

COUNCIL
Wednesday 20th May 2009

Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee
Annual Report 2008/2009



Forward by the Chairman

The Committee has had a very interesting year, particularly in light of the budget implications that the Council has to face. In particular, the Budget process followed a different format this year, and this has required time and dedication from the Committee Members, over an intense and challenging time.

The Committee met ten times during the 2008/2009 municipal year and spent over 11 hours scrutinising the budget process and alternative proposals.

The Panel agreed its work programme and topics for future scrutiny with regard to the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy Theme, Corporate Plan Aim and Council Priorities at its work programme setting meeting with officers on 20th May 2008. The work programme has included items forwarded to us by Officers and also by fellow Councillors.

There will also be items on the work programme that will be carried forward to the next municipal year.

At the meeting of the committee in April 2009, Members considered the Recommendation Tracking Forms which monitored the recommendations from Scrutiny Committees to Cabinet. It was felt by the Committee that this was an important part of the scrutiny process and should be an ongoing item on the work programme for the new municipal year.

I would like to thank Members of the Committee for their contributions and assistance in the various Scrutiny exercises, without whose attendance and active involvement, the Committee would not have been successful. I would also like to thank those officers who attended the meetings and/or the Review Panels for their input.

Finally, I would like to thank my Vice Chairman, Councillor Jennifer Green for all her help and support, Sue Saunders for her efficiency, cheerfulness and patience. I would also like to thank Caroline Newlands for her legal advice throughout the year.

Councillor Graham Ballinger
Chairman, Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee

1. Review Panels

The following Review Panels were established:

a. No Surprises Review Panel

The No Surprises Review Panel was established on 16th September 2008 following a Member request. The panel met three times between 16th September 2008 and 27th January 2009. Recommendations from the Review Panel were agreed by Cabinet on 26th March 2009. These included:

1. An awareness campaign be arranged for officers and members for “Think Local Member”. This would include posters and possibly a sticker which would remind Officers to inform Members on what was happening in Council wards.
2. An abbreviated copy of the Council phonebook be made available to all Members.
3. A quarterly item be added to the Members Bulletin asking for feedback to go to the Strategy, Partnerships & Communications Manager.
4. The No Surprises Protocol be amended.
5. Officers be requested to include all Council events and activities on the media planner which is on the Council’s intranet.
6. The responses to the No Surprises questionnaire be included in the Members Bulletin.
7. A standing item on the Members No Surprises Protocol be included in the monthly Core Brief.

b. Section 106 Review Panel

The Section 106 Review Panel was established on 4th August September 2008 following a Member request. The panel met five times between 4th August 2008 and 24th November 2008. Recommendations from the review panel were noted by Cabinet on 22nd April 2009.

c. No Barriers Review Panel

The Review Panel was established on 27th April 2007 following a recommendation by Group Leaders at their meeting on 6th March 2007.

The No Barriers Awards were set up in memory of Councillor Mike Oborski who admired a similar scheme based in Gdynia, Poland.

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Mike's wish was that the values of the Polish project were reflected in the Wyre Forest scheme. The Scheme recognises local businesses, organisations and individuals who have provided significant access, service or employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the Wyre Forest district. These include people with physical and learning disabilities, mental health difficulties and hearing and visual impairments.

Cabinet agreed recommendations from the review panel that an annual awards ceremony would be held. The first ceremony was held on 9th May 2008 where 11 recipients received awards.

The Review Panel has reconvened to co-ordinate the arrangements for the awards in 2009.

These awards are a lasting tribute to Mike's hard work and dedication to the district and the county over many years.

d. Budget Review Panel

The Budget Review Panel this year was particularly challenging. The Panel met from July 2008 to February 2009. It gave all Members an opportunity to take part in reviewing the budget for the year and in total, there were seven meetings.

During the budget process, the Panel received reports from Heads of Service who were in attendance. The reports included base budget variations, income service options and details of the capital programme.

The Panel also had the opportunity to scrutinise the budget proposals made by the Cabinet and considered the alternative budget proposals from the Independent Community & Health Concern, Labour and Liberal/Liberal Democrat parties.

The Review Panel's recommendation below was presented at the Cabinet meeting on 19th April 2009 and agreed at Council on 25th April 2009.

Having considered the Cabinet proposals, and amendments from the Independent Community & Health Concern, Labour and Liberal/Liberal Democrat Groups, the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee is satisfied that the proposals are all clear, achievable and financially sound.

e. Recommendations from Grants to Voluntary Bodies Review Panel

The Panel was established on the 5th February 2008. The Grants to Voluntary Bodies Review Panel scrutinised the Council's policy regarding the awarding of grants to voluntary bodies in the District. Cabinet agreed the recommendations from the review panel at their meeting on 24th July 2008. These included:

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1. The criteria for grants to voluntary bodies be refreshed, in line with terminology used in the Worcestershire Compact and the revised Corporate Priorities and Community Strategy Themes.
2. The application form be revised to include more robust sections on how the allocations of funds meets Council and Sustainable Community Strategy aims and priorities, and clearer information on the beneficiaries of the project or scheme).
3. The conditions of Grant Aid form be refreshed to bring it in line with the revised criteria and to strengthen compliance with relevant legislation.
4. The Council allocate a small amount of funds for the purpose of emergency grants to voluntary organisations in the District.

2. Council Priorities

At each Corporate Services Scrutiny meeting, the Committee considered a report on Council priorities which informed Members of progress each month with regard to the four Council Priorities for 2008/09 as set out in the Corporate Plan 2008/2011.

During the course of the meetings, the Committee recognised the achievement of staff at the Worcestershire Hub on being rated No.1 across the County. Members of the Committee asked the Leader of the Council to pass on their congratulations the Hub staff.

3. Recommendation Tracking Forms 2007/08

The Committee considered a report on all recommendations that had been made from Corporate Service & Performance Scrutiny Committee and Community & Regeneration Scrutiny Committees. It was agreed that this would be a standing item on the work programme again for next year to ensure that recommendations made to Cabinet were followed up.

4. Performance Management Audit

The Committee were informed that The Audit Commission's Annual Audit & Inspection Plan for 2008/09 included a review of the Council's performance management framework. The audit was carried out during October 2008.

Progress will be monitored as part of the Committee's future work programme and will also be monitored by the Audit Commission in the autumn of 2009 as part of the Audit & Inspection Plan for 2009/10.

The Committee will also make any recommendations to Cabinet, as appropriate, on the implementation of the action plan.

5. Single Site

The Committee were updated at each meeting on the progress made on Single Site. They were grateful to be kept informed of the latest position and the negotiations that were continuing with regard to single site.

Some Councillors were also involved by being members of the two Single Site Project Boards.

Throughout the year, other items were considered including:

- Local Land & Property Gazetteer
- Customer Services Review
- Comprehensive Area Assessment
- Website Development
- Corporate Governance Update
- Use of Resources and Value for Money
- Base Budget Proposals
- National Indicators