutive nights on 11 and 12 December.

*The meeting terminated at 7.50pm.*