

These minutes are draft minutes. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information, statements and decisions recorded in them, their status will remain that of a draft until such time as they are confirmed as a correct record at the subsequent meeting.

AGENDA ITEM NO.

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESOURCES AND BEST VALUE SCRUTINY COMMISSION HELD ON 22ND MARCH 2001 AT 2.00 P.M.

A Alun Davies
P Councillor Chalmers
P Councillor Channon
P Councillor Deasy (in the chair)
P Councillor Dodd
P Councillor Kitson
A Councillor LoPresti
A Councillor Patterson
P Councillor Tallis

Co-optees:-

P Ms. C. Christie-Paige - Women's Forum
A Ms. P. Morgan - LGB Forum
P Mr. R. Preddy - Disability Forum
A Mr. J. Savage - Bristol Chamber of
Commerce and Initiative
A Mr. P. Tan - Bristol Race Forum
A Mr. A. Hamblin) Trade Union
P Mr. C. Williams) Representatives

RBV

57.3/01 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

Alun Davies the Chair of the Commission had sent his apologies for the meeting.

RESOLVED - that Councillor Deasy be elected to Chair the meeting.

RBV

58.3/01 MINUTES - MEETING HELD ON 15TH FEBRUARY 2001

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting of the Resources and Best Value Scrutiny Commission held on 15th February 2001 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

RBV

59.3/01 MAPPING

Councillor Chalmers made the point that a number of reports were being written which included maps of Bristol showing national indicators of deprivation by ward. Officers were asked to ensure that this mapping information was displayed in an up to date and consistent manner in each report, and if possible to be generated on a centralised system.

RBV

60.3/01 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received in respect of any items on the agenda.

RBV

61.3/01 WHIPPING

No whipping arrangements were received by any party.

RBV

62.3/01 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

There were no items of business from the Chair.

RBV

63.3/01 PUBLIC FORUM

There were no public forum requests.

WORK PROGRAMME ITEMS

The commission received a report from the Director of Central Support Services (agenda item no. 8) providing an update of the asset management initiatives undertaken and being undertaken to provide the Council with best value in terms of asset use and retention.

The Divisional Director of Property and Finance outlined the report, advising on the departmental and corporate asset management plans which had been completed. It was reported that the Council had taken part in a national audit of its preparedness for good asset management through the local district audit office. The initial summary report had commended the Council for work done so far and had shown that compared to some other Authorities in the South West, Bristol was well placed. With regard to DETR key performance indicators for property performance, the Council was working with other core city authorities to develop common 'working' definitions.

The Commission then took evidence from the following witness who spoke at the meeting:

Ms Cynthia Rowe - District Audit

Ms Rowe reported on the areas assessed by district audit which had included non-operational property, backlog of repairs, corporate strategy approach, use of space and informed client survey. The Commission was advised that the asset management plan was a complex document that needed to be sustainable and promote the Council's objectives, ensure buildings were fit for their purpose and increase revenue/community benefit through efficiency.

During discussion that ensued members of the Commission indicated those areas where they wished further work to be carried out as follows:

1. an assessment of the work needed to ensure Council Buildings meet the criteria of the Disability Discrimination Act;
2. the need to carry out a full valuation of Council buildings;
3. the need for a corporate plan to establish a rolling programme of improvements for service departments to reduce the significant backlog of repairs (£90 million);
4. to include in the Plan the cost of repairing buildings as it could be better value for money to sell off rather than repair certain buildings;
5. to include in the Plan a summary of individual departments asset management plans;
6. to carry out condition surveys to ensure Council buildings are fit for the purpose they are being used for; and
7. to research the possibility of having a corporate budget for health and safety.

RESOLVED - that members would like to see further work done on the areas of asset management as set out above in points 1 to 7.

PERSONNEL POLICIES

RBV

65.3/01 WORK LIFE BALANCE

The commission considered a report of the Director of Central Support Services (agenda item no. 9) which:

- (1) advised of proposed changes to enable members to consider the views of Peter Cressey, Bath University, who had carried out the flexibility surveys and the views of the trade unions; and
- (2) sought the views of the commission regarding the draft policy

which would be forwarded to the Central Support Services Executive for it to consider prior to adopting the new proposals.

The Head of Strategic and Resource Planning reported that the Work Life Balance Policy was a significant and forward thinking document which would place Bristol City Council at the forefront of local Authorities introducing flexible working patterns for staff.

The joint approach adopted by the Council and the Trades Unions combined with the progressive/proactive nature of the proposals had resulted in the Council obtaining national publicity and being awarded a grant of £40,000 from the DfEE.

The Commission then took evidence from the following witnesses who spoke at the meeting:

(1) Mr Peter Cressey - Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Policy Sciences, Bath University.

Mr Cressey advised that work-life flexibility was an important issue and one of immediate concern for all organisations due to a number of reasons, including tendencies towards a 7 day week / 24 hour society and the need to adjust home and work life. This was especially prevalent given the new Labour Government commitment to 'family friendly policies'.

The Commission was advised that out of interviews conducted with management only one interviewee had expressed reservations on the introduction of the Work Life Policy due to problems associated with co-ordinating staff, and there was a general consensus that management training would be required.

In conclusion Mr Creesey reported that getting it right offered the prospect of cost savings, service improvement and increased staff satisfaction and loyalty.

(2) Ms Rowena Hayward - Trade Union Representative (GMB)

Ms Hayward advised the Commission that trades unions supported the Work/Life Balance Policy and had been fully briefed at all stages of its development. The policy was completely voluntary and there was no erosion of employee terms and conditions.

The advantage of the policy in helping to combat social inclusion was highlighted along with the fact that its introduction would lead to

increased staff and management interaction.

(3) Ms Liz Ring - Trade Union Representative (UNISON)

Ms Ring stated that the joint co-operation between management and trades unions in developing this positive staff policy had created a trusting environment for partnership working. Bristol City Council had also been the only local authority to secure DfEE funding for the second stage of the pilot scheme for this project.

During discussion that ensued members of the Commission raised the following key points:

- the policy was a leap forward, very people focussed and had been developed with excellent 'industrial relations'.
- the policy offered an opportunity for the Council to tap into the resources of the modern labour market by offering a flexible balance of work and life, therefore ensuring a prosperous organisation with a happy and dedicated workforce.
- there was a need to ensure effective monitoring of the performance of staff using flexible working methods to ensure the maximum benefit was being provided to the local community and that discipline procedures could be implemented if necessary.
- there was a need to ensure that adequate health and safety checks were carried out for those staff who were home-working.
- the need to ensure that a statement on equalities issues was included in the policy document.
- the need to ensure that the over-riding aim of introducing the policy was to ensure that best value in the provision of services to the local community was being achieved.

RESOLVED - that the above views regarding the draft Worklife Balance Policy be forwarded to the Central Support Services Executive at its meeting on 5th April 2001.

The commission considered a report of the Director of Central Support Services (agenda item no. 10) presenting Internal Audit's half yearly report for the period to 30th September 2000.

The Chief Internal Auditor outlined the report to members, advising that the internal audit section produced a strategic four year plan that identified the complete 'audit universe' and adhered to a risk assessment process for auditing Council services on an annual, biennial or quadrennial coverage. To date, internal audit had concentrated on financial control but due to a New Code of Practice issued by the Audit Commission, the impact of the best value regime and the introduction of a new CIPFA 'Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government' this was likely to change. A wider scope of audit, including a corporate risk assessment and an increased role in relation to internal control in the widest sense (not just financial) was envisioned.

The Commission were advised that unplanned for special assignments did have an impact on the work programme of the internal audit section and that at present one third of officer time was devoted to special assignments, with two thirds being devoted to the rolling audit programme. This had been highlighted as an area for improvement in the report of the district auditor. In response to a suggestion from a Member, the Chief Internal Auditor advised that during very busy periods agency auditors were brought in to lighten the load.

In response to a query from a member, the Commission were advised that once the Council had streamlined/standardised its ICT systems the audit process would be much easier to conduct.

In conclusion it was reported that due to the high level of unplanned work, there was a clear need to redirect audit resources away from traditional audit work towards one off special assignment and systems work that would validate the financial control framework of the City Council.

RESOLVED -that the report be noted.

(The meeting ended at 4.48 pm)

CHAIR