

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 – RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT held at COUNCIL OFFICES SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 3 JULY 2002**

Present:- Councillor R J Copping – Chairman  
Councillors Mrs D Cornell, R C Dean, Mrs S Flack, M A Hibbs, A J Ketteridge, Mrs C M Little, Mrs J E Menell, A R Row and R W L Stone.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs M Cox, M R Dellow, A Forrow, S Martin, M Perry and R M Secker.

**S2.1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs C A Bayley and G Sell.

**S2.2 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2002 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**S2.3 BUSINESS ARISING**

**(i) Minute S2.27 - Home Office Proposals for a Removals Centre**

The Chief Executive had contacted the Home Office on Monday and had been advised that the report to the Minister had not yet been completed. Further discussions were to be held with BAA, and the report was expected within the next few weeks.

Councillor Mrs Flack referred to the recent public meeting at Leaden Roding at which a representative from Barnston Parish Council had expressed extreme dissatisfaction at the way in which the Council's debate on the Removals Centre had been conducted. He was disappointed that for this crucial issue, the resolution from the Council had not been passed unanimously. The debate had obscured the fact that the whole Council was against the centres. The Chairman said that it had been a democratic debate, but other Members wondered whether for this type of important issue, it might be useful to hold a preliminary meeting to reach a consensus before the decision was made at full Council.

**(ii) Minute S2.29 (i) - Presentation on Essex County Council Pension Fund**

Members were informed that the Director of Resources would make a presentation on the Essex County Council Pension Fund to the next meeting. Work was also continuing on the review of the Early Retirement Policy and this might also be covered at the next meeting.

**(iii) Minute S2.29 (ii) - Office Accommodation**

Following the positive decision by the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council, the Corporate Management Team had met with Unison to discuss the timetable for the implementation of the office move. When looking at the timetable, Councillor Row asked the Council to bear in mind the current difficulties being experienced by the Planning Service and the extra disruption that the move to Saffron Walden might cause. Councillor Mrs Menell expressed concern that at the Extraordinary Meeting, Unison had still requested answers to some questions even though this matter had been the subject of full consultation.

**(iv) Minute S2.31 (i) - Audley End Station to Saffron Walden Proposed Cycleway**

Councillor Mrs Menell mentioned a recent meeting of the Local Agenda 21 Forum which had discussed cycling strategy in the district. She asked that these Minutes be available to the Environment and Transport Committee when it considered the cycleway at its September meeting.

**S2.4****INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS**

The Committee received a report summarising the results of Internal Audit work completed during the past six months. Recent audit work had covered energy management, payroll allowances and expenses, creditor payments and VAT, miscellaneous debt, the building cleaning contract, personnel and revenues.

Councillor Ketteridge referred to the audit of revenues and drew Members attention to a recent incident when a Council Tax payer had been incorrectly summonsed. The Principal Auditor pointed out that, with a large volume of transactions, it was inevitable that there would be an element of human error, but controls within the section had been tightened and performance had improved over the last few years. Members felt that in these exceptional cases, there should be additional compensation to the letter of apology.

RESOLVED that the Corporate Management Team and Group Leaders be asked to look at a possible policy of financial compensation.

Members then asked how the Internal Audit Section addressed areas of improvement identified by the District Auditor. Some Members were concerned that Internal Audit had not been involved in the Office Accommodation project. Members also considered that there should be a mechanism whereby Members could more effectively monitor the outcome of individual Internal Audit Reports and it was

RECOMMENDED that meetings be arranged as necessary at which the appropriate Scrutiny and Policy Committee Chairmen and officers could review Internal Audit Reports.

The Assistant Chief Executive said that the format of the six monthly audit reports was being looked at with a view to improving them.

## S2.5

### **BEST VALUE REVIEWS 2002/03**

#### **(i) Corporate Performance Legal and Monitoring Services Best Value Review**

The Head of Legal Services detailed the progress made to date with the Corporate Performance Legal and Monitoring Services Best Value Review. The group had approved a work programme and had obtained details of costings for the service. Three challenge events had been organised. The events had not been well attended and the group had expressed its disappointment at the lack of Member participation, particularly in the Corporate Performance session. A questionnaire had subsequently been circulated on Legal Services. Further data on current and predicted case loads was being sought to enable a benchmarking exercise to be carried out with other similar authorities. The benchmarking/compare exercise would then be completed and a draft improvement plan and consultation exercise would be prepared by the core group in September. A further progress report would be made to this Committee on 9 October 2002.

RESOLVED that

- 1 The report be accepted, and
- 2 Members be encouraged to respond to the corporate performance questionnaires.

#### **(ii) Best Value Review of Street Cleansing – Progress Report**

Members were advised of the current position with regard to the Best Value Review of Street Cleansing Services.

The Member Reference Group had met on three occasions and service profiles had been outlined. Three challenge events had been held at different times, but attendance had been disappointing. However, there had been worthwhile discussions and a number of issues had been raised. This information had been collated and summarised, and the next stage would be for the Officers' sub group to obtain information from other authorities for the compare part of the review. Once the comparison exercise had been completed, the Review Group would prepare a draft improvement plan for the full Reference Group to consider.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted.

#### **(iii) Best Value Review 2002/03 – Planning Services**

At the meeting of the Environment and Transport Committee on 11 June 2002, it had been resolved to extend the completion date of the Best Value Review of Planning Services from December 2002 to July 2003. This had

been due to high workload and severe staffing shortages in the Planning Service.

## S2.6 **BUDGET UPDATE AND STRATEGY**

Members considered the report that had been submitted to the Resources Committee on 20 June 2002 concerning the recommended strategy for preparing and setting the Council's budgets for 2003-2004. The Chief Accountant advised Members of the changing framework of Central Government's support for local authorities and the continuing pressure on Uttlesford's revenue reserves. The Chairman considered that it was important for all Members to be involved in the budget making process, and to identify areas where savings could be achieved or where priority should be given. The report concluded with the existing Council priorities for 2002/03 and it intended to update and discuss these at the Council meeting on 16 July. A number of Members felt it would be premature to make a final decision on the Council's priorities and targets at that meeting and suggested that it should be discussed first through the Committee cycle. Members then raised some further issues that could be included on the list of priorities for consideration at the Council meeting.

### RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the list of Council Policy Priorities for 2002/03 be considered and updated at the meeting of the Council on 16 July 2002 and the resulting list be used as a basis on which Officers could prepare reports; each Committee to have the opportunity to amend the list and set targets during the following Committee cycle and a final decision on the Council's policy priorities be made at the Council meeting on 16 October 2002.
- 2 the following issues be added to the list of Council priorities
  - the removals centre
  - decriminalisation of parking
  - the Public Service Agreement
  - cycleways in the District.

## S2.7 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETINGS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE AND THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 AND 20 JUNE 2002**

The Chairman drew attention to the Best Value Performance Plan 2002, which had been considered at the Resources Committee meeting. He stressed the importance of this document and urged Members to read it fully before the Council meeting.

**S2.8 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Assistant Chief Executive pointed out that the Committee was currently dealing with two Best Value Reviews and the Planning Review would be added later in the year. The next meeting would be looking at the Early Retirement Policy and pensions information. There was likely to be work arising from the budget process and also performance information that would need to be considered. In the circumstances, the Members felt that no further items should be included in the Committee's work programme at this stage.

**S2.9 MATTER REFERRED BY AN INDIVIDUAL MEMBER**

Councillor G W Powers had asked for a progress report on the Local Strategic Partnership, as there had been no update to Members since the conference held in November 2001. He had asked a number of questions and these were answered in the report. However, there were some further issues that Councillor Powers wished to discuss and it was agreed that this matter would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee when Councillor Powers would be able to attend.

The meeting ended at 10.05 pm.