

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE**8th August, 2007**

- Members Present:- Councillor Crookes (Substitute for Councillor Arrowsmith)
Councillor Duggins
Councillor Ms. Hunter
Councillor Maton
Councillor Mutton
Councillor Ridge
Councillor Williams (Chair)
- Co-opted
Member Present:- Councillor Clifford
- Cabinet Member
Present:- Councillor Taylor (Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance))
- Employees Present:- E. Dempsey (Chief Executive's Directorate)
R. Hughes (Head of Corporate Policy)
D. O'Sullivan (Chief Executive's Directorate)
C. Steele (Chief Executive's Directorate)
A. Townsend (Customer and Workforce Services Directorate)
- Apologies:- Councillor Arrowsmith

30. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Maton declared an interest in the matter the subject of Minute 33 below insofar as it related to his involvement with an organisation providing advice the City Council, the interest was not regarded as prejudicial and he remained in the meeting during the consideration of this item.

31. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th July, 2007, were signed as a true record.

32. Call-Ins Stage 1

The Committee noted that no call-ins had been received yet this week. The deadline for call-ins of Cabinet and Cabinet Member decisions made during the week commencing 30th July, 2007, was 9.00 a.m. on Friday 10th August, 2007. Any call-ins received after this meeting and before that deadline would be considered for validity by the Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, in consultation with the Director of Legal and Democratic Services (Paragraph 5.4.5.25.4 of the City Council's Constitution refers).

33. Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) Strategic Plan

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive that set out the background to the Cabinet Member Strategic Plans and went on to consider in detail the

Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) Strategic Plan for 2007/08 – 2009/10 which also contained information on the year end review of the 2006/07 plan.

The Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) gave a brief presentation on the key aspects of the Strategic Plan and responded to 10 questions that had previously been identified by the Committee as detailed below together with supplementary questions asked at the meeting.

Capacity

The Cabinet Member explained that capacity for continuous improvement was being addressed in a number of ways including the management of sickness absence levels and improved partnership working via the Local Area Agreement. The Cabinet Member was unsure as to precise cost implications but anticipated that there would be savings; Cabinet would consider a report shortly on the increased use of the Financial Advisory Framework Contract.

The Committee went on to discuss related issues and questioned the capacity within Culture and Leisure to improve the service. Councillor Taylor agreed that Leisure had historically been the poor relation and had suffered from the impact of historic cost savings. He cited the Heritage Lottery Fund grant for the War Memorial Park and forthcoming U.K. Schools Games as moves forward in this area.

The Committee enquired as to the effect of projects projected to save, but which were not achieving the expected savings, on the City Council's capacity to improve, for example Coventry Direct. Councillor Taylor indicated that he was confident that Coventry Direct would achieve savings in the long term although this was likely to take longer than had previously been anticipated, the impact was being monitored and there were lessons that could be learned from the implementation of the project. The Committee were concerned about the knock on effect on the City Council's capacity to improve if savings were not achieved.

Transport Innovation Fund

The Cabinet Member explained that the West Midlands Joint Committee had recently agreed the document "Gridlock or Growth – Choices and Challenges" which had been circulated to all Elected Members. The document had been submitted to the Department of Transport although it was not a full business case at this stage. The Cabinet Member highlighted that the proposals did not currently include road congestion charges; he did not believe that congestion levels within the City merited such an approach and pointed out the potential negative impact on the regeneration of the city if these were to be introduced. The Committee noted that the Transport Innovation Fund was not just concerned with congestion charging but also improvements to public transport for example yellow buses for schools.

Corporate Restructuring Success

The Committee noted that the recent corporate restructuring aimed to make the organisation more efficient in forward planning, procurement and commissioning with well researched recommendations for action and a systematic shared knowledge and information management system. Efficiency savings were expected to be realised from 2008/09 onwards; the Cabinet Member highlighted

that he considered value for money to be about providing a quality service at a reasonable cost.

CPA Action Plan

The Cabinet Member explained that the CPA Action Plan was a one off response to the corporate assessment report. Many of the actions contained within the plan had been completed, to ensure they were not lost, those that were not yet completed had been included in the appropriate Cabinet Member or Operational Plan. Operational Plans were reviewed by Management Teams and reports on the Cabinet Member Plans were made to the relevant Scrutiny Board on a half yearly basis.

Scrutiny Process

The Cabinet Member indicated that in terms of Scrutiny he viewed his responsibility as to oversee the relationship between Cabinet and Scrutiny; he held regular meetings with the Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee. Councillor Taylor felt that the scrutiny process had improved over recent years but that there was the potential for more involvement in policy development, budget setting, value for money and evaluation work. There would be a need to respond to new opportunities and duties in the Local Government Bill, specific guidance on this was awaited but it was currently expected to take effect from 2008.

Councillor Mutton indicated that he was pleased that the Cabinet Member recognised that scrutiny was working better however he was concerned that there were not sufficient Scrutiny Boards and as a result they were struggling to do all the work they would wish to, he asked that the number of boards be reconsidered. Councillor Taylor indicated that he had considered this matter at the beginning of the Municipal Year when the boards were established but did not think it was necessary to add an additional board, he pointed out that an additional Scrutiny Board would impact on the capacity of support officers.

City Region

Councillor Taylor explained that the importance of sub-regional working had been emphasised in the sub-national review. Work continued on the West Midlands Region, this remained a voluntary partnership although more formal governance arrangements were being developed. The focus of the City Region was on the delivery of growth and prosperity and adding value to current local and regional activities. In addition to this, work was also ongoing with the Warwickshire County Districts and Solihull to explore opportunities.

Coventry Partnership and Local Area Agreements

Councillor Taylor felt that partnership working was the way forward and that the City Council was in a strong position with the Local Strategic Partnership which was working well and improving. It was hoped that the scrutiny of partnership organisations could be with the spirit of co-operation rather than in an adversarial manner, following the lead taken by Scrutiny Board (4) on health.

The establishment of a Local Public Service Board would improve the performance management of the Local Area Agreement, give more budget flexibility and ensure better use of all public funds coming into the city.

With regard to the local health economy the Health and Wellbeing Theme Group of the Coventry Partnership shared the City Council's priorities, health was certain to be a key service theme within the Local Area Agreement.

With regard to the integration of the Local Area Agreements with the Corporate Plan the Committee noted that the Council's vision had been formally adopted by the Partnership. The Local Development Framework Core Strategy was to be part of the New Sustainable Community Strategy on which Members would be consulted in September. The Committee acknowledged the difficulties in addressing local priorities whilst negotiating with Government departments, it was felt that targets set by Central Government often had no relevance at a local level.

Best Value Targets

The Cabinet Member indicated that of the best value targets 64 had been achieved and 57 not achieved, many of those that had not been achieved had been near misses although some were of concern. Councillor Maton suggested that with regard to education targets, differences in achievement levels across the city were of more concern than missed targets, the Officers indicated that work had been ongoing in this area to narrow the gap in priority neighbourhoods. There was a need to balance setting overall targets with narrowing the gap, this was one of the strengths of the Corporate Plan where improvement targets were used rather than averages.

Consultation Strategy

The Cabinet Member confirmed that the Consultation Strategy would follow although no date had yet been set for this. It was agreed that communication was a large part of the Consultation Strategy and that the public needed to understand that decisions, often difficult, needed to be made. It was suggested that consultations should explain what the Council was trying to achieve rather than asking the public whether they were happy with proposals.

34. **Outstanding Issues**

The Committee considered and noted a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services that identified those issues on which further reports had been requested in order that Members could monitor progress.

RESOLVED that the item concerned with the University of Warwick Science Park and Associated Companies be rescheduled for further consideration in September, 2007.

35. **Work Programme 2007/08**

The Committee considered and noted the Work Programme for the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee for the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

36. **Other Business**

There were no other items of public or private business.