
To
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

18th October, 2006

Subject
Meetings with Cabinet Members – Cabinet Member Plans

1 Purpose of the Note

To inform the Committee of the outcomes of Scrutiny Boards' discussions with Cabinet Members about their Strategic Plans and to remind it of its own discussion with the Leader of the Council (the Cabinet Member for Policy, Leadership and Governance).

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the information set out in the Appendix to this note and to decide whether there are any particular issues it wishes to raise with the Leader of the Council.

3 Information/Background

3.1 This Committee and all Scrutiny Boards have now held meetings with their relevant Cabinet Members about their Strategic Plans. Notes of the majority of these meetings are attached as the Appendix to this note. Those relating to Scrutiny Board 4 will be sent later to the Committee, as the Board will be having further discussions about the outcomes at their meeting on 11th October, 2006.

3.2 All meetings were constructive and useful, and a number of issues were identified for inclusion in work programmes.

This was largely because all meetings were preceded by planning meetings, when Scrutiny Members decided the lines of questioning they wished to follow with Cabinet Members: these were then given in advance to the Cabinet Members. This meant that Scrutiny Members were given informed responses and learned more as a result: it did not preclude supplementary questions being asked at the meetings.

3.3 When the Leader of the Council met this Committee to discuss his Strategic Plan, he indicated that he would welcome the opportunity to discuss with the Committee the outcomes of the Scrutiny Boards' meetings with Cabinet Members.

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APPENDIX

Issues from Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Meeting with Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) re his Strategic Plan (9th August, 2006)

1. Issues noted

- a) **Atlantic Arc Cities Network** – the Committee noted that the major benefits of belonging to this organisation (at a cost of 5,100 Euros) were the opportunities it afforded to promote Coventry and to access European funding streams.
- b) **Capacity** – the Cabinet Member acknowledged the importance of providing training for elected members.

2. Issues requiring action by the Cabinet Member

- a) **International Strategy** – in response to the Committee's concern about the level of staff resources available to support the International Strategy, particularly in relation to work on economic links, the Cabinet Member indicated that he would investigate the staffing situation and report back.
- b) **Maximising Access to External Funding Sources** - the Cabinet Member agreed to investigate the possibility (if this is not already being done) of working up (and costing) schemes of varying sizes which could be drawn on to bid for Government and European funding at short notice.
- c) **City Regions** -The Cabinet Member indicated that he would arrange for all members (possibly during Group meetings) to be briefed on the current situation relating to this issue.

3. Issues requiring monitoring/further work by Scrutiny

- a) **Value for Money** - the Cabinet Member emphasised the importance of Value for Money and Scrutiny's role in reinforcing this approach to the Council's delivery of services e.g. examining specific service areas in detail.
- b) **Scrutiny of Coventry Partnership** - the Cabinet Member indicated that he was waiting for Government guidance on scrutiny arrangements, before considering what should be put in place in Coventry.

Issues from Scrutiny Board 1 Meeting with Cabinet Member (Finance, Procurement and Value for Money), 30th August, 2006

1. Issues noted

- a) **NDC** -this initiative was going well, despite some complaints from residents. The cross-party Advisory Panel had been re-established.
- b) **Council Tax** - a report on the policy relating to long-term property vacancies and charges on properties would be considered by the Cabinet in September.
- c) **Community Cohesion** -the Cabinet Member explained how Neighbourhood Management and the Community Safety Team were involved in promoting and improving community cohesion.
- d) **Minimising Risk on Capital Projects** - the Cabinet Member explained what was being done on this issue.
- e) **Council Tax Collection** -the Cabinet Member indicated that the collection rate had shown a sustained improvement, but still needed to be better. He had set a realistic target for 2006/2007.

Although West Midlands authorities achieved higher rates, he was not convinced that they measured their rates in the same way as Coventry.

2. Issues requiring action by the Cabinet Member/Officers

Value for Money -at the suggestion of a Board Member, the Cabinet Member indicated that he would investigate how non-Council bodies involved in delivering the Council's objectives (particularly Coventry Partnership) could be encouraged to ensure that Value for Money principles underpin their work.

3. Issues requiring monitoring/further work by Scrutiny

- a) **Community Cohesion** -the Cabinet Member gave details of the consultation with the community in relation to the new Community Cohesion strategy.

He agreed that it was difficult to measure the outcomes of community cohesion work and indicated that he would be keeping under review the criteria shown in his Plan.

- b) Capital Programme** - the Cabinet Member indicated that in order to prevent a recurrence of the high level of slippage in the Programme, he had instructed the Management Board and the Capital Programme Working Group to develop a strategy to make the maximum use of resources.

The Board noted that work had already been done to re-phase the programme and to introduce a more complex bidding process, which required bids to relate to corporate priorities and timescales.

- c) Housing Benefits** – good progress had been made in improving the service and this should continue. The introduction of a new IT system was a key part of this (planning for this was aimed at minimising slippage, but also identified a contingency plan should significant slippage occur).
- e) Budget-setting** – the Cabinet Member indicated that the Board would be consulted on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and that all Board would be involved in the half-yearly review of Cabinet Member Plans, giving them the opportunity to consider progress on achieving the Council's objectives and whether additional funding was necessary/savings would be possible.
- f) Procurement** - the Cabinet Member indicated that the Procurement Strategy was being revised. Initiatives in this area could result in real savings.
- g) Value for Money** – the Cabinet Member informed the Board of progress in implementing a Value for Money approach to delivering services. An awareness programme was being developed.

(note: all the issues shown in section 3 are included in the Board's work programme)

Issues from Scrutiny Board 1 Meeting with Cabinet Member (Human Resources, Corporate and Customer Services) - Scrutiny Board 1, 30th August, 2006

1. Issues noted

- a) Support for Managers on new initiatives (particularly ResourceLink and Neutral Vendor)** - support would be made available through workshops, a communications group, training sessions, local champions and a help desk.
- b) Value for Money** -The Cabinet Member indicated that she would receive regular report from Directorate VFM champions on progress towards improving VFM. New service proposals must include a business case. She would monitor performance against BVPIs and receive regular reports on key areas of activity.

- c) **Minimising Risks on Major Projects** - projects were managed through formal project management protocols which include risk management. The Board noted that the Prince 2 system was used for large projects, whilst the Council had developed its own (simpler) system for smaller projects. Directorate risk registers would ensure that any major risks were identified and escalated as appropriate.
- d) **Recruitment** - work was being done to attract job applications from migrants from eastern Europe, which would help to encourage integration.

2. Issues requiring action by the Cabinet Member/Officers

There were no issues identified.

3. Issues requiring monitoring/further work by Scrutiny

- a) **Sickness absence** - the Cabinet Member indicated that much work was being done, including ensuring that managers were given training and that they were following corporate procedures; addressing short-term absences particularly; developing Occupational Health support.

She also indicated that the Board could help to ensure progress in reducing sickness absence by continuing to provide challenge and offering advice on related strategies.

- b) **Coventry Direct** - the Cabinet Member indicated that this project was helping to increase productivity, reduce costs and to obtain external funding.

However, there were some problems and work was being done to overcome these.

(note: a report on the current situation on Coventry Direct was considered later in the meeting – the Scrutiny Board asked for six-monthly progress reports (or more frequent if there were major problems).

- c) **Stoke Aldermoor One-Stop Shop** – the Cabinet Member agreed that Board Members should have copies of the evaluation report on the Stoke Aldermoor One-Stop Shop pilot.

(note: all the issues shown in section 3 are included in the Board's work programme)

Issues from Scrutiny Board 1 Meeting with Cabinet Member (Culture, Leisure and Libraries) - Scrutiny Board 1, 19th September, 2006

1. Issues noted

- a) Partner organisations** – the Board noted the Cabinet Member's arrangements for being kept informed of the work being done by partners in delivering council services.
- b) Obesity Strategy** – the PCT is the lead on this, but Council officers are closely involved in the work. A Sport and Physical Activity Strategy is being produced.
- c) Adult Education** – the Board noted:
- action taken to address the reduction in funding from LSC
 - work being done to assist people with learning disabilities
 - provision for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and the need either for more government funding or the development of criteria in order to address the increasing demand for courses.
 - key adult education statistics
- d) Libraries** - the Board noted:
- the support available for those who wish to use the Internet in libraries
 - the current situation in relation to the relocation of the Central Library
 - a report to Cabinet on a review of libraries is due in the near future.
- e) Play areas** – the Board noted the criteria and process for determining where play areas will be sited, with particular reference to Section 106 funding.
- f) Other issues** – the Board noted:
- how the public are given access to council-owned land
 - work being done to access external funding
 - current staffing structures
 - criteria for prioritising activities in the Plan to address the future funding shortfall
 - how Value for Money is to be achieved

2. Issues requiring action by the Cabinet Member/Officers

- a) **ESOL**- officers will look at the possibility of involving the 2 universities in this provision.
- b) **IT in libraries**- officers will provide information on current courses held in libraries, but funded by Adult Education .
- c) **Art stock** - officers undertook to give members the current catalogue of art works and to consider the possibility of displaying works in libraries/council offices.

3. Issues requiring monitoring/further work by Scrutiny

- a) **Future strategies** - a number of strategies are currently being developed and the Board will be involved in this.
- b) **Play Areas** – more discussion is needed on how play areas are developed using Section 106 funding. The Board also wanted information on the revenue costs of play areas.

(note: this issue is included in the Board's work programme)

Issues from Scrutiny meetings with Cabinet Members regarding their Strategic Plans

Cabinet Member (Children, Learning & Young People) – Scrutiny Board 2, 23rd August, 2006.

1. Issues noted

- (a) **Children's Commissioning Trust** – the Board noted that this new partnership arrangement with the PCT would be completed over the Autumn. It was not expected to make a huge difference to the way the Directorate operates, however this will give added security to decisions made by the Council to pool budgets and commission services jointly with the PCT. (n.b This report was considered at the Board's 27th September 2006 meeting)
- (b) **School Standards** – whilst exam results were improving in Coventry schools the DfES targets were not met in 2005/6 and were unlikely to be met in 2006/7. The Cabinet Member was confident however that local targets set for individual schools were likely to be achieved and continue progress towards improving achievement.
- (c) **School Attendance** – the Board questions the impact of recent improvements in collecting attendance data. The Cabinet Member indicated that he felt that officers would be able to respond more promptly to attendance problems and that the new data recording was a useful tool for both the City Council and schools.
- (d) **Residential Services for Looked After Children** – the Board welcomed the new provision of small family sized residential units, due to come on-line during the current civic year. These units would allow the Council to be more responsive to the specific needs of looked after children and ensure that more children would be able to remain in the City.

2. Issues requiring action by the Cabinet Member

- (a) Government plans for improvements in the **nutritional content of school meals** will only be successful if the necessary funding accompanies the new regulations. Work is on-going in developing Coventry's response to the Government's agenda.
- (b) The Council has an ambitious **capital programme** investing in services for children & young people in the City. There were concerns over slippage being reported in last year's capital programme and the Cabinet Member was urged to ensure that the capital programme was delivered on time.

3. Issues requiring action by the Scrutiny Board

- (a) The Board questioned whether or not Coventry was fully compliant with the recommendations of the **Richard Report** (produced following the murder of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in Soham, Cambridgeshire). Officers have recently completed an audit of City Council policies and procedures,

particularly concentrating on inter-agency co-operation. It was requested that the results of this audit be presented to the Board.

- (b) The Cabinet Member and Scrutiny Board discussed the effect of **children whose first language was not English** enrolling in Coventry schools. This prompted a number of questions regarding the capacity of Coventry schools to plan for these enrolments and the current position regarding surplus places. Further information has been requested on these issues.
- (c) The Scrutiny Board asked the Cabinet Member if there were any areas within his portfolio which he would appreciate the Board investigating further. Following a discussion the Board agreed to add to their work programme the following issues (subject to sufficient time being available during the year to address them):
- Wrap-around care
 - The effect of immigration into the city on services for children & young people
 - Working with partner organisations
- (d) Additionally the Cabinet Member expressed his interest in the Board's work programme item concerning the effect of domestic violence and abuse on children & young people. This work programme item is to be progressed from the Board's 1st November meeting.

Issues from Scrutiny meetings with Cabinet Members regarding their Strategic Plans

Cabinet Member (City Services) – Scrutiny Board 3, 6th September, 2006.

1. Issues noted

- (a) Recycling** - the Board welcomed the Cabinet Member's report on the continuing improvement in the amount of domestic household waste recycled in Coventry. Whilst targets are challenging the developing Municipal Waste Management Strategy will ensure that Coventry continues to improve recycling rates.
- (b) Test Purchases** - the Board noted that test sales of knives, cigarettes and spray paints had been made and was disappointed to note that Trading Standards officers continued to find traders selling to under-age persons. The Board welcomed the commitment to continue education and prosecutions following test purchases to encourage traders to comply with the law.
- (c) Coventry Direct** – the Cabinet Member assured the Board that there had been considerable operational benefits in certain City Services functions being incorporated into Coventry Direct. Not least of these was the significant increase in the number of calls dealt with and a corresponding decrease in the number of abandoned calls regarding City Services issues.
- (d) PFI Lighting Scheme** – this scheme is progressing with a requirement to submit an Outline Business Case to Government by January 2007.
- (e) Value for Money and Sickness Monitoring** – the Board welcomed the work done in City Services on improving value for money and congratulated the Cabinet member and officers on a fifth consecutive fall in the level of sickness absence in the Directorate.

2. Issues requiring action by the Cabinet Member

- (a) Dome Hawk cctv Cameras** – the Board noted that there had been 2 successful prosecutions for environmental crime, and that further work was being undertaken to investigate further uses for this technology.
- (b) Licensing Act 2005** – the Board queried the impact of the new licensing regime on incidents of alcohol related violence. Whilst there is little evidence at present regarding the impact of the new act the situation should be monitored and local policies reviewed accordingly.
- (c) Greening the City** – Board welcomed the inclusion of new stretched targets for improving cleanliness in the City in the newly signed Public Service Agreement and encouraged the Cabinet Member to include these targets in his Cabinet Member Strategic Plan.

3. Issues requiring action by the Scrutiny Board

- (a) **Municipal Waste Management Strategy** – Scrutiny Board 2 has expressed an interest in being kept informed of developments in completing this Strategy. The Board will shortly be arranging a visit to the Waste to Energy Plant.

- (b) **Enforcement** – the Board have in their work programme an intention to re-visit the Best Value Review into public protection services, and in this review will have the opportunity to consider some of the enforcement issues raised during the discussion with the Cabinet Member.

Issues from Scrutiny meetings with Cabinet Members re their Strategic Plans

Cabinet Member (Urban Regeneration & Regional Planning) - Scrutiny Board 3, 18th September 2006.

1. Issues noted

- (a) **Lyons Report** – the Board asked the CM about his views regarding possible civil service relocations to Coventry. He was optimistic that Coventry had good prospects for further relocations and that the QCA was only the first such move to be agreed. Plans continue to be developed for major investment around the railway station and much of this will be geared towards attracting quality office developments using the journey time to central London as a major attraction.
- (b) **New investment in the City** – the Board asked the CM about prospects for further investment and he and officers gave a positive reply. Ikea, Belgrade Plaza (including the new Radisson-Edwardian hotel) have created a significant amount of interest in the City and work is on-going to capitalise on this.

2. Issues requiring action by the Cabinet Member

- (a) **Swanswell** – whilst the CM acknowledged that progress on the wider development of Swanswell was slow, he was confident that the development was proceeding according to plan.
- (b) **Recruitment of Surveyors / Property Vacancies** – Members were concerned about an apparent shortage of specialist property management staff.
- (c) **Public Transport** – the Board queried how the effectiveness of the significant investment in public transport was measured (ie PrimeLines). There is a lack of effective measures of progress in the Plan and appropriate performance indicators should be developed.
- (d) **Aspirational Housing** – whilst the performance indicator for this objective remained in development the CM was confident that new development in the City would be more diverse and therefore encourage more higher-earners to stay in Coventry.
- (e) **Access to Council Buildings** – the CM was questioned on plans to improve access to public buildings. The Board were advised that though a small budget was available for investing in making publicly buildings more accessible, this went only a small way to meeting requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act.

3. Issues requiring further work by the Scrutiny Board

- (a) **IKEA** – the Board were concerned to discover more about how this development would be knitted into the wider city centre and how the planning was going for managing the extra traffic which would be coming to the city. The Board were assured that a significant amount of work was underway in

preparing for this store opening. The Board have asked for a report on progress to date to be presented to them after Christmas.

- (b) **Economic Development Strategy** – a new strategy is currently being developed and the Board will (with other stakeholders) have an opportunity to comment on it early in the New Year.
- (c) **The Transport Strategy** – the Board asked the Cabinet Member if there were any specific areas where he would appreciate the support of the Scrutiny Board. The CM replied that whilst he welcomed the work the Scrutiny Board was about to commence on the Planning Service (in November) – he encouraged the Board to begin work on developing a comprehensive transport strategy, which would help the City to grow further. The Cabinet Member felt that there was still a shortage of car parking in the City and that whilst there was lots of work going on in various important transport projects (north-south corridor, bus rapid transit etc) and the Board have agreed to include this in their work programme, providing sufficient time is available during this civic year.