Policy Development Scrutiny Committee

Date	29 Sept 2011
Venue	Town Hall, St Annes
Committee members	Councillor Fabian Craig-Wilson (Chairman) Councillor Leonard Davies (Vice-Chairman) Ben Aitken, Frank Andrews, Susan Ashton, Julie Brickles, David Chedd, Simon Cox, John Davies, David Donaldson, Charlie Duffy, Karen Henshaw JP, Edward Nash, Elizabeth Oades, Richard Redcliffe, Elaine Silverwood
Other Councillors	_
Officers	Joanna Scott, Ian Curtis, Allan Oldfield, Clare Platt, Tracy Scholes, Paul Walker, Annie Womack
Others	_

Public Platform

There were no members of the public wishing to speak

1. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any personal/prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000. There were no declarations.

2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14 July 2011 as a correct record for signature by the chairman.

3. Substitute members

There were no substitutes.

4. Data Assurance Policy

This report was introduced by Ian Curtis, Head of Governance and the council's monitoring officer. Mr Curtis explained that good practice requires the council to have policies setting out how it complies with its obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998, how it ensures data quality and how it classifies data.

Accordingly the adoption of a consolidated Data Assurance Policy was recommended in the report, to incorporate existing policies on data protection, which governs the handling of personal data; data quality, which seeks to ensure that the council uses and keeps high quality reliable and up-to-date information; and to add material on data classification which governs the sensitivity of data held.

Mr Curtis described the detail of the three elements to members. In response to questions from the committee he described circumstances in which data might be considered to be classified as sensitive and explained that any such classification required a "public interest" test.

Members asked whether there was an external review which would give assurance that our policies and practices were fit for purpose. Mr Curtis advised that there was not a formal inspection regime, but that the Information Commissioner had oversight and compliance was checked through complaints.

After the debate the committee RESOLVED:

1   To recommend to Cabinet that a Data Assurance policy as set out in the draft attached to the report is adopted.

5. General Fund Monitoring Report 2011/12 –   Quarter Ended 30 June 2011

This report, which was introduced by Joanna Scott, Assistant Director of Finance, showed the updated position on the General Fund Revenue Budget as at 30th June 2011. The report highlighted any significant variances from the profiled latest budget and detailed the actions taken to address them.

Ms Scott provided a background for members of the budget setting and monitoring cycle and confirmed that the quarterly reports were brought to committee to provide members with awareness and understanding of the issues. There were various appendices attached to the report and she also explained their significance to members.

In particular she drew their attention to Appendix C (revenue slippage monitoring), and advised that Cllr Buckley (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources) had particularly asked that the committee members look at them

as those items would not be included in future quarterly reports during the year, unless some change occurred.

Ms Scott also asked that members consider Item 2 in the report, which was headed Budget Areas for Further Consideration.

It was noted that there was no provision within the budget for a contingency fund to finance potential planning appeals, which can be costly for the council. Ms Scott confirmed that was the case.

Members also asked questions about the authority of managers to make virements between their budget heads, and it was suggested that the committee might wish to be made aware of those. Ms Scott explained that each service had an overall Council approved budget for which the budget holder was responsible for which was allocated by managers to various budget heads within that service on a best estimate at the start of the year, but that they had flexibility to move their budget around in order to respond to need and changing priorities, up to a certain level as stated in the Council's Financial Procedure Rules. Mr Allan Oldfield, Director of Customer and Operational Services added that it was a management tool, that there was a process in place that had to be adhered to, that virements tended to be smaller, and that the hotspot report which members had in front of them would bring out the big issues for review by members and that is where the focus of the scrutiny should be . He further stated that if there was an overspend of any significance, that would have to be reported to full council as an unfunded budget requirement.

Members expressed concern that the quarterly budget monitoring reports were to be split between the two scrutiny committees, and expressed a preference for each report to come to the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman undertook to discuss the arrangements at the next Scrutiny Management Board meeting.

Ms Scott was asked whether there was a quarterly report on capital programme monitoring to the Portfolio Holder Finance & Resources and she agreed that there was, but confirmed that it did not go to scrutiny. Committee members said that they would like the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee to receive that report also.

There was some more debate and members commended Ms Scott on the clarity of the report, after which the committee RESOLVED:

1.   To note the current position and the comments outlined in the report.

2.   To recommend to cabinet that for 2012/13, finance is included within the base budget to cover the cost of potential planning appeals.

There was no recorded vote as the Chairman decided that the matter was not controversial.

6. Appointment of Car Parking Task & Finish Group

The Chairman reported that a request had been received from the Director of Strategic Development to appoint a Task & Finish Group to undertake a review of car parking strategy. This request had gone to the Scrutiny Management Board who had agreed that this was the correct course of action, and the matter had therefore been referred to this meeting.

The Chairman nominated some councillors to sit on the Group and the committee RESOLVED:

1. To appoint a time-limited Task and Finish Group to look at the matter in more detail, and to report back to a later committee and to Cabinet.

2. To appoint to the Task and Finish Group the following members:

   Cllrs Fabian Craig-Wilson; Elizabeth Oades; Julie Brickles; Richard Redcliffe and Charlie Duffy.

There was no recorded vote as the Chairman decided that the matter was not controversial.