

Sc.40

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT THE GUILDHALL,
ABINGDON ON THURSDAY, 14TH
FEBRUARY, 2008 AT 7.00 PM

Open to the Public, including the Press

PRESENT:

MEMBERS: Councillors Melinda Tilley (Chairman), Andrew Crawford (Vice-Chair), Matthew Barber, Andrew Crawford (Vice-Chair), Yvonne Constance, Jim Halliday, Joyce Hutchinson, Judy Roberts, Laurel Symons, Melinda Tilley (Chairman) and Reg Waite.

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS: None.

OFFICERS: Steve Bishop, Jason Lindsey, Nikki Malin, Steve Bishop, Terry Stock and Toby Warren.

NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: None.

SC.57 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sue Marchant, Janet Morgan and Jenny Shepherd.

SC.58 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 December 2007 were adopted and signed as a correct record.

SC.59 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Jim Halliday declared a personal interest in the Quadrant item, in so far as he was an employee of the Science and Technology Facilities Council, Harwell, a member of the Partnership (Minute Sc.66 refers).

SC.60 URGENT BUSINESS AND CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

SC.61 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 32

None.

SC.62 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER 32

None.

SC.63 REFERRALS UNDER THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES OR THE BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE RULES

None.

SC.64 RESPONSES OF AND REFERENCES FROM THE EXECUTIVE

(a) Call In of Executive Decision – Transfer of Payroll Service

The Executive noted the advice of the Scrutiny Committee that in future full information should be included in all Executive Member decision notices.

(b) Review the Activity of the Executive
Minute Ex.102 – Health and Safety Training

The Committee noted advice from the Council's Head of Legal Services regarding the implications on the Council, as an employer and Council Members personally of any breaches of Health and Safety legislation. In receiving this advice, the Executive confirmed its earlier recommendation from 7 December 2007 that both Executive and Scrutiny Committee Members be required to be accredited to the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health 'Safety for Senior Executives' training standard.

Scrutiny Committee Members again expressed their opposition to the Executive's recommendation that health and safety training should be mandatory for them and concurred with the views of the Scrutiny Committee Vice-Chair, as quoted in Minute Ex.118(b). The Committee was not opposed to health and safety training in principle, only the requirement that it be mandatory.

Reference was made to the Executive's initial recommendation that had been made without the benefit of a report or supporting information.

The Chief Executive confirmed that he was not aware of any other local authority that made health and safety training for Members mandatory. He reminded the Committee that health and safety legislation placed a personal responsibility on Members of the Council, although he accepted that the chance of any challenge was low risk and that there was no case law or legislative requirement for training to be mandatory. He confirmed that he was satisfied that the Executive had been fully aware of the implications of health and safety legislation when it concurred with the recommendation of the Health and Safety Review Board. Finally, he advised that this matter would now be for the Council to conclude.

SC.65 COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Head of Communications on the work of the Communications Team. She referred to the operational day to day work of the Team; actions arising out of the recently approved Communications and Consultation Strategies; and recent achievements, including the launch of the

Council's new website, the establishments of Staff Action Planning Groups, the increase in local media coverage, financial savings and dealing with emergencies. Finally, she spoke of the future work programme.

In response to questions, the Communications Manager responded as follows:-

- The cost of the Team was approximately £130,000. The four team members had all been appointed to existing posts within the Council
- There were cultural differences between the Vale and South Oxfordshire District Council in the way in which the respective Communication Teams operated. South Oxfordshire's communications were more decentralised and it had outsourced its web design work.
- The proposed media training for Councillor would comprise two levels, higher and lower. The higher level would include training on broadcast media interviews for members of the Executive, Shadow Cabinet and the Senior Management Team at a cost of about £10,000. The lower level training would be delivered in-house and would include training on media awareness and dealing indirectly with the media.

Some Members expressed concern at the cost of the proposed higher level training and the Communications Manager undertook to give further consideration to the proposed training package and discuss with the Executive and Shadow Cabinet Members responsible for Communications before proceeding. Some Members were of the view that a team comprising four members of staff required justification and that further consideration be given to the total spend of the service and work programme. Those Members were reminded that this concern should be raised as part of the budget debate at Council on 27 February 2008.

The Chairman thanked the Communications Manager for her presentation.

RESOLVED

that the Communications Manager be requested to give further consideration to the cost of the proposed higher level training package and discuss with the Executive and Shadow Cabinet Members responsible for Communications before proceeding.

SC.66 QUADRANT PARTNERSHIP

(Councillor Jim Halliday had declared a personal interest in this item and in accordance with Standing Order 34 he remained in the meeting during its consideration).

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Community Strategy on the work of the Quadrant Partnership. The Partnership brought together the key players who were committed to achieving even greater economic success and sustainability for the area known as the Quadrant, an area of southern central Oxfordshire whose future growth was defined by four points:

- Harwell Science and Innovation Campus (HSIC)
- Milton Park
- Didcot

- Grove and Wantage

The partners comprised:

- SEEDA (South East England Development Agency) (chair)
- Vale of White Horse District Council (project manager)
- UKAEA (United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority)
- STFC (Science and Technology Facilities Council)
- MEPC Milton Park
- Oxfordshire County Council
- South Oxfordshire District Council
- Oxfordshire Economic Partnership (contributing observer)
- Government Office for the South East (contributing observer).

In considering this matter, Members made the following comments:-

- There was a need to encourage employment opportunities in the Wantage/Grove area in the light of the future major housing development in Grove. Wantage/Grove was not adequately represented on the Partnership.
- University representation on the Partnership was important, bearing in mind that six universities had a presence in the Vale.
- The involvement of SEEDA in the Partnership was welcomed.
- There was a shortage locally of non university educated young people.
- Local education establishments should exploit the opportunities to visit local high technology industries.
- A Councillor's tour of the Diamond Project, Harwell should be organised.
- The work of the Partnership needed greater publicity.
- There was a need for flexibility in the type of housing being provided eg more shared ownership.

The Chief Executive undertook to canvass Members to ascertain the level of interest in organising a visit to the Diamond Project. Furthermore, he confirmed that local businesses had identified the need to improve links with schools/colleges and MEPC, the owners of Milton Park, had indicated that it would welcome an educational facility at the Park. Finally, he advised that the work of the Quadrant Partnership had been raised during a recent Ministerial visit.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Community Strategy for his presentation.

RESOLVED

that the Chief Executive be requested to canvass Members to ascertain the level of interest in a visit to the Diamond Project, Harwell.

SC.67 IMPLEMENTATION OF AGRESSO 5.5 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM -
REPORT OF THE INFORMAL AGRESSO WORKING GROUP

The Committee received and considered report 141/07 of the informal Agresso Working Group, which had been established to review the problems encountered during the Agresso 5.5 computer system implementation, in particular the following:-

- (a) The quality of the project management;

- (b) The impact of the backlogs in terms of cost, inconvenience to Council tax payers, and suppliers of goods and services;
- (c) The Council's policy on Information Technology implementation.

Councillor Jim Halliday, one of the Members of the Group, presented the report.

In considering the report, the Committee asked a number of questions, details of which are set out below, together with the answers given. Some of the questions asked were answered during exempt session:-

Question	Answer
How does the position at South Oxfordshire DC compare to the Vale with the implementation of Agresso?	South Oxfordshire is not using the new Agresso system to its full capacity. Accounts Receivable is being used by all departments, Accounts Payable is being used by 2 out of 8 departments and the General Ledger is being used only by the Accountants. The Vale is making fuller use of it.
Is the Project Recovery Plan on track?	The Plan should achieve completion by 2 April 2008. Some elements of the Plan have slipped and extra measures have been taken to ensure completion on time.
There appears to be some confusion with Capita on terminology and what is considered to be "steady state". Does the Recovery Plan make it clear on the requirements and expected actions?	The Officers are confident that the Plan is clear and no task is recorded as being complete, unless the Vale and SODC are 100% satisfied and have signed it off.
Has Capita produced a list of duplicate payments, loss of early payment benefits and penalties? If so can it be circulated?	A list has been produced detailing supplier errors and missed early payment discounts and this can be shared with Members. There have been no new duplicate payments, since the previous report.
SODC has set a target of 91 days to clear the backlog of invoices compared to the Vale's target of 110 days, why is SODC's target lower?	SODC is not using the Agresso system for paying invoices and has reverted to the manual payments system. The Vale is using Agresso hence the greater backlog of outstanding invoices.
For purchase order processing,	The "90%" target was the joint Vale

<p>SODC has set a target of 90% and the Vale’s target is to maximise purchase order processing. Why the different approach?</p>	<p>and SODC target at the start of the project. This has since been amended to “maximise” for both Councils. The Vale and SODC need to discuss policy on purchase ordering. It is highly unlikely that 90% would ever be achievable in practice.</p>
<p>It would appear that concerns regarding the timetable for the contract implementation were not sufficiently flagged at Project Board Meetings.</p>	<p>There were monthly monitoring meetings at both Member and Officer level and on those occasions when a “red alert” warning was given, assurances were received that sufficient corrective actions would be taken to resolve slippages and deadlines would be met. However with hindsight, some assurances given should have been challenged, in particular the late receipt of the Chart of Accounts having no detrimental impact on the “go live” date.</p>
<p>The Vale needed a “champion” at Member level to take responsibility for the contract implementation. The Council was let down by the Executive Members serving on the Ridgeway Shared Services Board</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>The implementation of the Agresso system was part of a much larger change being implemented at the same time. The other elements of the overall contract were implemented without any problems.</p>	<p>Accepted. However, Staff and Members were not paid on time in August 2007.(which was due to human error at the Contractors offices rather than a computer system error)</p>

RESOLVED

- (a) *that report 141/07 be received and forwarded to the Executive for information;*
- (b) *that the Strategic Director and Chief Finance Officer be requested to review the Council’s implementation of the PRINCE project management methodology; and*
- (c) *that Councillors Mary de Vere, Tony de Vere and Richard Farrell be requested to attend the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to discuss the Committee’s findings, as set out in report 141/07.*

SC.68 REVIEW THE ACTIVITY OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee received and considered the Minutes of the Executive held on 1 February 2008.

SC.69 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 item is considered:

Implementation of Agresso 5.5 Financial Management System – Report of the Informal Agresso Working Group

(Category 1 - Information relating to an individual.)

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

SUMMARY OF THE EXEMPT ITEM CONSIDERED AT THE MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2008

SC.70 IMPLEMENTATION OF AGRESSO 5.5 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM - REPORT OF THE INFORMAL AGRESSO WORKING GROUP

The Committee received and considered report 141/07 of the informal Agresso Working Group, which had been established to review the problems encountered during the Agresso 5.5 computer system implementation.

Councillor Jim Halliday, one of the Members of the Group, presented the report. The Committee accepted the report and its findings. The responses to some of the questions contained exempt information.