
RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT 2006/07

I am pleased to present the Annual report of the Resources Scrutiny Committee to Council on behalf of the Members of that Committee. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the Officers for their support over the last year and to convey a special thanks to Councillor Don Bristow, Cabinet Member with Resources Management Portfolio, who has attended and contributed to the majority of our meetings. His contribution to debate and discussion has enhanced the work we have undertaken.

As in previous years, the majority of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee, both at ordinary and special meetings has surrounded the Council's Revenue and Capital Medium-Term Financial Plans and detailed discussions and questioning of Officers has taken place on these plans. In addition, the Director of Community Services has also attended one of our meetings to answer Members' questions following a call-in of Cabinet's decision in relation to an overspend on the Adult Services budget. Following this call-in, Members were satisfied with the explanation given for the overspend and continued to monitor the situation to ensure that the overspend was being managed and monitored.

We also regularly receive combined financial and service planning reports so that we can compare the Council's financial performance against budget and, for the same budget headings, the service against target.

A major part of our work this year has been to undertake two separate reviews into the Pedestrian Heart project as requested by Council and I would like to personally thank Members of the Resources Scrutiny Committee for their input and contribution to these reviews. The first review we undertook was to look into the issues surrounding the finding of a gas main during the course of the Pedestrian Heart works and, following an extensive review and interviews with various Officers and representatives of the main contractors involved with the project, Cabinet agreed to note our recommendations and also agreed to approve funding of £80,000 to enable a post of Assistant Director (Capital Projects) to be established. I would also like to place on record my thanks to the two members of the public who actively participated in this review for their time and effort.

In the latter half of 2006, we were again requested by Council to look into the Pedestrian Heart project and to give an insight to a review of future capital project management. Following various presentations and the review of various documentation in relation to the contract, we forwarded our findings and recommendations to Cabinet. Again, Cabinet endorsed our recommendations and formally recognised the work we had undertaken by forwarding its thanks to us.

We have continued to monitor and review the Council's progress in meeting the requirements of the Gershon Review and have had several very informative meetings of our Task and Finish Review Group. Linked to the work we have done in monitoring the anticipated savings, we have

also looked at Procurement within the authority and the savings made against contracts and new contract opportunities, and the initial findings of the review of administration which is currently being undertaken within the Authority

In addition to the monitoring of savings as a result of revised procurement practices, as a Scrutiny Committee, we have also regularly monitored the progress made against the Procurement Strategy Action Plan, however, in June 2006, we considered how we could better assist the Officers with the work they were undertaking to raise the profile of procurement and its role within the Organisation to ensure understanding of the significant contribution procurement can make to the delivery of Council services. We decided to re-establish a Task and Finish Review Group and Members took an active role and visited a number of authorities that had received Beacon Status for the Delivery of Quality Services through Procurement in 2005/06 to gain knowledge and best practice. The visits we undertook were extremely beneficial and worthwhile and, following this review and our recommendations, Officers are currently developing a Procurement Action Plan and we will continue to monitor and review progress against this.

Other issues we have looked at are the Council's ICT Strategy; the Community Strategy; the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan, relevant departmental service plans; the financial performance of the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit and the performance and actions of the Health and Safety Unit within the Corporate Services Department.

We have also received information from Officers on PerformancePlus, the Council's computerised performance management system. This system allows Officers to record and analyse information, and produce reports, to create an effective management of corporate and service performance, based on objectives and performance indicators contained within the Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and Service Plans, which can be monitored by us.

In addition, I have had numerous meetings and discussions with leading Officers outside the formal scrutiny process and have reported back to Members on the outcome of those meetings.

Councillor Ian Haszeldine on behalf of the Resources Scrutiny Committee