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**MINUTES OF A MEETING
OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT THE GUILDHALL,
ABINGDON ON THURSDAY, 15TH
MARCH, 2007 AT 7.00 PM**

Open to the Public, including the Press

PRESENT:

MEMBERS: Councillors Melinda Tilley (Chair), Matthew Barber, Peter Green, Richard Stone Laurel Symons and Derek Verdin.

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS: Councillor Jim Halliday for Councillor Andrew Crawford, Councillor Janet Morgan for Councillor Terry Fraser and Councillor Robert Sharp for Councillor Yvonne Constance.

OFFICERS: Jason Lindsey and Tim Sadler.

NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: None.

SC.126 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The attendance of Substitute Members who had been authorised to attend in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 17(1) was recorded as referred to above with apologies for absence having been received from Councillors Yvonne Constance, Andrew Crawford, Terry Fraser and Derek Rawson.

SC.127 MINUTES

The public and exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 February 2007 were adopted and signed as a correct record, subject to the list of substitute members in attendance being amended to include Councillor Janet Morgan, substituting for Councillor Laurel Symons.

SC.128 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

SC.129 URGENT BUSINESS AND CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

SC.130 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 32

None.

SC.131 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 32

None.

SC.132 REFERRALS UNDER THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES OR THE BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE RULES

None.

SC.133 RESPONSES OF AND REFERENCES FROM THE EXECUTIVE

At its meeting on 2 March 2007, the Executive had considered report 159/06 - Best Value Performance Indicators - Performance against the top and bottom quartile 2005/06, and invited the Scrutiny Committee to ensure that procedures were in place to ensure there was no positive discrimination against employing women as top earners (BVPI 11a).

The Committee noted the reference and

RESOLVED

that the above reference from the Executive be placed on the agenda for the first meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

SC.134 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE - THIRD QUARTER 2006/07

The Committee received and considered report 158/06 of the Directors' Group reporting on Corporate Governance for the third quarter of 2006/07. The report looked at progress with corporate priorities, performance of Best Value and Local Performance Indicators, financial information and key staffing data for the period. Accompanying the report were commentaries from Portfolio Holders on Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) results from the third quarter.

Members noted progress on the corporate priorities:

- The new website had been implemented, designed to facilitate more interactive services and be compliant with the highest standards of accessibility
- The Abingdon Air Quality Management Area Declaration had been made
- There had been progress with the review of enforcement policies which in turn would lead to an improved score for Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 166a (Environmental Health Enforcement Checklist)
- New appraisal schemes had been introduced, linking more explicitly to corporate priorities with a focus on improvement
- The management development programme had been commenced
- The Ridgeway Shared Service Partnership had been commenced
- Action planning had been commenced to address issues raised in the Staff Attitude Survey in June 2006
- Responding to a request from the Scrutiny Committee, those issues where the Directors were concerned about progress had been highlighted in red in the appendix to the report
- Service review meetings would be cascaded down to third tier level

Referring to the Corporate Priorities Report and the action to investigate alternative means of funding affordable housing, the Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer reported that the Council's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) bid had been submitted and was still being considered by the Secretary of State. Furthermore, he advised that no Non Housing Revenue Account PFI schemes had been approved and it was understood that PFI credits were accumulating. In view of this, fresh representations to the Secretary of State were planned.

In respect of work with parish councils to develop rural housing on exception sites, it was noted that Rural Enabler post employed by the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council had now been filled. It was noted that exception sites had been developed in both Kingston Bagpuize and Shellingford.

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Finally, it was reported that as part of the update of the Council's web site the Tridion Content Management System transfer was being progressed.

RESOLVED

that the Corporate Governance Report for the third quarter 2006/07 be received.

SC.135 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – PERFORMANCE AGAINST TOP AND BOTTOM QUARTILE 2005-06

The Committee received and considered report 159/06 of the Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer, which compared performance for 2005/06 against that of the national top and bottom quartile data for 2005/06 which had been published by the Audit Commission in late December 2006.

In respect of the Best Value Performance Indicators, it was noted that some of the environmental BVPI's conflicted with each other, for example increased recycling and waste minimisation targets and that the crime BVPI's relied heavily on partnership work led by the police. It was suggested that these anomalies be brought to the attention of the Audit Commission, through the Local Government Association.

It was noted that BVPI 82bii – total tonnage of waste composted did not take account of those residents using home composters. In respect of the planning BVPI's it was noted that the Council had changed its method of determining planning application, which had improved performance. Finally, referring to BVPI 166a – Environmental Health Checklist it was reported that Officers were confident that the Council would be out of the bottom quartile by the end of the fourth quarter in 2006/07.

RESOLVED

(a) *that report 159/06 be received;*

(b) *that the Executive be recommended to take up with the Audit Commission, through the Local Government Association, the relevance of some of the Best Value Performance Indicators, especially those that conflict with each other (BVPI 82aⁱⁱ and 84a) and those outside the control of the Council – Crime (BVPI 126, 127, 128, 156 and 175).*

SC.136 SICKNESS ABSENCE PROCEDURES/PROCESSES - REVISED POLICY

The Committee received and considered a draft Absence Policy, which would be considered by the Personnel, Regulatory and Appeals Committee on 29 March 2007. It was noted that the detailed consideration of staff sickness levels at the Council had been a matter previously considered by the Scrutiny Committee and Members welcomed the draft policy.

In considering the draft policy, the Committee made the following comments/observations:-

- Page 6 – final paragraph of Section 5 – The Bradford Factor to read “Below is the BF table which shows the scores and the interventions that **may** take place at each score”.
- Make greater use of the Council's Occupational Health Advisor in advising the GP of a member of staff on long term sick leave.
- Provision of a checklist for staff on sick leave reminding them of their responsibilities.
- Prior to the introduction of the Bradford Factor (BF) as a tool for monitoring individual staff sickness, each member of staff should be provided with a BF score to act as a benchmark.

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- The Council to be more proactive in assisting staff monitor their health ie annual blood pressure checks.
- The policy to make reference to existing health & safety policies at the Council.

RESOLVED

that the views of the Committee, as set out above, be forwarded to the Human Resources Manager.

SC.137 STAFF TURNOVER

The Committee welcomed the much improved staff turnover figures, although it was noted that turnover in some service areas was still high. The Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer explained that turnover in the Planning Service Area was due in part to the shortage of planning officers nationally and the expansion in the number planning post across the country. In respect of the turnover figures in the Finance Service Area, the Director undertook to advise the Committee outside of the meeting whether the figure was a result of the transfer of staff to Captia.

RESOLVED

that the staff turnover figures be noted.

SC.138 PERFORMANCE ON THE COLLECTION OF RENT ARREARS - COUNCIL PROPERTY

At the meeting of Scrutiny on 14 December 2006, it had been agreed that a report be made to this meeting on performance with the collection of rent arrears for Council commercial property. Unfortunately, due to staff absences and the pressure of other work, the Head of Property Services had been unable to collate the necessary information for the meeting. It was noted that the information would be sent to Members of the Committee outside of the meeting and before the District Election in May.

RESOLVED

that the report be received.

SC.139 ROLE AND WORKINGS OF THE COMMITTEE

As this was the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of the current Council, Members were asked to consider what comments or advice it would wish to give to the incoming Council on the role and workings of the Scrutiny Committee. The following advice was given:-

- The Council needs to retain an overview of the internal audit function as part of its formal democratic decision making structure.
- Retain the pre-scrutiny approach for major issues facing the Council.
- Appoint Members of the Committee to shadow service areas at the start of the Municipal Year.
- Retain responsibility for reviewing the Waste Management Contract on an annual basis.
- The Committee to remain non-political.
- Draw on the expertise of Members for different areas of scrutiny. The Council should produce a Members Skills Register early in the new Council.
- Take a harder look at the planning and leisure functions.
- Continue to keep under review staffing matters, such as turnover and sickness.

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- Continue to keep under review the Capita outsourcing contract and in particular BVPI performance.
- Regular review of Corporate Governance.
- Keep under review the Executive Portfolio Holder/Officer working relationship to ensure that the process is working. Such meetings to be minuted to provide an audit trail.
- Advice to the Executive on how the Council can achieve a four star excellent rating at its next Comprehensive Performance Assessment, without raising costs and the Council Tax.
- The Committee's membership to remain at 10 members with an opposition chair. Committee Members to attend all meetings without the need for substitute Members to retain continuity.
- Retain informal working groups to undertake scrutiny work.
- More Member training on the scrutiny function.
- Select Committee style working.
- Adequately funded external scrutiny – Thames Valley Police (BVPI's) and Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust.

R E C O M M E N D E D

that the advice of the Scrutiny Committee on its role and workings be as detailed above.

SC.140 REVIEW THE ACTIVITY OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 2 March 2007 were noted.

SC.141 CHAIRMAN'S THANKS

The Chairman announced that this was the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of the current Council and she thanked all Members and Officers, in particular her Vice-Chair Councillor Derek Rawson for their help and support over the past four years.

SECTION II (Exempt Information Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972)

None.

The meeting rose at 8.10pm.