

AT A MEETING
- of the -
**RESOURCES AND
PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**
held at the Council House,
Walsall, on **Monday 2 August
2004** at 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Sanders (Chairman)
Councillor Sarohi (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Anson
Councillor Griffiths
Councillor Martin
Councillor Rochelle
Councillor Mrs. Shires
Councillor Turner
Councillor Underhill

Councillor J.G. O'Hare – Portfolio Holder
for Resources and Performance Management

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

1. There were no declarations of interest or party whip for this meeting.

MINUTES

Resolved

2. That the minutes of the meeting of the panel held on 22 April 2004, a copy having been circulated to each member of the panel, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

NOTES OF WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

Resolved

3.
 - (1) That the notes of the Benefits Service Working Group from its meeting held on 7 April 2004, be noted;

- (2) That the notes of the Best Value Working Group from its meeting held on 14 May 2004, be noted.

RESOURCES AND SCRUTINY FACT PACK 2004/05

4. The Executive Director (Mrs. C, Evans) advised members that, together with the agenda and reports for this meeting, a “fact pack” relating to the work of the panel for the coming municipal year have been circulated to members. The Panel was advised that the “fact pack” contained the following information:-

- IDeA – Members’ Guide to Performance Management
- Review of Scrutiny Activity 2003/04
- Considerations for effective Scrutiny 2004/05
- Draft Scrutiny Training Programme 2004/05
- Summary of Workshop Feedback (20.7.04)
- Scrutiny Panel Remits
- Directorate Plan 2004/05
- Directorate Organisation Chart
- Directorate Activity 2004/5
- Resources Panel Membership
- Centre for Public Scrutiny “Good Scrutiny Guide”

Mrs. Evans gave a brief presentation to the panel on the Finance, Legal and Performance Management Directorate Plan for 2004/05. Members were advised that the plan summarised the overall aims, objectives and targets of the Directorate for the year and sought to build on the successes of 2003/04.

Mrs. Evans said that the overall aims of the Directorate are to deliver:-

- First class customer focus support to enable effective decision making, strategic and operational planning and high quality service delivery
- A team environment where people are valued and developed
- Stable finances through integrated medium term
- Modern, legal, financial and performance frameworks

At this point in the meeting, Councillor Anson asked whether the forward plan could be included on future agendas of the scrutiny panel. There was general support for this proposal from other members.

Resolved

5. That a copy of the Cabinet's forward plan be included on all future agendas of this scrutiny panel.

CHILDRENS SERVICES AND LIFELONG LEARNING
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –
21 JULY 2004

6. At this point in the meeting, the chairman advised the panel that the Childrens Services and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and Performance Panel, at its meeting held on 21 July 2004, had requested that this scrutiny panel consider the issue of the take-up of free school meals in Walsall, including proposals to increase the number of people registering for free school meals in the Borough, together with the possible introduction of a single registration form for housing benefit and free school meals eligibility.

The chairman asked members whether the panel should consider this reference and whether it would be appropriate for the Benefits Service Working Group to be re-appointed to consider this matter, together with other related benefit services issues.

There was unanimous support from members for the proposal to re-appoint the Benefits Service Working Group with a view to its work being completed during a three to four month period.

Resolved

7.

- (1) That a Benefits Service Working Group be established made up of the following members:-

Councillor Mrs. D.A. Shires
Councillor Martin
Councillor Rochelle
Councillor Sarohi

- (2) That the remit of the Benefits Service Working Group be:-

- To consider the benefit claim form, its layout and the information it requires with a view to recommending an improved form;
- To optimise customer access to the benefits service so that the public receive advice in as prompt and appropriate manner as possible

- To make recommendations to ensure that customer waiting times are within acceptable limits
- To consider the reference from the Childrens Service and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and Performance Panel so as to increase the number of people registered for free school meals and the possible introduction of a single claim form for housing benefit and free school meals

The Chairman said that he considered it important that when members of the public phoned the benefit services they were given helpful and accurate advice.

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S WELFARE BENEFITS

8. At this point in the meeting, members were advised that an independent review of the work of the Council's welfare benefits (including the anti-poverty unit) was in progress arising from work commenced during last year's strategic choices exercise and that a copy of this report would be submitted to the September 2004 meeting of the panel.

Resolved

9. That a copy of the report arising from the independent review of the Council's approach to welfare benefits (including the anti-poverty unit) be submitted to the September 2004 meeting of the panel and that members would then determine what course of action the panel would take with a view to enabling recommendations to be made to Cabinet if appropriate.

BEST VALUE WORKING GROUP

Resolved

10.

- (1) That a Best Value Working Group be established with a membership made up of the following members:-

Councillor Anson
Councillor Griffiths
Councillor Turner
Councillor Underhill

(2) That the remit of the Best Value Working Group be as follows:-

- To consider and advise the panel on the following matters so that any appropriate recommendations to Cabinet can be made:-
- The overall framework within which best value reviews are undertaken, completed and taken forward;
- The annual programme of planned best value reviews, how they are selected and prioritised within the plan?
- The summary of outcomes of best value reviews, recommendations, conclusions and whether these are subsequently implemented
- The effectiveness of the best value review process and whether it makes a difference
- Improvements in the whole approach to best value reviews
- Identify any learning points from specific best value reviews which may or could be used to improve the process so that the Council's services improve continuously
- Question officers and other stakeholders on the rational and allied aspects of the report and the underlying process and that this activity be undertaken with a view to ensuring the Council's approach to best value reviews is efficient and robust in making any recommendations for changes as required

CORPORATE ASSESSMENT REPORT -
CPA IMPROVEMENT PLAN

11. The report considered by Cabinet on at its meeting 14 July 2004, was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

12.

- (1) That the content of the CPA Improvement Plan be noted;
- (2) That the panel receive quarterly progress reports to future meetings on the CPA Improvement Plan.

POTENTIAL SCRUTINY ACTIVITY 2004/05
DISCUSSION NOTE

13. A discussion note Potential Scrutiny Activity 2004/05 prepared by the chairman was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

14.

- (1) That the panel, at its September 2004 meeting, hold a workshop outlining the targets and indicators which underpin the best value performance indicator process to ensure that information is provided which will drive up the performance of Council services;
- (2) That the panel, at its September 2004 meeting, consider a report on the budget consultation process as this will form one of the strand of the panel's work for this municipal year.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.30 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: