

## **CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

Tuesday 15 September 2009 at 6.00pm

**Panel Members Present** Councillor Longhi (Chair)  
Councillor Coughlan  
Councillor Chambers  
Councillor Harris  
Councillor Rochelle  
Councillor Turner  
Councillor Yasin

**Portfolio Holders Present** Cllr C Towe- Finance and Personnel

**Officers Present** Rory Borealis- Executive Director (Resources)  
Brian Kelly- Assistant Director (Business Change)  
Vicky Buckley- Head of Corporate Finance  
Amanda Torr- Policy Co-ordination Officer  
Colin Teasdale- Performance and Scrutiny Officer

### **20/09 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Cook, Councillor Young and Councillor Arif

### **21/09 SUBSTITUTIONS**

The following substitution(s) to the panel were submitted for the duration of the meeting:-

- ø Delete: Councillor Young
- ø Substitute: Councillor Chambers

### **22/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

### **23/09 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

#### **Resolved**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

## **24/09 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Members were informed about the scheduled dates for the training session on Councillor Call for Action and also advised that if they were unable to make these times that training would be available on request either on a one to one basis or via Group rooms.

## **25/09 VALUE FOR MONEY REVIEWS**

The Chair suggested to the Panel that a Value for Money review be undertaken of Procurement and Contract Management and indicated that he would like to be lead member for that review. He also asked members if there were any other areas they would like to consider for review and suggested that, in the light of information contained in the quarterly financial monitoring report on tonight's agenda that the Print and Design service may be an appropriate area for review. Cllr Turner indicated that he would be willing to act as lead member for this review subject to appropriate levels of support being provided. Officers confirmed that guidance and support would be available throughout the process.

### **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel carry out Value for Money reviews of Procurement and Contract Management and the Print and Design Service.**
- 2. That Cllr Longhi be appointed lead member for Value for Money review of procurement and contract management.**
- 3. That Cllr Turner be appointed lead member for the Value for Money review of Print and Design.**

## **26/09 QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING**

The Head of Corporate Finance presented the report (annexed) outlining the quarter one position for services within the Corporate panel remit, she highlighted the two main reasons for the projected overspend were in council-wide procurement and Print and Design. The Chair commented that the two identified Value for Money reviews should assist with this.

The Executive Director (Resources) clarified that the procurement projected overspend related to activity across the organisation, not the procurement functions costs and that this was not related to a plan that had not been delivered but softer stretch targets for achievement beyond that planned.

## **27/09 STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY CONSULTATION**

The Chair introduced Amanda Torr, Policy Co-ordination officer, to the Panel who explained that the purpose of the item was to gain Members

views on the consultation contained within the papers for the meeting, ahead of submitting a response. A presentation (annexed) was delivered to the Panel outlining the consultation questions and inviting their comments for each. The questions and members responses are outlined below.

**1. Do you agree that central government should extend scrutiny powers in relation to Local Area Agreement (LAA) partners to cover the range of their activities in an area, not just those limited to specific LAA targets?**

Members indicated that they would be broadly supportive of this move and believed that scrutiny had a vital role to play in localising accountability. They issued a note of caution around spreading themselves too thinly and felt it would be important to pick the right issues and also ensure that any new legislation was backed up with appropriate levels of resources.

**2. Does central government need to make scrutiny powers more explicit in relation to local councils' role in scrutinising expenditure on delivery of local public services in an area? If so, what is the best way of achieving this?**

Members agreed that it would be important to make scrutiny powers more explicit in relation to expenditure and were positive about the potential benefits of the Total Place Initiative. They had no specific recommendations on the best way of achieving of this.

**3. Do you agree that central government should bring all or some of the local public services as set out in chapter one, fully under the local authority scrutiny regime? Are there other bodies who would benefit from scrutiny from local government?**

Members agreed with the principle of this proposal and felt it would strengthen their ability to tackle certain issues if these services were able to be brought to account. They note again, however, that the increased capacity that this would require would need to be supported.

**4. How far do you agree that central government should extend scrutiny powers to enable committees to require attendance by officers or board members of external organisations to give evidence at scrutiny hearings, similar to the powers already in existence for health and police?**

Members felt strongly that in order for scrutiny to be effective in tackling external issues they needed to be given these powers.

**5. What more could be done to ensure that councils adequately resource and support the local government scrutiny function to carry out its role to full effect?**

Members noted that the proposals outlined in previous questions, which

were broadly supported by the Panel, would require adequate resourcing but felt strongly that the onus was on government to ensure that any new powers were backed up with additional funding from central government who should not impose new requirements locally without additional resources. They also rejected the suggestion in the consultation that there should be a legal responsibility on the chief executive to ensure adequate resources were available as budgeting was a political decision.

**6. How can council leaders ensure that scrutiny is a core function of how their organisations do business and have a full and proper role in scrutinising the full range of local public services?**

Members noted that Walsall already gave equal allowances to cabinet and scrutiny chair positions so did not feel that a change in legislation would have any effect in this area.

**7. What more could be done to better connect and promote the important role of local government scrutiny to local communities, for example citizens as expert advisers to committees?**

Members felt that there were already some excellent examples of this happening in Walsall under the current arrangements but agreed it was important to continue to strengthen it. They commented that it was better for scrutiny to go to the public rather than wait for the public to come to them. They also urged caution over ensuring any community representation was indeed representative and that the use of expert advisers, whilst useful, also had the potential to act as 'gatekeepers' to the community.

**17. Should the activity of sub-regional partnerships be required to be subject to scrutiny arrangements?**

and

**18. Should councils' joint overview and scrutiny committees be able to require sub-regional bodies to provide them with information on the full range of their activities and to consider their recommendations on sub-regional matters.**

In response to both of these questions, Members felt that they already had an input into these partnerships at various different levels and whilst supportive of the power to be used if required felt it was less likely to be needed than the powers mentioned in previous questions and were mindful of stretching their capacity too much,

Members welcomed the opportunity to respond to the consultation and thanked Amanda for her time.

**RESOLVED**

**That the comments of the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel in relation to the Strengthening Local Democracy constultation be forwarded to the Department for Communities and Local Government for consideration.**

#### **28/09 SINGLE STATUS**

#### **RESOLVED**

**That the item on Single Status be deferred to a future meeting**

#### **29/09 PAYROLL AND PENSIONS VALUE FOR MONEY REVIEW UPDATE**

The Assistant Director (Business Change) presented the report on behalf of the Head of Human Resources and Development and informed members there was ongoing work to look at which services had potential for in-sourcing, which was wider than just Payroll. He informed Members that the recent reorganisation had been done with supporting this kind of activity to ensure expertise were in the right place.

The Chair commented on the table in the report highlighting the comparisons in cost per payslip with different authorities and in particular the comment contained in the report that 'councils with a lower payslip cost may have not used the same calculation and may not have costed in all elements.' He requested that more robust benchmarking was carried out to clarify this as he felt it may reveal that Walsall was in fact higher up the table for low cost payslips.

#### **29/09 WORK PROGRAMME**

An updated version of the forward plan (7 September 2009) which was published after the distribution of papers was handed out to Members along with a copy of the current work programme contained within the report.

#### **RESOLVED**

**That the work programme and forward plan be noted.**

#### **30/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair confirmed the date of the next meeting was 12 November 2009

*The meeting terminated at 7.25pm*