

## **POLICY AND CORPORATE RESOURCES REPORT TO COUNCIL**

### **First Quarter**

At the first Committee meeting of the year each of the three new Overview and Scrutiny Committees agreed to undertake a series of short portfolio reviews from June to September to establish the impact and progress of the cuts and challenges faced by the Council as a result of last years Local Government Financial Settlement. Each Committee asked their respective Executive Members to explain the current status of their portfolio / departmental reviews, and to explain how confident they were of meeting the budget challenges agreed at Finance Council.

Members across each of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees focussed their attention on the delivery and outcomes of those reviews;

### **Children and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

This Committee decided to divide into three task and finish groups; one scrutinising the Children's portfolio, one scrutinising Adults Services and one scrutinising the Leisure and Culture portfolio.

The task group scrutinising the Children's Services portfolio agreed that the scope of the review would include:

- Reviewing of the cuts to Children's Services and the impact on the case numbers that Social Workers are carrying.
- Understanding of the number of high level cases each worker is carrying, that utilise a considerable amount of the workers' time.
- Exploring current caseload levels and the systems that are in place to help with reduction and how effective they are.
- Exploring the impact on the quality of service that is being provided to children and their parents.
- Investigating the impact of high caseload levels on Social Workers.
- Comparing caseload numbers against comparable neighbouring authorities, and
- Benchmarking caseloads against national recommendations.

The task group scrutinising the Leisure and Culture Portfolio chose to focus attention on;

- Requesting the original departmental budget that the cuts were being made against.
- Examining the details of the cuts and further explore the reasoning behind the decisions.
- Investigating the impact that the cuts have had on issues such as, staffing levels and reduction in services.
- Exploring the potential longer term impact that the cuts will have on the service areas within the Portfolio.

The task group scrutinising Adult Health have adopted a broader approach by deciding to keep the whole portfolio under review, with the rationale that with demand – led services and an ageing population, situations change very quickly, and what may be considered “green” in terms of performance could change and become a significant issue in a much shorter period of time than that set between the meeting dates of the Committee.

At the end of each of the three reviews draft recommendations were compiled for agreement at the meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2011.

### **Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee agreed to establish two task and finish groups each reviewing one of the following two areas:

- The £250,000 reduction in core fee paid to CAPITA and the implications of the cuts; joint working to achieve these cuts with the Council and any unexpected positive or negative consequences.
- The implications of reductions in the street cleansing budget.

Both task and finish groups met for the first time on 19<sup>th</sup> July. At its first meeting the CAPITA task and finish group met with the Director of Regeneration to review all areas of CAPITA core fee reduction. They then agreed to invite CAPITA to present more detail at its next meeting.

It was decided that because the areas of focus for both the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods and Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committees were very similar, that the best use of limited resources would be to hold a joint meeting with officers from CAPITA. This met on the 10<sup>th</sup> September, providing Members of Policy and Resources OSC an opportunity to hear about the Capita Symonds savings programme and to ask questions alongside the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Task Group looking at a review of services provided through the strategic partnership including “Instant HR”.

It is expected that the recommendations from the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods CAPITA task and finish group will be taken to the Committee on the 12<sup>th</sup> October.

At the first meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> July the Street Cleansing Budget reductions task and finish group scrutinised three areas –

- The schools Environment Officer job vacancy cut and the impact this would have on schools.
- additional environmental initiatives and the ways of positively conveying these key messages to neighbourhoods and
- The possibility of highlighting wards where negative environment issues remain prevalent.

Inevitably further questions arose which will be addressed at a subsequent meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> September which will include a discussion on the impact

of the Executive Board giving more money to the portfolio. It is expected that recommendations will then be taken to the Committee meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> October.

## **Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee decided that there would be two significant areas they wished to scrutinise:

- The overall Capita savings, and
- Management cuts to the authority.

Following on from the CAPITA presentation at the joint meeting of the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods OSC task group and Policy and Corporate Resources OSC task group outlined above further information was requested which outlined the history of the partnership from 2001 to date, including the outcomes of the 5 year and 10 year reviews, and a summary of the non-Symonds savings including responses to the £200K shortfall reported in the last RAG report was agreed, with Members considering the “next/final 5 years” issues including future partnerships and the issue of contract structures in respect of core vs. non-core fee arrangements. It is anticipated that Recommendations will be made to the next respective Committee meetings.

A meeting to scrutinise management cuts, how this saving is made up, and how it has been delivered, has been planned with senior officers in advance of the next Policy and Corporate Resources meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> October.

As agreed at Council Forum on 23<sup>rd</sup> June it is anticipated that in the next round of meetings Members will be able to complete these reviews and redirect their focus to choosing work programmes for the remainder of the year. Which is a return to some of the more traditional scrutiny that has been done previously, namely: For the next round of Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings Executive Members have been requested to attend and give a ten minute presentation of their top five priorities and top three risks for their portfolio. Committees will then use this information on which to base their work programmes for the remainder of the municipal year. Additionally, Executive Members have been asked to make their respective Committees aware of any issues where they feel it appropriate to invite and engage scrutiny in pre decision work, as it is considered this approach will make policies more robust. An approach it is hoped Council Forum would support.

The introduction (as outlined in the last report to Council) of new Chief Officers and senior manager support to each of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees has worked well. There have been regular Officer Review meetings to ensure that this support to Committees and Members remains consistent, relevant and appropriate.

**Transformational Agenda, budget cuts and continued challenge to portfolios.**

It should be noted that the Transformational Agenda (RAG reports) that Committees have received to date will continue to be an agenda item, but not the main focus of the Committee: There will be an expectation that Executive Members report by exception any items that may be of concern. As outlined at the beginning of the municipal year, these reports will continue to remain of significant importance, as any reductions in performance or failure to meet the efficiency targets set will make it even more difficult to deliver corporate priorities with much diminished resources.

Having proven that it is possible to deliver a consistent approach to work programmes across all three Overview and Scrutiny Committees AND complete short term Scrutiny reviews within an agreed period, it is expected that reporting back the work of sub groups to what are only 3-4 remaining Committee cycles of the municipal year will deliver equally consistent results.

Finally, despite a reduced Scrutiny service Members from all political groups have increased their involvement and clearly led on the delivery of some significant pieces of work, investing their time, efforts and enthusiasm over the last four months to ensure the authority remains on track to deliver significant resource challenges.

**Jim Shorrock**  
**Chair**

**Derek Hardman**  
**Vice Chair**