CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday 22 July 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present   Councillor Longhi (Chair)
Councillor Nazir (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Cook
Councillor Flower
Councillor J Phillips
Councillor Sarohi
Councillor Yasin

Portfolio holders present
Councillor Griffiths, Finance and Personnel
Councillor Arif, Procurement, Transformation and Performance Management

Officers present Sarah Homer, Assistant Director- Transformation
John Pryce-Jones, Corporate Performance Manager- Customer Focus and Intelligence
Vicky Buckley- Head of Corporate Finance
Paul Milmore- Head of ICT Strategy and Client Services
Martin Sadler- Head of ICT Services and Support
Colin Teasdale, Performance and Scrutiny Officer

08/08 APOLOGIES
Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bird and Turner.

09/08 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

10/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP
There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

11/08 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:
That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 April 2008, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record (annexed)

12/08 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The panel commented on the fact that the training course advertised had been cancelled due to lack on interest and that this was the third such one in the last few weeks. They felt that information on training courses needed to be more relevant and enticing to members, including details of

what benefit it would be to them.

The Assistant Director for Transformation said she would liaise with her HRD staff and the scrutiny team to see what could be done to meet this.

Members also commented on the need for more innovative approaches to training delivery, including consideration of venue and timings to encourage more attendance.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that, in his position as a member of the Walsall Member Development Steering Group and the Regional steering group, they had undertaken some benchmarking work with other authorities and that this could be brought back to the panel when Member Development was looked at in detail as identified on the work programme.

Resolved:
1. **That the Assistant Director for Transformation liaise with both HRD and the Scrutiny Office to ensure that future training opportunities are presented with more information to encourage member attendance;**
2. **That benchmarking work on member development is included with the report from the Member Development Steering Group to be brought to a future panel meeting**

03/08 FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the Forward Plan that had been issued on 7 July 2008.

Members noted that there were no significant items on the forward plan for the panel to consider that had not already been included on their work programme.

Resolved:
1. **That the forward plan be noted.**

13/08 Information Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy

The Portfolio Holder for Procurement, Transformation and Performance Management introduced the Heads of Services for ICT Strategy and Client Service and Services and Support to the Panel. He explained that following a review by Deloittes in 2006, which had identified a number of weaknesses in the Council's approach to ICT, the Council had invested in excess of £5million in improvements to ICT, including the recruitment of a new management team consisting of an Assistant Director and 3 Heads of Service. The Assistant Director had since been on armed forces leave but, rather than backfill this post, they had taken the decision to entrust the 3 heads of services with moving the agenda forward in his absence.

The Head of ICT Strategy and Client Services then delivered a presentation to the members (annexed) detailing the work done so far and the future plans for the service. A number of questions were raised by the panel members.

Members commented on the improvements shown in the National eService Delivery Standards (NeSDS) and whilst this indicated a lot of work still to be done it did show they were going in the right direction. They queried, however, why the Skills Management criteria appeared to have gone backwards.

The Head of ICT Services and Support responded that this was because they used to deliver ICT training from within the service but this had recently been moved out to the HRD service meaning that, at the moment they were not in a position to report on it for NeSDS purposes but that this did not mean it was not happening and they were currently working with HRD on how best to reflect current arrangements in future NeSDS returns.

Members queried the two differing positions for the Governance Theme as one was above 'progressive' and the other below 'minimum.'

The Head of Strategy and Client Services replied that this was mainly due to one particular criterion within the NeSDS around having a governance committee in place.

Members commented that the establishment of this committee should be a priority so that it could help shape the strategy.

Members queried why there had been no movement on the Configuration, Development and Integration theme.

Officers explained that as this was not creating any significant problems for them at the moment it was better to build in the capabilities and processes first and get to this once all that was in place.

Members queried, of the 200+ servers how many they hoped to be able to get down to and what the timeframes were for this. They felt that once this had been completed it would represent a big step-change in the process.

Officers replied that as the average server was only at 50% capacity then their first target would be 100 but that it should be possible to reduce it even further than this. They hoped to have completed this work stream within the next 12 months.

The Portfolio Holder for Procurement, Transformation and Performance Management commented that previously people had been reluctant to call the ISS Service Desk due to a perception of poor service, meaning

that the large increase in the number of calls to the service, mentioned in the presentation was a good indication of improved service.

Members commented that they had noticed an improvement in this service themselves and were now more confident that their queries would be answered promptly and effectively.

The Chair advised members that they should take away and read the detailed information contained in the ICT service plan and if any questions arose from this to direct them through the Scrutiny Office.

Officers invited any members that would be interested to visit the ICT offices where they could be given a tour and a look at some of the work that was going on.

Resolved:

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel recommend that the governance structures for ICT strategy be put in place as a priority.

14/08 CORPORATE ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

The Corporate Performance Manager (Customer Focus and Intelligence) gave a presentation outlining the key findings of the Corporate Assessment (annexed) and invited comments and questions from members.

The Portfolio Holder for Procurement, Transformation and Performance Management commented that as this assessment had been carried out under the 'harder test' the maintenance of a score of 3 represented strong progress. He pointed out that 5 Local Authorities has dropped from a 4 to a 3 and 7 from a 3 to a 2 under this methodology.

Members expressed concerns about the statements in the report regarding the inconsistency of the challenge to the executive from scrutiny and in particular, the criticism of the previous year's budget setting process which auditors stated 'failed to challenge the executive's plans.' Members requested that details of the evidence submitted to the audit commission were brought back to the panel along with details of any challenge the authority made to this statement.

Other Members felt that the Audit Commission's findings on the scrutiny budget process had been fair and that the problem was the information provided to members that was difficult to challenge without having a more thorough financial understanding. They felt that more officer support was needed to provide more relevant information presented in a way that was easier for members to understand.

Resolved:
That officers bring back to the panel information on the evidence

submitted to the Audit Commission regarding the scrutiny process and details of any challenge made to the Commission's findings.

15/08 Budget Role of Scrutiny

The Head of Corporate Finance presented an overview of the budget setting process for 2008/09, summarising the information contained in the report that had been distributed with the papers (annexed), and asked members if the proposed template gave them the information they needed or if there was anything else that could be provided.

Members queried what information relating to the remit from other panels would be brought to the Corporate Panel in its role looking at the overarching budget for the council.

The Head of Corporate Finance clarified that each of the 5 panels would get one pack relating to services within their remit. The Corporate Panel would get one of these packs for the corporate services and in addition a summary of the information contained in the other 4 packs.

Members commented that they were pleased with the proposed templates and felt they represented a step forward in providing elected members with the tools they needed to effectively challenge budget proposals.

Resolved:

That that report on the Budget Process for 2008/09-2011/12 be noted

16/08 Budget Monitoring Report

The Head of Corporate Finance gave a presentation outlining the budget position for corporate services and the Council as a whole, then invited question and comments from the members.

Members asked for the reasons behind the underspend in Strategic Transformation.

The Assistant Director for Strategic Transformation informed members that this was due to a slippage in some projects so anticipated spending hadn't yet occurred. They had requested a carryover for this spend.

The Chair informed members that the overspend in Social Care and Inclusion had been picked up by the Procurement Working Group and more information on the procurement reasons for this was being brought back to that working group. Non-procurement related reasons for this overspend would fall within the remit of the Health, Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel who would be receiving a similar report.

Resolved:

That the Budget Monitoring presentation be noted.

17/08 Lead members for VfM Reviews

The Chair informed members that the panel had to nominate a lead member for each of the 3 value for money reviews the panel had agreed to carry out and asked for volunteers for this.

Resolved:

That the lead member for each of the 3 value for money reviews be as follows:
- **Payroll and Pensions- Cllr M Flower**
- **Safety, Health and Well-being- Cllr J Phillips**
- **Communications- Cllr M Longhi**

18/07 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 11 September 2008

The meeting terminated at 8.05pm.

Signed (Chair):
Date: