

Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2008

Present:

Councillor Watson – In the Chair

Councillors Andrews, Clayton, Isherwood, Morrison, P. Murphy, Brian O'Neil, Sandiford, Smith and Trotman.

Present by Invitation:

Councillor Leese, Leader of the Council

Councillor Priest, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

Also present:

Councillor E. Newman

RG/08/13 Minutes

Referring to Minute RG/08/10 the Committee was informed that a meeting of the H.R Sub Group would be meeting in the next two weeks to consider sickness absence and Leadership Development Programme.

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2008 as a correct record.

RG/08/14 Late reports

The Chair commented on the very late receipt of the outstanding reports to be considered at the meeting, giving insufficient time for members to read and properly scrutinise them. The Chair announced that she would raise this at the next meeting of the OSC Co-ordinating Group. Geoff Little, Assistant Chief Executive, undertook to also raise this at the next meeting of the Strategic Management Team.

RG/08/15 Information and Overview Report

The Committee noted a report of the City Solicitor on the forward work programme and monitoring progress in relation to (i) Manchester Working; (ii) Procurement; and (iii) Cash Grants.

It was noted that a detailed report on the full outcomes of the procurement service improvement programme particularly the savings in utilities and social care, would be submitted to the May meeting of the Committee.

In relation to cash grants, the Committee considered the latest version of the application form. A number of suggestions were made in relation to possible amendment of the form, in particular (i) rewording the section indicating the grant available of 'up to £40,000'; (ii) the font size of the application form; (iii) the inclusion of who was involved in the decision making process.

In response to further questions, officers stated that once an application has been received, Support Officers meet with the person(s) applying for the grant to discuss the application in detail. The Committee was also informed that any surplus in allocations of cash for grants was reallocated to other wards throughout the city. All council Members will be circulated with details on th revised scheme as soon as possible.

Decision

1. To note the report
2. To request officers consider the above suggestions in relation to the application form for cash grants.
3. To add a report relating to the Town Hall Strategy to the Work Programme.

RG/08/16 Quality Performance Report

A report of the Head of Corporate Performance was submitted providing performance information on the delivery of the Community Strategy for the period ending 31 December 2007.

Members noted that where a red indicator appeared, an additional commentary had been included to show the action being taken to improve performance. The Committee was informed that as this was an overview report individual performance issues would be considered by the relevant Scrutiny Committee. This Committee is to take a more strategic view.

In relation to a question about the cost of the consultation exercise concerning Recycling and Composting, the Leader of the Council stated that he was unable to give a precise figure as a great number responses were still being received for this particular consultation. The Chair indicated that the information could be included in the next information and overview report with, perhaps some details about the number of responses etc.

Decision

1. To note the report.
2. To request officers to submit a further report in June.

RG/08/17 Local Area Agreement

The Draft Local Area Agreement was submitted for comment prior to consideration by the Executive on 12 March 2008.

The Chair noted that although the report brought together many issues previously discussed by the Committee, the report itself had not been made available to the Committee members until the 5 March, 24 hours before the meeting of the Committee. This gave insufficient time for Members to go through the report properly.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Performance) introduced the draft report and informed members that the Executive would be asked to approve the draft as a basis for further discussion with Government. This would then set the indicators within the LAA. State of the Wards reports to Ward Co-ordination would show progress against LAA priorities at ward level. The final document would be submitted to the Council for approval after the necessary sign off by the Government. Following questions he said that those areas that were still the subject of discussion with Government were clearly outlined in the text

Members of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee will have the chance to scrutinise the LAA before final submission to Council

The Leader of the Council informed the Committee that reference to District Public Service Boards in Section 3 of the report on Neighbourhood Focus and Community Leadership should be deleted.

Reference was again made to the inclusion of members in the District Public Service Board process and the Committee noted that the Executive would be looking at this in the new Municipal Year.

Decision

1. To endorse the Local Area Agreement subject to the deletion of the reference to District Public Service Boards in paragraph 4 of Section 3 on Neighbourhood Focus and Community Leadership.
2. To emphasise the need for the Committee continue to receive quarterly monitoring reports in accordance with the previous resolutions of the Committee and further updates as necessary.
3. To note the commitment of the Executive to look at the situation regarding elected member involvement in the District Public Service Boards in the new municipal year.

RG/08/18 School Governance

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted updating the Committee on action to strengthen support for school governance in Manchester Schools including plans for a new clerking service.

Officers outlined the need for changes to school governance, the challenges to be addressed and the implementation of the full programme that would take about 18 months. Many of the changes however would be visible to governors in the summer and autumn terms of 2008.

The Chair welcomed the report and noted that it seemed to carry evidence of real progress in contrast to the reports received by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee last year.

In discussion members stated that in relation to training, district clusters may not be appropriate and that tailored training might be better. Members were informed that training and learning would be offered to suit the needs of the governors. A new Service Level Agreement Framework would be in place by 2009.

Members were concerned that the expertise and professionalism of some of the existing clerks may be undermined by the proposals and sought assurances in relation to the legal standing of those governors who did not want any change to their existing service. In response, the Committee was informed that legally there is no way a clerking service can be enforced on a governing body except where the delegated budget had been withdrawn. Schools would be targeted where it was believed they needed support. In addition to the minute taking aspect of the role of a clerk to the governors, a clerk should be the primary source of advice on statutory requirements and regulations and be able to advise the governing body appropriately. A draft Action Plan would be drawn up before any final decisions made.

A member raised the question of support for governing bodies where a senior member of staff is involved in disciplinary procedures. It was agreed that the HR Sub Group should look at this and other aspects of the HR support available to governors.. Members were informed that the School Funding Forum has agreed a separate budget to be called upon in circumstances where senior staff were the subject of disciplinary procedures.

Decision

1. To welcome the report and note progress made and proposals for future implementation.
2. To request a further report on progress to a future meeting in particular the final draft of the Action Plan relating to the clerking service.
3. To request the HR Sub Group look at the management support in relation to all human resources procedures in schools.

RG/08/19 Governance

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted providing an overview of the work currently taking place to improve organisational and partnership governance in the Council.

The Committee was informed of the work in progress and of the areas of work being reviewed by the officer technical working group. In response to a question about the working group, officers agreed that it would be helpful to have a Sub Group to take forward the work of the officer group.

Members commented on the Annual Governance Statement and were informed that it would be reported to the Audit Committee in May. It was suggested that the AGS be submitted to the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee in May to enable comments to be reported to the Audit Committee.

Decision

1. To note the progress outlined in the report and request that the Annual Governance Strategy be submitted to this Committee prior to consideration by the Audit Committee.
2. To agree to set up a Sub Group to assist in the work being undertaken by the officer technical working group and the Chair to determine the composition of the Sub Group.
3. To request a report detailing a timetable for work to be undertaken by the Sub Group

RG/08/20 Valuation and Property: Partial Externalisation (Press and Public excluded)

A report of the City Treasurer was submitted advising members on progress made on the tendering process since last reported to the Committee in January 2008 in respect of the partial externalisation of Valuation and Property. A report on the outcome of the procurement process to identify a service provider would be submitted to the meeting of the Executive on 12 March.

The Head of Valuation and Property outlined the timetable and the steps taken resulting in a shortlist of the three remaining tenderers. The Committee were given an assurance of the safeguards built into the process to ensure there were no conflicts of interest following the award of the tender. In response to a question, the Committee was informed that 30 staff would be affected and that the Trade Unions had been consulted over 12 months ago, they understood the change was necessary and were happy with the process. Further contact would be made with the unions and dedicated training sessions would be held in the future.

The Committee thanked officers for the very detailed report and commended the excellent procurement process.

Decision

1. To exclude the public during consideration of this item because the report contains information in relation in respect of the financial or business affairs of a particular person and public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.
2. To note the progress made and endorse the approach to partial outsourcing of Valuation and Property.
3. To agree to the Chair of the Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee exempting the decision, or the exercising of the delegation to appoint a service provider from call in subject to the Chair of this Committee having details of the full evaluation scores for each tenderer together with the detail of the report to the Executive.
4. To agree that in future similar circumstances, the Trade Unions be invited to attend the Scrutiny Committee.

H/R&G/mar08