

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

9th January, 2008

Scrutiny Co-ordination
Committee Members

Present:-
Councillor Arrowsmith (Chair)
Councillor Charley (Substitute for Councillor Williams)
Councillor Mrs. Dixon (Substitute for Councillor Ms. Hunter)
Councillor Duggins
Councillor Lee
Councillor Maton
Councillor Mutton
Councillor Ridge

Co-opted

Member Present:- Councillor Clifford

Employees Present:-

C. Dear (Chief Executive's Directorate)
P. Jennings (Finance and Legal Services Directorate)
S. Manzie (Chief Executive)
J. Parry (Assistant Chief Executive)
C. Steele (Chief Executive's Directorate)
A. Townsend (Customer and Workforce Services Directorate)
A. West (Chief Executive's Directorate)

Apologies:-

Councillor Ms. Hunter
Councillor Williams

101. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

102. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st November, 2007, were signed as a true record.

103. **Call-Ins Stage 1**

The Committee noted that no Cabinet or Cabinet Member meetings had been held during the week commencing 31st December, 2007, therefore there were no decisions open to call-in this week.

104. **Corporate Plan 2007/08 – 2009/10 – Half Year Progress Report**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive that had previously been considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 18th December, 2007 (their Minute 158/07 refers). The report set out a review of progress over the first half of the current financial year on the Corporate Plan and summarised the progress made against

each of the corporate objectives and management objectives.

The Chief Executive briefly introduced the report, the Committee noted that the number of star ratings achieved by the City Council was improving and there was a greater level of consistency between inspected services. However, a number of areas for improvement remained.

The Committee questioned the Officers on aspects of the report, in particular:-

- The approach taken to the reduction of sickness absence levels, in particular whether this had remained the same since the initiative had been introduced or if supplementary/alternative strategies and approaches had been adopted.
- Member training in particular concerns that areas for potential training identified in Member one to one sessions were rarely taken forward, there was also concern that attendance levels at training sessions was often low with Members cancelling at short notice. It was suggested that as Members often failed to attend training sessions they were booked on to a process of notification to Group Leaders and Whips when Members failed to attend should be established. Members enquired as to the position with the roll out of the previously successful 360 degree feedback pilot which it was understood was to be extended to all Elected Members. Officers agreed to take forward these issues.
- The level of statistical information available on the City Council's website to assist members of the public in understanding trends in performance levels. Officers agreed to identify what information was available.
- Concern regarding the educational attainment of looked after children in particular the number of GCSEs obtained at A* to C.
- The City Council's progress towards the CPA use of resources judgment target.
- The provision of sex education in Coventry's schools; Officers agreed to pass on Members comments in relation to this to the Director of Children, Learning and Young People.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the report and request Officers to follow up those issues identified above.

105. **Revenue and Capital Pre-Budget Report 2008/09**

The Committee considered a report of the Management Board that had previously been considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 18th December, 2007 (their Minute 162/07 refers). The report updated Members on the work undertaken in preparation for the 2008/09 and future years' Revenue Budget and Capital Programme. At their meeting the Cabinet had agreed that the contents of the report would be used as the basis of the Council's public budget consultation process. The final report would be considered by Cabinet and Council in February as part of the Council Tax setting process. The Committee noted that dialogue with trade unions had already commenced and they

would be submitting their comments on the proposals.

The Committee questioned the officers on aspects of the report, in particular:-

- The inclusion of the recently approved street lighting PFI in the budget. Officers believed this had been included but agreed to confirm.
- The impact of the PTA budget and how this fed through to the City Council via their levy. Officers agreed to provide further details to Members.
- Whether the savings associated with the transfer of the Taxi Licensing function from City Development to City Services were achievable. Officers indicated that they believed that this was the case and agreed to confirm this to Members.

The Committee enquired whether Management Board were looking at proposals to address the deficit which Appendix 3 indicated was between £0.7m and £6.8m depending on the best or worse case scenario. The officers explained that since the report had been produced some things had changed both in terms of resources and savings and that this was still ongoing. Management Board were also looking at issues that involved both additional spend as well as additional savings; the position was moving towards the best case scenario as the Government settlement had been greater than expected and the PTA levy had not gone up as much as had originally been expected. Officers agreed to provide information on the level of revenue raised by a 1% increase in Council Tax to Elected Members.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the report and Officers be requested to forward that information outlined above to Elected Members.

106. **Outstanding Issues**

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

107. **Work Programme 2007/08**

The Committee considered and noted the Work programme for the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee for the 2007/08 Municipal Year. It was requested that work on the Review of Voluntary Organisations commence towards the end of February, 2008.

108. **Charging Review 2007 Culture, Leisure and Libraries Consideration**

With reference to Minute 47/07, the Committee considered a report of the Director of Community Services that reconsidered charges for football pitch and changing room hire and admission to the Lunt Roman Fort in response to a request from this Committee during the consideration of a previous call-in. The officer indicated that charges had been adjusted slightly as a result of the call-in however there was some concern that the increase in costs for pitch hire for juniors was being increased by a significantly greater percentage than the adult charge (33% and 16% respectively).

Members enquired why the charge for a 1 to 10 person group was £40 when those

people, if they paid separately, could be admitted for £2.50 each. The officer explained that if the visitors attended in a group then they had the benefit of a dedicated member of staff to guide them during their visit; this issue was highlighted to all small groups attending. The Committee were concerned that whilst the provision at the Lunt Fort was very good on those days when events were held, this was often not the case on non event days and that other attractions offered better value for money for visitors on non event days. The officers acknowledged that this was often the case and indicated that the Lunt Roman Fort was an expensive facility to operate given the number of visitors it attracted.

The Committee note that consideration could be given to a change in approach to charging when the strategy was next reviewed, the Officer highlighted that any reduction in or removal of the admission charges at the Lunt Roman Fort would need to be offset by an increase in the Culture, Leisure and Libraries budget to cover staff, equipment etc costs. The Committee requested that when the strategy was next reviewed Officers give consideration to limiting the number of days that the Lunt Roman Fort was open each year but to provide an improved service to visitors on those days when the facility did open. They further requested a report on visitor levels at the facility after 12 months in order to understand the effect of the increased admission charges.

The Committee enquired as to what post code data was available on visitors attending attractions operated by the City Council, for paid attractions such as the Lunt Roman Fort this information was robust but for free attractions such as the Museum of British Road Transport this was less so. It was emphasised that attractions were promoted across the region and sub-region and that consideration was currently being given to joint promotions. The officers agreed to provide that information on visitor origins which was available.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) The Committee recommends that the Cabinet Member (Culture, Leisure and Libraries) proceeds on the basis of the proposals set out in the report submitted.**
- (2) Officers be requested to consider limiting the number of days the Lunt Roman Fort was open each year but providing improved services on those days that the facility did open when the strategy was next reviewed.**
- (3) A review of visitor levels at the Lunt Roman Fort be undertaken after 12 months to establish the effect of the increased admission charges.**
- (4) Officers be requested to provide post code data on visitor origins to City Council attractions where available.**

(NOTE: This item was considered at the meeting as an item of other urgent public business, the reason for urgency being to allow Scrutiny to have an input into the report prior to its consideration by the Cabinet Member (Culture, Leisure and Libraries) at his meeting on 17th January, 2008.)