

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 – RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT held at
7.30 pm at the COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN
on 1 DECEMBER 2004**

Present: - Councillor S Flack – Chairman.
Councillors H D Baker, R M Lemon, J P Murphy, M Savage and
S Schneider.

Also Present: - Councillor E Gower.

Officers in attendance: - A Bovaird, V Borges, D Burridge, M Dellow, T
Halford, C Hughes, E Lock, S Martin, I Pigney (Unison), R Pridham, M
Purkiss, V Rogacs (Unison), L Scott and A Stewart.

SC2.27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C A Bayley, M A Hibbs
D J Morson and F E Silver.

SC2.28 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2004 were received, confirmed
and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the amendment of
the word “adapted” to read, “adopted” in minute SC2 19.

SC2.29 STAFF ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS

The Committee received a report outlining two parallel and independent
exercises, which had been undertaken in late summer/early autumn within the
organisation to assess staff opinions and attitudes. The Chief Executive
explained that he had held 21 sessions, which all staff were invited to and in
total 228 staff attended. Whilst at the same time Unison had prepared and
distributed a questionnaire to all their 145 members of which 115 were
returned.

He then outlined the proposed action plan, which had been agreed between
management and Unison and which addressed the staff’s issues and
methods to work towards resolving them.

The Chairman asked the Unison representatives why only 145 questionnaires
were distributed as she felt an assessment of the whole workforce should be
made. She went on to say that employees seemed to have a heavy work load
resulting from e-mail and phone over loads and also that the Executive
Management Team needed to be more visible and have more contact with
their staff.

In response to the Chairman’s questions Val Rogacs informed the Committee
that only Unison members could be canvassed. However, they had received a
significant response rate from their members and a number of staff had

provided additional comments. The Chair went onto ask if the Unison representatives were feeling confident with the action plan and they informed the Committee that they were now feeling cautiously optimistic as the issues they had raised were now being addressed.

Councillor Murphy informed the Committee that this has been a very useful process and had the full support of the Councillors.

SC2.30 **ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS**

The Audit Partnership Manager introduced the report, which outlined the work completed by the Internal Audit during 2003/04, compliance with the Code of Practice and the annual audit opinion. He explained that all of the 29 audits depicted in the report had resulted in a written report to management and in total 124 recommendations had been agreed to improve the Council's control environment, equating to 4.3 per audit, which was an increase of 2.6 for 2002/03. He explained that approximately 55 days were spent on giving proactive audit related advice and assistance and approximately 32 days on internal investigation.

He briefly summarised the Code of Practice, which set out organisational and operational standards for internal audit in Local Government.

He went on to outline that the Audit opinion could fall into one of four categories. Whilst the Council had not fully implemented a corporate risk management system during 2003/04 it was considered that the risks identified and evaluated by the Internal Audit were adequately controlled. He explained that this meant that there was some inconsistency in application but they were operating effectively and objectives were largely achieved. To reduce the residual risk, management needed to implement the recommendations contained within the internal audit reports.

RESOLVED that the Annual Internal Audit report be noted.

SC2.31 **DECRIMINALISATION OF PARKING CONTROL – UPDATE**

The Parking Enforcement Manager gave the Committee an update on the progress with the implementation of the decriminalisation of parking control.

He informed the Committee that 962 penalty notices had been issued and 605 had been paid. He went onto explain the penalty notice appeals procedure. He added that the back office was fully staffed and there were now 5 full-time and 2 part-time Attendants with a current short fall of one full-time position.

He explained that the aim of the decriminalisation of parking enforcement was to keep Uttlesford District moving safely especially during busy periods. He added that the attendants had also been patrolling outside schools to ensure the free flow of traffic.

So far he had received positive feedback from the District and daily questions from the public. He added that any complaints that they had received had

been dealt with quickly and efficiently. He added that some of the attendants had received verbal abuse and one case involved a minor assault that resulted in a Police caution.

Councillor Schneider questioned if the patrolling of schools would be extended to villages. The Parking Enforcement Manager informed the Committee that it was currently too early and the Police had advised to “keep small” for the time being. He added in response to a question from Councillor Murphy that there had been huge problems recruiting attendants and by extending the hours it would only deter people further. Councillor Lemon congratulated the Officers and informed the Committee that he had also received good feedback.

RESOLVED that the Decriminalisation of Parking Control Manager returns to the Committee in 6 months with an update on progress.

SC2.32

PRESENTATION ON STATISTICS FOR ABSENCE, SICKNESS, TURNOVER AND APPRAISALS

The Executive Manager (Human Resources) introduced the report and explained that the first two charts detailed sickness absence by service and showed the number of days lost and then a percentage of the total lost. The remaining two graphs showed the days lost to short-term sickness absence as both disability and long-term absence had been removed. She informed the Committee that the charts showed data from 1 October 2003 to 30 September 2004. During this period there were 2465.5 days lost to sickness. However, 45 percent of these were due to long-term sickness absences of 13 employees. The figure roughly equated to an average of 9.3 days per member of staff or 4.5 days per member of staff when excluding long-term absence.

She went onto say that the new computerised Human Resource system would allow absence research to be compiled easily on screen making it easier to be circulated to Members and Officers. She explained that the new system would also define the day the absence occurred and if it fell near a holiday or if it followed a pattern.

The Executive Manager (Human Resources) confirmed that long-term sickness was categorised as more than one month. She then informed the committee that the Managing Absence Policy asked managers to stay in contact with staff while they were absent.

The Chairman requested that in six months the Executive Manager (Human Resources) returns to the Committee with new absence figures separating long-term and short-term sickness in order for the Committee to assess the sickness situation and make recommendations.

RESOLVED that

1. The report be noted.

2. The Executive Manager (Human Resources) brings a report in 6 months updating the Committee on the sickness absence figures for long-term and short-term absence.

SC2.33 **PROFILED BUDGETS FOR COMMITTEES FOR FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR**

The Chief Accountant introduced the report, which provided a summary of spending and income against profiled budgets as at 30 September 2004, six months into the financial year.

He explained that the Audit Commission had highlighted budgetary control as a key area for improvement in the Council's financial management. In July the Council went live with a new financial management system giving more scope to present budgetary information. He explained that one of the functions is budget profiling, which provided the ability to spread, or project spending and income over their expected pattern or profile during the year. He added that the system was a starting point and was still being developed with the needs of the individual manager and service being refined.

He explained the financial reports were attached and covered all main service headings of the Council's budget and was structured on a committee basis. It used a current status indicator in the final column to indicate whether the budget appears to have a problem. A one star indicator showed that actual spending or income had exceeded the profiled budget, but was within total budget for the year. Two stars showed that actual spending or income had already exceeded the total budget for the year and managers would be asked to indicate the reasons for the apparent variance.

In reply to a question from the Chairman the Chief Accountant informed the Committee that any matters of concern would have been included in the report and the Committee would be made aware. However, currently there were no major budgetary concerns. He added that the nature of the new reporting system would be good as it enabled you to home in on the two star areas giving greater control over budgets allowing accountants to focus on reports and communicating the figures.

The Chief Executive added that the financial reporting system would need adjustments as it was new and next time commentary would be added.

RESOLVED that the budgetary control position as at 30 September 2004 be noted.

SC2.34 **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SECOND QUARTER 2004/05**

Councillor S Schneider declared an interest in this item insofar as it related to bed and breakfast accommodation, as her husband owns a Bed and Breakfast business.

The Committee considered the report that provided the updated provisional Performance Management results for July to September 2004. The results remained provisional due to the difficulty in adapting the quarterly reporting to the timing of the five Committee cycles of the year.

Councillor S Schneider questioned what checks were in place to make sure that accommodation for the homeless was clean and tidy.

In response to a question from the Chairman relating to the length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation, the Chief Accountant commented that homelessness was missing an explanation, which was due to the lack of time, but future reports would include manager's comments.

The Chief Accountant went on to explain that the results for the removal of abandoned vehicles in 10 days showed some concerns. He explained that the targets were not SMART and the process was currently under review.

In response to the Chairman the Chief Executive explained that the appraisal system was under review but the figure of 6.80% did not reflect a true number of completed appraisals. He then gave an unspecified breakdown showing the Committee examples of departments that had completed appraisals and not produced paper work, those who had not completed appraisals and those who had. He added that some staff were pushing for an appraisal but some managers were not keen to carry them out. He explained that appraisals were carried out annually with an interim review after 6 months with a completion date of around October. Councillor S Schneider recommended that they should be completed on a specific day for instance their birthday or start day and this would relieve the pressure put on the Human Resource Department.

RESOLVED that the Performance Management information for the second quarter 2004/05 be noted.

SC2.35 **PRESENTATION ON RECYCLING WORK PROGRAMME**

Ron Pridham and Edward Lock gave a presentation on the Council's recycling work programme.

SC2.36 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF THE TRANSPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 NOVEMBER 2004**

The Chairman asked that a report be brought to the next meeting on the impact of charging the public to park at the Council Offices on Saturdays.

SC2.37 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT**

(i) **Courier Service**

The Chairman asked the Chief Executive if he could review whether the Members Courier service was cost effective.

(ii) **Councillor Absence at Meetings**

The Chairman expressed concerns with the attendance of Members at Scrutiny meetings. The Chief Executive agreed to raise this issue at the next Group Leaders meeting.

The meeting ended at 9:30pm.