

SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Leadership Board held on 19 November, 2009 at 4.00 p.m. in the Civic Offices, Telford, Shropshire

PRESENT: Councillors D.R.W. White (Chairman), R. Aveley, A.A. Mackenzie, A.A. Meredith and K.L. Tomlinson

ALSO PRESENT: Ken Clarke (Head of Finance & Audit), Fiona Botterill (Scrutiny Manager), Andy Meredith (Customer Services Manager), Stuart Freeman (Traffic & Transportation Business Manager – Network Policy & Management), Helen Hill (Transport Business Manager) and Kathy Swallow (Senior Education Officer – Admissions)

SLB-90 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meetings of the Scrutiny Leadership Board held on 16 September 2009 and 24 September 2009 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

SLB-91 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

Councillor J.A. Francis

SLB-92 DECLARATION OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

None.

SLB-93 UPDATE ON THE FIRST POINT RECOMMENDATIONS

The report of the Head of Customer Services & Business Transformation gave the Board an update on the progress made against their recommendations in respect of First Point Telford and the Cabinet's response.

RECOMMENDATION 1: CONTINUAL MONITORING OF FIRST POINT TELFORD TO ENSURE THAT THE APPROPRIATE RANGES OF SERVICES ARE PROVIDED TO THE PUBLIC

Since opening in February 2009, First Point Telford had helped over 4,600 customers. An analysis of the services that had been used was shown in Appendix 2 of the report and the outcomes of customer visits, with debt and benefits advice enquiries creating the largest demand in Appendix 3.

Whilst it was recognised that First Point Telford had limited capacity for expansion, additional services had been introduced, as set out in Appendix 4 of the report.

RECOMMENDATION 2: THE CABINET CONSIDER PROVIDING A PERMANENT POINT OF CONTACT FOR COUNCIL SERVICES IN THE TOWN CENTRE VICINITY

The creation of a One Stop Shop on the Ground Floor of Civic Offices had been agreed by Cabinet on 21st July 2009 with the aim of it being opened on 1st March 2010. Cabinet would shortly be asked to agree that, initially, the One Stop Shop would be open: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 8:30 am to 6:00 pm; Thursday 8:30 am to 8:00 pm; Saturday 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. This would be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that, subject to affordability, the service met the needs of customers. In addition, the Cabinet would be asked to continue with the funding for the Citizens Advice Bureau, to allow it to continue to provide debt and welfare advice through the One Stop Shop.

In addition to the Council services currently provided, a range of partners and additional Council functions would also provide services at the One Stop Shop, as set out in the report.

RECOMMENDATION 3: THE CABINET CONSIDERS THE USE OF LIBRARY FACILITIES TO OFFER A FIRST POINT OF CONTACT FOR COUNCIL SERVICES THROUGHOUT THE BOROUGH; ESPECIALLY IN AREAS WHERE THE LIBRARY IS USED ON A PART TIME BASIS.

In their response to this recommendation, the Cabinet had stated that a review of Leisure and Culture was being undertaken by Northgate Kendrick Ash and the Business Efficiency Team and they had been asked to consider this recommendation as part of their review. It was now anticipated that the review's findings would be reported in January 2010.

The report also detailed the further developments under way, including a 'Making Ends Meet' Booklet, the development of the Corporate Contact Centre and changes to the Council's website. A copy of the Booklet had also been sent to all Members as it provided good signposting information.

Councillor A.A. Mackenzie emphasised the need for there to be a planning presence in the One Stop Shop and for an increased use of electronic access to information. The Customer Services Manager responded that this was currently dependent upon the implementation of the new planning system but it was the intention under Phase 2 of First Point Telford to consider the closure of Darby House as a public reception including the transfer of planning services to the One Stop Shop.

Councillor Mackenzie also requested information on the number of users of First Point as a direct result of the economic recession. The Customer Services Manager explained that this level of analysis was not possible but referred Councillor Mackenzie to Appendix 3 of the report which showed a breakdown of the issues dealt with by the Citizens Advice Bureau staff and those by the Revenues & Benefits staff. In addition, the Scrutiny Manager said that Members could be provided with a copy of the usage information from the customer satisfaction perspective.

Both the Board and the Customer Services Manager commended the staff of First Point for their work in setting up the facility in the Telford Library. Whilst welcoming the developments set out in the report, the Chairman stressed the importance of appropriate access being available in Civic Offices. He said that the current location was very useful for people also going to the Shopping Centre and expressed some concern that the usage could decrease if First Point Telford was moved.

Members welcomed the development of First Point but commented that the Council also needed to improve its other methods of providing information to people. The Customer Services Manager agreed and informed them that a new Council website would be going live in April 2010. This would be customer focussed and give a high profile to those areas people most needed to access. In conclusion, the Chairman asked that a further progress report be brought to the Board at an appropriate date.

RESOLVED - That the progress made against the recommendations of the Scrutiny Leadership Board be noted.

SLB-94 UPDATE ON IMLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SCRUTINY SCHOOL TRAVEL REPORT

At its meeting on 24 September, 2009 the Board had received an update report on those recommendations that had not yet been completed or where no update had been provided by the responsible officer. As no such update had been provided in respect of the Review of School Travel, the responsible officers had been invited to attend this meeting of the Board to provide a verbal update.

The Transport Business Manager and the Traffic & Transportation Business Manager, gave a verbal update on progress on the Review of School Travel. Overall the ongoing provision of transport to schools was now being considered as part of the wider transport review that was currently being undertaken by Northgate Kendric Ash.

With regard to transport provision for children attending faith schools as the choice of their parents, the Senior Education Officer – Admissions informed the Board that a report was to be submitted to Cabinet in February 2010 on the issue.

With regard to the Working Group set up, it was noted that, due to organisational changes, Community Services representation had been replaced by representation from Children & Young People and from Environment & Regeneration. The Group was now established and had met several times and would be writing to all schools to establish how many Safe Routes to School had been set up.

In conclusion, the Scrutiny Manager stressed the need to for updates on reviews to be provided as soon as the work had been completed in order that they could be taken off the list of those requiring an update.

SLB-95 REVIEW OF SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS AND SCRUTINY LEAD MEMBERS' APPRAISALS

The report of the Head of Finance & Audit sought approval to undertake a review of the Scrutiny arrangements in early 2010 and to incorporate into that process the appraisal of Lead Scrutiny Members.

The current Scrutiny arrangements, which had been in place since January 2009, were aligned to the Council priorities with the Board currently being responsible for scrutiny of the overarching priority of Transforming Telford & Wrekin. Each of the six Lead Scrutiny Members on the Board was responsible for scrutiny of one of the remaining priorities. As part of the process to assess the effectiveness of Scrutiny and provide appropriate support to Members, an annual appraisal of Lead Scrutiny Members had previously taken place and it was now proposed that the 2009/10 process be incorporated into the wider review.

It would be appropriate to assess the effectiveness of the current arrangements twelve months after implementation and it was proposed that a review was undertaken by an independent expert in Local Government Scrutiny. As well as seeking the views of both Scrutiny/Executive Members and co-optees, the review would seek the views of officers from the Council and partners involved in scrutiny. A range of methods would be used including questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. Based on the evidence gathered during the review, recommendations would be made on possible developments for Scrutiny.

In addition, the Audit Committee had requested that a report on the effectiveness of the Scrutiny arrangements introduced in January 2009 be made to its meeting on 30 March 2010. The focus of that report would be the role of Scrutiny in the Council's governance structures. In order to include the report in the wider review it would be necessary to bring the findings of the review to the meeting of the Scrutiny Leadership Board on 25 March 2010, which would enable any recommendations on the scrutiny structure to be considered prior to Annual Council.

The Chairman commented that this was a very positive process and the Head of Finance & Audit informed the Board of the intention to use Professor Steve Leech to undertake the review of the current Scrutiny arrangements, which was supported by Members.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Members of the Scrutiny Leadership Board agreed to commission and participate in a review of the Council' Scrutiny arrangements;**
- (b) That the appraisal of Lead Scrutiny Members be included in the above review.**

SLB-96 EMPLOYEE SUGGESTION SCHEME

In 2005 Scrutiny had undertaken a review of Employee Suggestion Schemes but this had not been accepted by the Cabinet. However, in the light of the current economic climate, Councillors Derek White and Bob Groom, as members of the review, had decided that now would be a good time to reconsider Employee Suggestion Schemes as a potential money saving and service improvement initiative.

The 2005 review had been updated by revisiting Ricoh, which had been consulted then and which Members considered to have an exemplary scheme, and by researching Employee Suggestion Schemes in operation in other local authorities. Concurrent with this, there was growing support for such a scheme from both the Corporate Employee Focus Group and a range of members, including the Cabinet Member for Policy, Performance & Partnership and the Value for Money Scrutiny Group.

The Policy & Value for Money Manager had, therefore, submitted a report and proposed scheme to the Cabinet of 10 November 2009, a copy of which was appended for Members' information. The Scrutiny members had been consulted on the proposals and had put forward a number of recommendations which they would like to see taken into account in the further development of the Scheme should it go ahead.

On 10th November, Cabinet had approved the following recommendation:

- That the key principles and outline process in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 of the report be agreed; and
- That the next steps in Section 5 of the report and delegation of authority to the Head of Policy, Performance & Partnership, following consultation with the Cabinet Member: Policy, Performance & Partnership, to finalise details be agreed.

The Scrutiny recommendations had been noted and the Cabinet Member for Policy, Performance and Partnership had expressed broad support although he considered that the second recommendation might not be possible in the current economic climate.

The Chairman welcomed the report and emphasised the need for a system that was appropriate to the Council to be drawn up and given due consideration before it was introduced. The Suggestion Scheme should also be operated as a computer based system with appropriate linkages.

SLB-97 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Chairman informed the Board that an additional Scrutiny Assembly would be held, on a date to be confirmed, at which Members would have the opportunity to ask questions of the Chief Executive on 'One Council One Vision'. This was a very important initiative in which Scrutiny should have a role.

SLB-98 SCRUTINY FORWARD PLAN 2009-10

The updated Scrutiny Forward Plan for 2009-10 was noted by the Board.

The Scrutiny Manager reminded the Members that the meeting of the Board on 25 March 2010 was scheduled to consider the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership. As this was a wide ranging area, she asked Members which areas in particular they would wish to look at. Members suggested the following:

- The results of the Dawley DPPO and an update on its operation
- Crime hot spots
- The expansion of CCTV
- The effectiveness and efficiency of Community Support Officers
- An update on work in relation to ASBOs

Given the number of issues identified, the Scrutiny Manager undertook to go back the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership and identify which of the issues it would be timely for Members to discuss.

SLB-99 COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN EDITION 98

Edition 98 of the Council's Forward Plan was noted by the Board.

SLB-100 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday, 14 January, 2010.

KEN CLARKE, HEAD OF FINANCE & AUDIT

The Chairman informed the Board that this would be the last meeting to be attended by Ken Clarke. On behalf of the Board he wished to record their appreciation and thanks for all the work Ken Clarke had done in establishing the Scrutiny function in Telford & Wrekin.

The meeting ended at 5.52 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: