

Date: 7 March 2007

TO: All Members of the Scrutiny
Committee
FOR ATTENDANCE

Members are reminded to bring with them to the meeting their copy of the Executive Agenda and draft Minutes for the meeting held on 2 March 2007.

TO: All Other Members of the Council
FOR INFORMATION

Dear Sir/Madam

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** to be held in the **GUILDHALL, ABINGDON** on **THURSDAY, 15TH MARCH, 2007** at **7.00 PM**.

Yours faithfully

Terry Stock
Chief Executive

Members are reminded of the provisions contained in Part 2 of the Local Code of Conduct, and Standing Order 34 regarding the declaration of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

A G E N D A

Open to the Public including the Press

A large print version of this agenda is available. Any background papers referred to may be inspected by prior arrangement. Contact Jason Lindsey, Democratic Services Officer, on telephone number (01235) 540306.

Map and Vision

(Page 5)

A map showing the location of the venue for this meeting, together with a copy the Council Vision are attached.

1. Notification of Substitutes and Apologies for Absence

To record the attendance of Substitute Members, if any, who have been authorised to attend in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 17(1), with notification having been given to the proper Officer before the start of the meeting and to receive apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

(Pages 6 - 9)

To adopt and sign as a correct record the public minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15 February 2007.

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive any declarations of Personal or Personal and Prejudicial Interests in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

In accordance with Part 2 of the Local Code of Conduct and the provisions of Standing Order 34, any Member with a personal interest must disclose the existence and nature of that interest to the meeting prior to the matter being debated. Where that personal interest is also a prejudicial interest, then the Member must withdraw from the room in which the meeting is being held and not seek improperly to influence any decision about the matter unless he/she has obtained a dispensation from the Standards Committee.

4. Urgent Business and Chairman's Announcements

To receive notification of any matters, which the Chairman determines, should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances, which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the Chairman.

5. Statements and Petitions from the Public Under Standing Order 32

Any statements and/or petitions from the public under Standing Order 32 will be made or presented at the meeting.

6. Questions from the Public Under Standing Order 32

Any questions from members of the public under Standing Order 32 will be asked at the meeting.

7. Referrals under the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules or the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules

To receive Referrals under the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules or the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules (if any).

8. Responses of and References from the Executive

To consider any responses of the Executive to reports of this Committee, together with any references for consideration by this Committee, as follows:-

Executive – 2 March 2007

Best Value Performance Indicators - Performance against the top and bottom quartile 2005/06

RESOLVED

that the Scrutiny Committee be invited to ensure that procedures are in place to ensure there is no positive discrimination against employing women as top earners (BVPI 11a).

9. **Corporate Governance - Third Quarter 2006/07**

(Pages 10 - 12)

To receive and consider report 158/06 of the Directors, considered by the Executive on 2 March 2007. **Members are asked to bring their copy of this report with them to the meeting, a copy of which was attached to the Executive Agenda sent to all Members of the Committee previously.**

Copies of commentaries received from Executive Members are attached.

10. **Best Value Performance Indicators – Performance against Top and Bottom Quartile 2005-06**

To receive and consider report 159/06 of the Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer, considered by the Executive on 2 March 2007. **Members are asked to bring their copy of this report with them to the meeting, a copy of which was attached to the Executive Agenda sent to all Members of the Committee previously.**

Recommendation

That Members note the Council's performance against the national top and bottom quartile results for 2005-06 and that active management of Best Value Performance Indicators is undertaken through the Corporate Governance Reporting process.

11. **Sickness Absence Procedures/Processes - Revised Policy**

The Scrutiny Committee has been interested in the sickness levels at the Council and has previously been provided with statistics and a report on the use of the Bradford Factor in Absence Management. This report follows the Managing Sickness Absence Report presented by the Assistant Director (Human Resources) in September 2006.

The Committee has requested the new Proposed Absence Policy to be submitted for consideration, before adoption. The Absence Policy, together with the new Proposed Capability Policy (sent separately to Members of the Scrutiny Committee) which is referred to in the Absence Policy will be considered by the Personnel, Regulatory and Appeals Committee on 29 March 2007.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note that this matter will be considered by the Personnel, Regulatory and Appeals Committee on 29 March 2007.

12. **Staff Turnover**

To review the latest staff turnover statistics. The details are set out in the Corporate Governance Report at Agenda Item 9.

13. **Performance on the Collection of Rent Arrears - Council Property**

At the meeting of Scrutiny on 14 December 2006, it was agreed to ask for a report to the March meeting on performance with the collection of rent arrears for Council property. Unfortunately,

due to staff absences and the pressure of other work, the Head of Property Services is unable to collate the necessary information for the March meeting. The information will be sent to Members of the Committee outside of the meeting (before the District Election in May).

14. Role and Workings of the Committee

Members are asked to consider what comments or advice (if any) they may wish to give to the incoming Council on the role and workings of the Scrutiny Committee.

15. Review the Activity of the Executive

To review the activity of the Executive and consider any references to this Committee. Members are requested to bring with them to this meeting the agenda and draft minutes of the Executive meeting held on 2 March 2007.

16. Exclusion of the Public, including the Press

The Chair to move that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the remainder of the meeting to prevent the disclosure to them of exempt information, as defined in Section 100(I) and Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, to the Act when the following items are considered:

Item 17 Minutes
(Category 1 - Information relating to any individual.)
(Category 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information.)

17. Minutes

(Pages 14 - 15)

To adopt and sign as a correct record the exempt minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15 February 2007.



OUR VISION AND AIMS

Our Vision is to build and safeguard a fair, open and compassionate community

The Vale of White Horse District Council aims to:

Strengthen local democracy and public involvement through access to information, consultation, and devolution of power so that everyone can take part in our community and contribute to the decisions which affect our lives

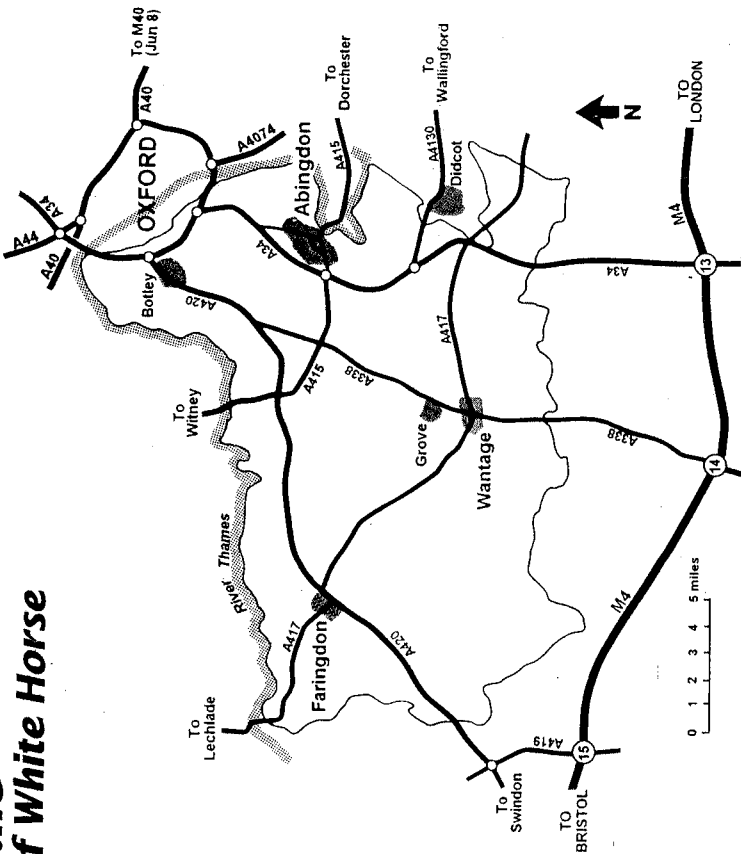
Create a safer community and improve the quality of life among Vale residents

Encourage a strong and sustainable economy which benefits all who live in, work in or visit the Vale

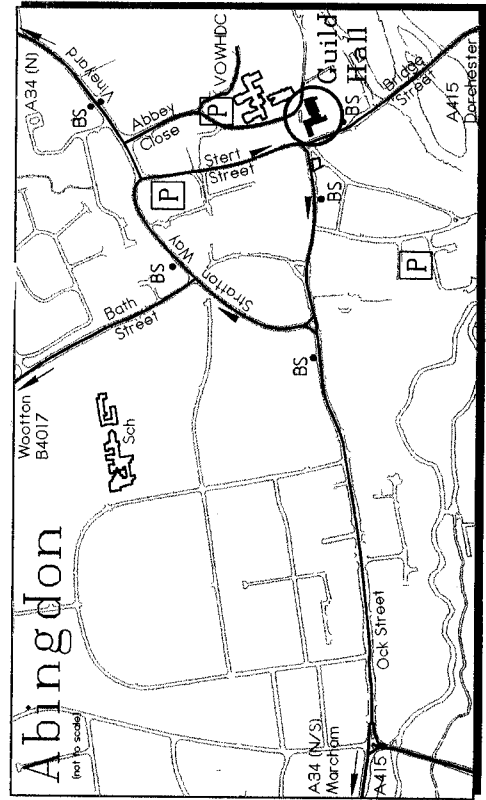
Help disadvantaged groups and individuals within the Vale to realise their full potential

Provide and support high quality public services which are effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of people within the Vale

Protect and improve our built and natural environment



Abingdon, Guildhall, Abingdon



KEY : BS = Bus Stop

LOCATION MAP



Sc.54

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

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

Open to the Public, including the Press

PRESENT:

MEMBERS: Councillors Melinda Tilley (Chair), Derek Rawson (Vice-Chair), Matthew Barber, Yvonne Constance, Andrew Crawford, Peter Green and Derek Verdin.

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS: Councillors Jim Moley (In place of Terry Fraser)

OFFICERS: Tim Sadler and Steve Culliford.

NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Nil

SC.109 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 Terry Fraser, Richard Stone and Laurel Symons.

SC.110 MINUTES

The public minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 December 2006 were adopted and signed as a correct record.

SC.111 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

SC.112 URGENT BUSINESS AND CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

SC.113 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 32

None

SC.114 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 32

None

SC.115 REFERRALS UNDER THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES OR THE BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE RULES

None

SC.116 RESPONSES OF AND REFERENCES FROM THE EXECUTIVE

None

SC.117 CUSTOMER SERVICES - PAYPOINT

The Committee received a presentation from the Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer regarding the Paypoint, a nationwide service which assisted the public in making payments for Council Tax, parking fines and other services such as utility bills and television licences.

As part of the Council's Customer Contact Strategy, consideration was being given to alternative methods of payment for Council services. The preferred methods of payment were Direct Debit for individuals and BACS transfer for businesses for regular payments. One-off payments were preferred by Debit Cards. The officers were looking at how to improve customer access to make payments. Options included web-based or telephone payments by Debit Card, payments through Cash Offices or using national payment networks, e.g. the Post Office, Paypoint or Payzone. In the Vale, the most effective of these three national payment networks appears to be Paypoint operated by the Co-op. This was largely because the Council's bank was also the Co-op, and economies could be made with this option.

A list of shops and other premises in the Vale with Paypoint facilities was circulated. Payments would be made direct to the Council's bank and would not have to wait for a clearing process to be completed through a third party. Under current arrangements payments made through the Post Offices cost the Council approximately 75p per transaction, whereas payments through Paypoint would cost around 43p per transaction. This could save £4,000 per annum and would extend the times when the public could make payments. There would be a one-off set up cost of around £4,000.

Members noted that closing Faringdon Area Office could also save around £20,000 per annum. Members noted the cost per transaction at Faringdon Area Office were high.

The Committee supported the principle of using Paypoint for payment for the Council's services but asked that the Co-op be asked to encourage any rural Post Offices that had not joined the scheme to do so.

Members noted that the officers would be reporting to the Executive in due course on the Customer Contact Strategy and would consider the Committee's comments at that time.

RESOLVED

that the Executive be advised that the Scrutiny Committee supports the principle of using the Paypoint scheme to receive payments for Council services as part of the Customer Contact Strategy and asks that the Co-op be recommended to encourage any rural Post Offices that had not joined the scheme to do so.

SC.118 SERVICE AREA ANNUAL REPORT 2005/06 AND HALF YEAR REPORT 2006/07 - LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The Committee noted that Councillor Laurel Symons had no significant issues to raise on the Housing Service Area Half Year Report. Councillor Peter Green reported that in the Food and Safety Service Area, an advertisement had been placed for the vacant Environmental Health Officer post. Councillor Derek Verdin then reported that there were no significant issues with the Planning and Community Strategy Service Area Half Year Report but that there had been a problem with staff turnover. Attempts were being made to fill a vacant post. The Committee considered that staff turnover should be added to the agenda for the next meeting in March 2007.

At the meeting of the Committee held on 16 November 2006, Members considered the Service Area Annual Reports 2005/06 and resolved "that the Strategic Director and Monitoring

Sc.56

Officer be asked to explain the omission of Annual Reports from both Legal and Democratic Services from the Service Area Annual Reports 2005/06 and the omission of a half year report from Legal Services in the Service Area Half Year Report 2006/07.”

At the last meeting of the Committee on 14 December 2006, it was further resolved “that it be noted that a Service Area Half Year Reports for 2006/07 in respect of Legal Services has yet to be presented and that the Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer be invited to give an update on this explaining why the report has been delayed and what measures he has in place to resolve the matter”.

The Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer reported that a Legal Services Half Year Report had been produced. The Strategic Director explained that the production of the Annual and Half Year reports for Legal Services had been delayed due to problems experienced by Legal Services, with a large workload and limited staffing resources. He outlined steps put in place to cope with workload and plans to restructure the Service Area; tabled at the meeting was a proposed new structure for Legal Services. Members supported the proposed new structure and but suggested that enforcement needed to be made a higher priority. The production of the Half Year report was noted.

RESOLVED

- (a) that staff turnover be discussed at the next meeting of the Committee in March 2007;*
- (b) that the position of the Legal Services Half Year Report 2006-07 be noted;*
- (c) that the proposals for restructuring of Legal Services be noted.*

SC.119 WASTE CONTRACT

The Committee received and considered a note of a meeting between Councillor Yvonne Constance and Mike Mackay, the Deputy Director (Contracts and Procurement), regarding the waste contract. Councillor Constance had concluded that the management of the contract was well led and re-focused to monitor performance very closely. This was becoming a very well managed function in the Council. Councillor Constance was pleased that the Deputy Director had joined the team and brought such important experience to improving performance so rapidly.

RESOLVED

that the report be noted.

SC.120 STAFF SURVEY

The Committee received an update on progress with the Staff Survey Action Plan.

Since the last Committee meeting, the Chief Executive had published his first blog: a web-based log of events and actions undertaken. Feedback had been invited. Members considered that the blog was welcome but was too long. It was suggested that it should be simplified with less detail, explanation and justification.

SC.121 REVIEW THE ACTIVITY OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee reviewed the activity of the Executive. Since the Committee's last meeting in December 2006, the Executive had met only once, on 5 January 2007. The scheduled

February meeting of the Executive had been cancelled due to there being insufficient business to warrant the whole Executive's attention.

The Committee had no items to raise.

SC.122 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC, INCLUDING THE PRESS

RESOLVED

that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public, including the press, be excluded from the remainder of the meeting to prevent the disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Section 100(l) and Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, to the Act when the following items are considered:

Minutes

(Category 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information.))

Management of Sickness Absence

(Category 1 - Information relating to any individual.)

Section 106 Contributions - Progress report

(Category 1)

SUMMARY OF THE EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED AT THE MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2007

SC.123 MINUTES

The exempt minutes of the Committee meeting held on 14 December 2006 were adopted and signed as a correct record.

SC.124 MANAGEMENT OF SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Committee received and noted a paper from the Human Resources Manager, summarising levels of sickness absence during 2006/07.

SC.125 SECTION 106 CONTRIBUTIONS - PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received and noted reports on progress with contributions received from Section 106 Agreements.

Report to the Executive on the BVPIs for 05/06

Housing

The number of private sector houses returned into occupation is low but we have recently discovered how other councils count their properties. We have now started using the same method and the numbers have risen enormously. Unfortunately we are unable to go back and count these in 05/069 as other councils were doing.

We discovered that when a household is placed in a private rented accommodation that is counted by some councils as another property that was empty and is no longer empty. So we should be able to rise out of the bottom quartile by counting in a similar fashion.

The BVPI is not a sensible one because Councils that have thousands of empty properties should be able to bring lots more back into use than councils that only have a few hundred. This is an example where percentages could be used sensibly.

The Audit Commission seems incapable of knowing when it is sensible to use percentages and when it is ridiculous.

The number of people in temporary accommodation and the length of stay in B&B are reasonable at middle quartile.

Benefits

All the quartiles relating to Benefits are top quartile.

Community Safety

All except one are in the top quartile – the Vale is a very safe place to live.

Mary de Vere

Commentary on the BVPI's - Performance against Top and Bottom Quartile 2005/6

I propose to address those indicators in the medium and bottom quartile in Environment section but will highlight some notable successes.

1. BVPI 82aii – the desire to increase the tonnage of waste (albeit recycled) is contrary to waste minimisation and we should be doing all that we can to reduce both residual and recycle (it all costs money to handle). So I have to reject this BVPI as plainly stupid!
2. BVPI 82bi and bii (waste composted) - I continue to have a fundamental problem with these indicators that run contrary to our published policy and the apparent governments adherence to waste hierarchy and minimisation. There is no account taken of the huge amount of home composting done. The most recent WRAP survey in the Vale and Oxfordshire shows that a very significant percentage of people surveyed said they composted at home. 62% in the Vale and 40% in Oxfordshire. Until government appreciates how much home composting contributes I shall resist any attempt to drive these numbers up. I will of course respond to the very positive uptake by residents with the brown wheelie bin scheme and expect that when the new scheme to redirect the green sack garden waste away from landfill is introduced in 2007 we shall see the numbers increase.
3. The Vale should congratulate itself on its top performance with BVPI84a, household waste collected per head of population and at the same time the BVPI 86 – Cost of Waste collected. I have drawn some comparisons with our partner districts in the rest of Oxfordshire in the Table below:

Authority	Household Waste collected kp per head	Collection charge per household 2005/06
SODC	396	£50.96
Cherwell	440	£56.94
WODC	443	£53.05
VOWH	352	£45.90

4. BVPI 166 – Environmental Health Check list – the Executive has taken action to ensure that significant improvement will be achieved during 06/07. Ref the comments in Agenda item 12 on page 18. Cllr Richard Farrell may also address this in his report.
5. BVPI 218b – removal of abandoned vehicles. I shall give a verbal report on this at the meeting.

Tony de Vere 28th February 2007

Report to the Executive re LPI EH3 – Percentage of Food Premises Inspections Carried out (High Risk and Non High Risk Premises)

This indicator carried a red traffic light and a sideways arrow.

The enforcement programme was on track until last autumn but was then adversely affected by a combination of adverse developments:

- One full time environmental health officer left in August 2006. Recruitment started but temporary backfill was not approved as a cost saving measure.
- Recruitment to post was unsuccessful twice. Approval was then given for temporary backfill due to severity of workload build up between August and December.
- Difficulties then ensued in obtaining suitably qualified temporary backfill. 0.4 FTE finally arranged from January 2007.
- Third attempt at recruitment now under way, with possibility of appointment with lower technical qualifications. Successful recruitment is anticipated by June 2007.

In addition to the pressures caused by the above, several major Food and Safety incidents took place during the period. These needed immediate attention and took up extensive officer time.

Priorities in the programme are being pursued: i.e. HSW and food commercial database, for which temporary clerical assistance has been obtained; the HSE and Oxfordshire partnership; pilot project work on manual handling in the licensed trade. The investigation of serious accidents and related enforcement has been maintained as a priority.

The estimated position is that at year end programme will be 70% complete. This will be reviewed at the end of March. Enforcement programme for 2007-08 is due for completion by end of March.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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