



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES HELD ON TUESDAY 6 NOVEMBER 2007, IN LARGE DINING ROOM, JUDGES LODGINGS, COMMENCING AT 11.30 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 2.00 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr P Rogerson (Chairman), Mrs M Aston (Vice-Chairman), Mr S Adams, Mr M Appleyard, Mrs P Birchley, Mrs A Davies, Mr T Egleton, Mr N Hussain, Mr Z Mohammed, Mr A Oxley, Mr D Polhill and Mr F Robinson OBE

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 5th October 2007 were confirmed.

4 MEDIUM TERM PLAN REVIEW

The Chairman welcomed Mr Frank Downes, Cabinet Member for Resources, and Mr Ian Trenholm, Strategic Director for Resources, to the Meeting. Mr Downes and Mr Trenholm had been invited to the Meeting to give their views on the Medium Term Financial Planning Process (MTFP) and to help the Committee find out if the 2006/07 financial settlement had delivered the outcomes it had set out to achieve and what lessons could be learnt and recommendations made for 2007/08 and 2008/09.

Mr Downes and Mr Trenholm responded to the following Questions :-

In the light of the data provided are there any comments you wish to make on how the Council manages its performance and budget, both revenue and capital ?

Mr Downes explained that there are 22 Services across the County Council, 7 in Resources. Support services are in place to provide back up to the delivery services. Demands on support services change all the time but the budget is not increasing at the same rate. Mr Downes had reported to Cabinet that Resources was forecasting a year end overspend due to improvements being put in place for other Services. A corporate overspend had also been carried over from last year because services hadn't made savings. Mr Downes highlighted the important roles played by the support services and gave examples where they had made

savings for the Council through different initiatives. In particular, Mr Downes mentioned savings made by Procurement on the mobile phone contract and by Human Resources in reducing the Temporary Staff bill.

Mr Trenholm explained background to the performance data shown in the Corporate Plan Performance graphs circulated with the Agenda papers.

How are the MTP indicative figures for years 2 and 3 used in informing the following year's budget ?

Mr Trenholm explained that the MTP is built up from existing activity. The current budget is taken and forecast forward. Measures are then put in place to achieve savings with a report of the financial consequences of making changes.

In your view how engaged is the membership in influencing both the political and financial priorities for the Council ?

Mr Downes responded that Members were engaged through Policy Advisory Groups (PAGs) and through the Political Groups. There was also the Members Challenge Panel.

In your view how effective is the MTP challenge process ?

Mr Downes said that he felt there was intensive officer challenge. This coming year should be better from a member challenge perspective, he felt.

Mr Trenholm explained the officer challenge process. Members of the Chief Officer's Management Team (COMT) sits, with a Head of Service, on a challenge to a Portfolio they don't manage. The Head of Finance chairs each one for consistency.

How are the outcomes of the MTP reflected in the future performance management and budget management process throughout the year?

Mr Downes emphasised the intense monitoring of the current year's budget which would then feed into the following year's. Within the Resources Portfolio, a monthly meeting was held between Mr Trenholm, the individual Heads of Service and himself to discuss the Service's performance report. Reports went to Cabinet on a quarterly basis outlining performance against budget.

How effective is the Value for Money Score in relation to its associated strategy ?

Mr Trenholm explained the A-E matrix score based on the Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry and the three "E's"- effectiveness; efficiency; economy. Mr Trenholm said that he was not aware of any authority that quantifies value for money in absolute terms. The process was certainly something that the Audit Commission look at in a positive light and was a good first step. It has been successful in focusing on value for money as a subject. In terms of the Question, Mr Trenholm said it was a difficult to answer, Yes or No.

What processes are in place to identify and manage risks of under/over achievement both of performance and budget ?

Mr Downes re-iterated the regular meetings with Heads of Service, 1:1s and the regular reports to Cabinet. Mr Trenholm mentioned that, on a bi-monthly basis, Risk Registers and Service Plans were examined. The revenue budget and performance were also regularly reviewed by COMT.

In the context of both the policy and financial medium term planning process, what are the challenges you face and what improvements would you suggest ?

Mr Downes mentioned the ever increasing demand, and reducing budgets, as a particular challenge. Mr Trenholm said that "Pathfinder" was a challenge. A business case was being worked on with the District Councils. A range of solutions was on the table, including outsourcing the whole of the Portfolio. There was an increasing move towards "self-service" particularly with the onset of the business development system, "SAP" and other web-based technology.

Members were invited to ask Mr Downes and Mr Trenholm questions.

Comments were made that the political challenge process needed to be distinguished from the whole Council challenge. All members of the Council needed to be able to contribute to, and challenge, the budget process. Concern was expressed that there has not been sufficient public monitoring of the budget. An ongoing process of monitoring was needed. A view was expressed that if you are not a member of the Cabinet you do not know what is going on. A debate was needed on this issue it was felt. The Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive would be invited to a future meeting.

In response to a question about the need to make assumptions about performance against budget, Mr Trenholm explained that much of the annual data is in the Schools area. Proxy data was used where appropriate.

Members discussed the way the Committee would need to evolve and the data that they needed to receive and why. Feedback was also needed on successes.

In concluding the item, and thanking Mr Downes and Mr Trenholm for attending the Meeting, the Chairman reminded Members that they would be looking at the individual Service Areas of the Resources Portfolio, with Mr Trenholm and the individual Heads of Service, at the next Meeting on 11th December.

Members discussed their expectations for future Meetings and the Chairman invited views on the format, and detail, of the Questions. Any suggestions should be passed to Cheryl Powell.

5 CORPORATE PROPERTY STRATEGY

Members received a presentation from Diane Spencer, Head of Property Services, and Graham Morley, Corporate Property and Facilities Manager, on the Corporate Property Strategy.

Diane Spencer's Presentation covered the following :-

- Background and Key Drivers
- Composition and Vision
- Strand 1 (Process to date; Current Actions)
- Strand 2 (Acquisitions and Disposals)
- Strand 3 (Strategic Property Reviews)
- Strand 4 (Maintenance Strategy)
- Strand 5 (Work-style Strategy)
- Strand 6 (Lettings Strategy)

Diane Spencer responded to Members' questions. In response to a question as to the policy on use of capital receipts, it was agreed to ask the Head of Finance for clarification and

report to the next meeting. Graham Morley reported on disposals and capital receipts as well on vacant and surplus properties. He responded to questions from members.

6 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next Meeting was scheduled for 11th December 2007. Time to be confirmed.

CHAIRMAN