

Durham County Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

At the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Corporate Management Issues held at the County Hall, Durham on Monday 22 November 2004 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:

Councillor C Robson in the Chair

Members:

Councillors J Armstrong, Blenkinsopp, Firby, T Forster, Nicholls and Stradling.

Other Members:

Councillors Barker, Coates, Dormer, Lethbridge, Priestley and Watson.

Labour Party Representative:

Councillor B Scott.

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors M Hodgson and Porter.

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Equalities and Diversity

The Sub-Committee considered a report, together with a presentation by the Equalities and Diversity Steering Group and Chris Tunstall, Deputy Chief Executive (Environment and Change Management) (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of Minutes).

Linda Walker, Chairman of the Equalities and Diversity Steering Group highlighted the following during the presentation:

- (1) The Equalities Agenda - How Are We Really Doing?
- (2) Summary of the main points of the Greenfield Consultant's Report

- Commitment
- Equalities Levels 1 & 2
- Level 3 - Main Issues
 - Corporate planning
 - Service Plans
 - Corporate and Performance Management

(3) Warwickshire County Council Key Findings

Councillor Robson asked how the authority can improve the way in which it caters for people with learning impairment who attend Council meetings. He continued that there is a loop system however, having experienced this in practice in one of the committee rooms and in particular with only one microphone available, the result was embarrassing for the person we were trying to assist. If we cannot provide the right environment for those with hearing impairment to participate in our meetings we cannot expect others in the County to do this.

Linda Walker responded that the authority needs to provide a service for the complete range of physical disability. She continued that training is currently taking place with staff at the Help Desk. She would look into the issue of hearing impairment.

Councillor Blenkinsopp requested advice as to how Members can publicise the Equalities Agenda.

Linda Walker highlighted the need to involve Members and continued that awareness training is currently taking place for staff and Members.

Councillor Coates requested clarification in relation to the pockets of resistance which had been identified.

Linda Walker confirmed this was being addressed.

Councillor Armstrong requested clarification as to what Members involvement would be and suggested that any information to promote Equalities could be given to Members via Member Area Panels. He emphasised that the process should be Member led.

Councillor Dormer asked whether an assessment of the cost had been made in relation to the implementation of the Equalities Agenda.

Linda Walker confirmed that she is currently working on a work plan which includes the cost of particular areas of work and officers time.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

A3 Procurement

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny together with a presentation by Bill Richards, Head of Corporate Procurement concerning the procurement process within the Authority (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of Minutes).

During the presentation, Bill Richards highlighted the following issues:

- Procurement - What Is It.
- What is Strategic Procurement
- What is Durham County Council's Policy for Procurement
- How do we ensure compliance
- What is Value of Procurement in Durham County Council
- How is Procurement organised in Durham County Council
- Service Area Operational Procurement
- Strategic Alliance
- Drivers for Change
- National and Regional Initiatives
- Our Current Initiatives
- E-Procurement
- How will we monitor success
- Efficiency Review - Gershon
- Savings
- Identified Savings
- Procurement Strategy - Cash Savings in 2007/08
- Procurement Strategy - Efficiency Savings in 2007/08
- Best Value Review - Business Services
- How will savings be achieved

Councillor Armstrong declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item of business as he serves as a Member on the Strategic Alliance Board.

Councillor Armstrong asked what involvement the Unit had in relation to the Strategic Alliance for Building and Civil Engineering works which accounts for over £50m of the Authority's Procurement Annual Spend.

Bill Richards responded that up-to-date the Unit has played a very small role as the Civil Engineering Alliance is controlled via Environment Service with the Building Alliance now falling under Corporate Service although he anticipates that the Unit will have a greater role in the future. He highlighted that he will be serving on the Building Alliance Board.

Councillor Armstrong continued by asking what role the Unit undertakes in relation to transport procurement, social care and health procurement relating to care issues and procurement by Service Direct.

Bill Richards responded that he works closely with Richard Startup, Head of Transport in relation to the transport requirement of Education and Social Care and Health. He continued that the Unit is currently looking at stabilising price increases.

With reference to Social Care and Health the Unit is looking at the provision of domiciliary care for block contracting purposes as well as a brokerage service for domiciliary care.

Finally in relation to Service Direct Bill Richards confirmed that the Unit has worked quite closely with the service on a regular basis concerning purchases.

Councillor Armstrong continued by asking how corporate are the Council's procurement arrangements? What proportion of procurement does the Unit directly deal with and what proportion do you influence and does the Council need to improve its corporate approach to secure more cash savings?

Bill Richards responded that Corporate Procurement over 2 years ago had an influence over £30m of expenditure. It now has influence over approximately £136m (over 60% of procurement expenditure). He continued that the Unit has made significant progress over the last 2 years and he emphasised that he anticipates that the Unit will make even more progress in the future.

Councillor Dormer indicated that he understood that Essex had been "Ahead of the Game" in relation to E-Government. How does this authority compare with other authorities in relation to the provision of E-Government.

Bill Richards responded that Essex was ahead in relation to the implementation of the Market Place solution however this Authority had held off introducing this in order to allow the Best Value Review of Support Services to be implemented.

He continued that in some areas the Authority is ahead, the authority recognises where it is and what they have to do.

Councillor Barker commented that the corporate approach and achieving savings is fine however Members are concerned with the quality of what is provided and how the social environment can be affected.

Bill Richards responded that in terms of procurement the issue of sustainability is considered.

Councillor Robson asked how the annual cash savings for procurement are delivered in practice. He continued that some Chief Officers have informed Members that their budget is reduced. Could the process for this be explained. Also could confirmation be given that cash savings are looked on as an annual rather than accumulative saving.

Bill Richards responded that currently procurement savings are added up on an accumulative basis however they are shown separately on a yearly basis in budget statements.

He continued that last year the savings of £500,000 were removed from service budgets following discussions at the Procurement Board where each Service is represented.

Councillor Blenkinsopp asked how the procurement strategy fits in with the Strategic Vision for the County and the Council's Sustainable Environment Policies which stress the importance of the local economy.

Bill Richards responded that he was satisfied that the procurement strategy assists in the authority achieving the Strategic Vision.

Councillor Stradling asked whether it is possible for the County Council Procurement system to be applied or used by other authorities, in particular Parish Councils.

Bill Richards responded that the authority was offering services to Parish Council and was looking to extend this facility.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

A4 Complaints Handling

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate Services) concerning details of complaints handling within the Council for the first six months of 2004/05 (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that the trend in terms of numbers of complaints continues to be reasonably static, a majority of complaints relate to poor service (generally the equality and level of service) particularly in relation to Social Care and Health and there are also consistent issues in relation to most services about staff conduct with Social Care and Health having the greatest number.

Councillor Coates suggested that in relation to future reports complaints concerning private providers of care should be shown separately.

In addition he asked what the authority is learning from the various complaints to ensure that the problems do not re-occur.

Bill McKibbin, Assistant Head of Service, Corporate Services responded that each service, following a complaint, looks at what has been learned to ensure it does not happen again.

Councillor Barker requested clarification in relation to the 35 complaints which had been received by the Ombudsman. He asked whether the authority had been given the opportunity to respond or had the complainant referred the issue direct.

Bill McKibbin responded that the complaints come from a number of services and that usually the authority is given the opportunity to address the problem. The 35 members of the public who remained dissatisfied with the authorities investigation had then taken the matter to the Ombudsman.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A5 Performance Management

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Corporate Policy concerning Performance Management (for copy see file of Minutes).

Ann Campbell, Head of Corporate Policy informed Members that overall the performance of indicators supporting this objective are a mixture of slight improvements and slight deteriorations. She highlighted the following as areas of concern.

- BV8 - % of invoices for commercial goods and services which were paid by the authority within 30 days.
- BV 156 - % of the authority's buildings open to the public in which all public areas are suitable for and accessible to disabled people.
- BV157 - The number of types of interactions that are enabled for electronic delivery as a % of the types of interactions that are legally permissible for electronic delivery.

With reference to the Local Public Service Agreement the Sub-Committee was informed that in relation to the 12 targets, the authority should achieve 9 and therefore will receive £9m reward which has already been included in the Budget over the next two years.

Councillor Armstrong questioned that in relation to BV156 and 157 what measures have been put in place to improve performance.

Ann Campbell responded that Chief Officers will be discussing BV156 and BV157 at Corporate Management Team with a view to putting in place measures to improve performance.

Councillor Coates commented that he was encouraged by the reduction in sickness absence although he was still concerned above BV8, % of invoices for commercial goods and services which were paid by the authority within 30 days.

Ann Campbell responded that the target set by Authority was deemed to be achievable however this had been proved wrong. She continued that it is hoped the new electronic processing of invoices will speed up the process.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A6 Work Programme

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny giving an update on the work programme for the Sub-Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Stradling suggested that more Scrutiny meetings should be taken out into the local community. Councillor Armstrong suggested that this issue be discussed at a future meeting of the Co-ordinating Panel.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A7 Forward Plan

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny with updated details of the sections of the Council's Forward Plan falling within its jurisdiction (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.