

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ORGANISATION COMMITTEE

5.00PM – 18 JULY 2005

BRIGHTON TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Watkins (Chair); Councillors Allen, Edmond-Smith, Giebeler, Hamilton, Mallender, Pennington, Simson, Willows and Young.

In attendance: Councillor Burgess as Lead Councillor, Human Resources

PART ONE

ACTION

11. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

11A. Declarations of Substitutes

11.1 Substitute Councillor For Councillor
Councillor Willows Councillor G Theobald

11B. Declarations of Interest

11.2 There were none

11C. Exclusion of Press and Public

11.3 The Committee considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in Section 100A(3) or 100 1 of the Local Government Act 1972.

11.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting during consideration of all the items on the agenda, except item 20.

12. MINUTES

12.1 Councillor Mallender pointed out that at minute 4.26 he was not a current member of the Housing Management Sub-Committee but was a member at the time the matters proposed for scrutiny took place.

MvB

12.2 The Committee asked whether representations had been made to

the government regarding planning enforcement (minute 7.3 refers). The scrutiny support officer would investigate.

MvB

[The Development Control Manager is progressing the matter. (August 22nd MvB)]

12.3 **RESOLVED** - That subject to the above amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2005 be approved and signed by the Chair.

13. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

13.1 There were none.

14. PERFORMANCE MONITORING: HUMAN RESOURCES

14.1 The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Burgess, as Lead Councillor for Human Resources, the Director of Human Resources and the Performance Analyst.

14A. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE: PIs FROM THE PERFORMANCE TEAM FOR PERIOD ENDING 31 MARCH 2005

14B. BV12 (STAFF SICKNESS)

14.2 The Performance Analyst gave further details on the quarterly best value performance report on employee health and equalities and answered questions on the performance indicators for sickness absence and equalities. (See minute book)

14.3 The Director of Human Resources said levels of staff sickness absence responded to special management attention and were generally reducing. January and February had been disappointing, because of high levels of flu. April and May had shown some improvement.

14.4 Human Resources had been in discussion with Directors and were optimistic that the council could achieve the new stretched target for sickness absence for 2005/2006.

14.5 **RESOLVED** – That the performance information be noted.

14C. STAFF SICKNESS SCRUTINY REVIEW – OCTOBER 2000

14.6 The Director of Human Resources referred to the scrutiny review of staff sickness and to a note tabled at the meeting outlining progress on implementing the review's recommendations. (See minute book)

14.7 The HR information system, which had been anticipated at the time of the scrutiny review, was not found to be useful; it did not match with the payroll system and was separate from the system used for

schools.

14.8 A single system giving faster access to information and improved accuracy was now expected to be in place by the end of the year. This would give management more useful information. Data would be broken into 25 Assistant Director level sections providing total days lost, average per employee, a distinction between long-term and short-term illness, and broad causes of illness, such as stress, chest, stomach.

14.9 Proportions were to be circulated widely, however ADs would receive more specific and confidential information on individuals accumulating the highest levels of sickness absence so that supportive action could be taken.

14.10 Stress-related illness was tending to increase nationally and was an area of concern, for which it was difficult to isolate causes. A stress working group had been set up following the 2003 staff survey and training established for managers on successful techniques.

14.11 Although not in the top quartile in comparison with other unitary authorities, the council's current overall level of sickness absence was at a five-year low. The scale of improvement was consistent with the target though the target was more stretching every year and was still not being met. Continued management attention was needed. Progress would be reported frequently to OSOC.

14.12 A more local Occupational Health Service, providing additional advisory and remedial services would be put out to tender in the Autumn.

14.13 **RESOLVED** – That the report and progress note be noted

14D. EMPLOYEE SICKNESS ABSENCE

14.14 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Human Resources providing an update on the issues surrounding the management of employee sickness absence within the Council (see minute book).

14.15 Members discussed the importance of ensuring appropriate sensitivity and/or firmness in dealing with stress-related issues and welcomed the introduction of a new Health and Safety Management System. Councillor Edmond-Smith explained the work of the Health and Safety Commission, of which she was a member, in measures at work to help prevent stress. The Health and Safety Executive had produced draft management standards for employers including measures to help reduce stress at work. The Committee asked for a copy of the draft standards.

14.16 It was suggested that Trades Union views could be invited by OSOC to a future meeting, and that a small working group could be set up to monitor any possible effects of efficiency savings on staff and

services. OSOC may wish to look in more detail at how local government work is structured and resourced compared with employers' expectations of staff.

14.17 The Director said that key information on sickness absence was reported monthly to the Management Team, at Directorate level or where appropriate at team level. A stress management team had been set up.

14.18 A grant from the Department of Health was now being used to research a range of managerial factors relating to sickness absence not only to enable specific teams to perform better but to learn lessons applicable across the whole council.

14.19 Following discussion the Committee requested a brief report to the next meeting with further information on:

- 1) Summary of the principal reasons for both long- and short-term sickness absence with broad 'order of magnitude' comparison of the prevalence of each reason
- 2) What approximate proportion of agency staff (report appendix 5 refers) are employed to cover sickness absence?
- 3) Do agency staff all receive the minimum wage?
- 4) What additional services will the new Occupational Health system provide?

14.20 Members asked for information to a future meeting regarding whether the council's policies on illness, health and safety and stress management applied to councillors as well as officers; and what were the duties of councillors with regard to staff health.

14.21 Councillor Burgess said it was helpful to hear Members' concerns.

14.22 **RESOLVED** – (1) That a brief report be provided as minuted at 14.19 above to the next meeting, Monday 19 September.

ML/MvB

(2) That further information as minuted at 14.15 and 14.20 be provided to OSOC.

ML/MvB

15. FORWARD PLAN: MONDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2005

15.1 The following items were noted as being scheduled for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee on 19 September 2005:

Performance Monitoring or 'Overview' : Children, Families and Schools:

Older People's Council [*Annual report to be presented to OSOC*]

November 14th (MvB)]
Update on Scrutiny Reviews

15.2 For the CfS overview item, Members asked for an update on the funding of school buses for the coming academic year, a progress report on school admissions policy following the scrutiny review of December 2002 and the arrangements for the disposal of equipment and stationery from COMART prior to the school's closure.

15.3 In relation to the COMART, as there was some concern that items which might have been of value to other schools/colleges or to voluntary sector organisations were being disposed of in skips, it was requested that the CFS Department be alerted to the issue as soon as possible.

MvB/JH

15.4 OSOC confirmed the wish to monitor outcomes of completed scrutiny reviews.

16. VALUE FOR MONEY AND EFFICIENCY

16.1 The AD of Financial Services presented a report of the Director of Finance and Property providing an update on the new Annual Efficiency Statements that must be submitted to central government (see minute book).

16.2 Focussing in particular on report para 3.8, Members felt that efficiency savings could possibly be 'not agreeable' and were concerned that these were not merely seen as financial savings.

16.3 The impact on the council's statutory duties, key services and implementing policies including equality, sustainability and health and safety needed to be closely monitored. The AD told the meeting this was done through the usual budget-setting and corporate reporting process.

16.4 Answering questions Councillor Burgess as deputy chair of Policy and Resources Committee said the change from black bags to wheelie bins could be included as efficiencies even though the savings were put back into recycling. As part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, the Audit Commission took into account not only costs but also conformity with policies. The planned 2.5% savings were achievable; they had been considered by a cross-party review group and Policy and Resources Committee.

16.5 More environmentally friendly courier vehicles were being used; these were not LPG powered. Co-ordination of vehicle purchases at corporate level was currently being arranged.

16.6 Following discussion OSOC requested a report on progress in implementing the recommendations of the procurement scrutiny review; in particular how policy guidelines – for example on more sustainable

MvB/EH

vehicles - are actioned if purchasing is more decentralised.

16.7 The Committee referred to report Appendix 2 and also asked; How could additional Royal Pavilion visitor income at the same charging levels be secured for the same visitor levels?

NM

[Reply from the service: This efficiency saving was included in the 2005/06 budget strategy based on budgetary performance in 2004/05 which saw a 14,000 increase in visitor numbers and a consequent over-achievement of income (i.e. underspend) of approximately £24,000. The service was therefore set a higher income target (budget) for 2005/06 on the assumption that it would achieve the "same" number of visitors in 2005/06 while only increasing charges in line with inflation. In effect, the unplanned saving that occurred in 2004/05 was formally "taken" as a planned efficiency saving in the 2005/06 budget. (MvB)]

16.8 Finally Members discussed future plans for purchasing at a regional level (report para 3.4 refers) and was concerned that the council should not lose key elements of control over its own procurement practices.

16.9 **RESOLVED** – (1) That a procurement report as minuted at 16.6 above be presented to the next meeting.

**MvB/EH
NM**

(2) That officers be requested to provide information as minuted at 16.7 above.

17. PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPING THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENTAL SCRUTINY LINK OFFICERS

17.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Strategy and Governance concerning the proposals for the practical involvement of Scrutiny Link Officers in moving scrutiny forward (see minute book).

17.2 It was noted that scrutiny link officers had been appointed one for each department; therefore Adult Social Care had no link officer of its own. Councillor Allen as Chair of HOSP felt that the scrutiny link arrangements needed to be revisited in order to cover this major service area.

17.3 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the ways of working with Scrutiny Link Officers be approved

MvB/JH

(2) That the Head of Law and Director of Housing & City Support give further consideration to the Scrutiny link arrangements for Adult Social Care.

AG-G/IL

[Scrutiny Link Officers for Housing and City Support are: Pam Montgomery (Assistant Director, Housing), Philip Letchfield and Brigid Day (Joint Heads of Performance and Development, Adult Social Care. (MvB August 31st)]

18. ANNUAL REPORT ON SCRUTINY

18.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Strategy and Governance summarising the work undertaken within the scrutiny function at Brighton and Hove during the year 2004-2005 (see minute book).

18.2 As Chair of HOSP, Councillor Allen confirmed that a report on the terms of reference was to be presented to the next meeting, 11th October. He said it was disappointing that draft minutes of June 28th HOSP meeting were not yet available due to staff resources; more scrutiny support was needed.

18.3 Councillor Pennington stated that he wished his last year's request to HOSP for scrutiny of telecommunications masts to be considered by OSOC.

18.4 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the report be submitted to the next full Council meeting in accordance with the procedural rules for OSOC.

(2) That Councillor Pennington's request for scrutiny of Telecommunications Masts be considered at the next meeting of OSOC.

19. DEVELOPMENT OF SCRUTINY AND UPDATE ON CURRENT SCRUTINY REVIEWS

19.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Strategy and Governance concerning the progress made on current scrutiny reviews and providing an update on developments in the scrutiny function, including the Education and Health Overview and Scrutiny Panels (see minute book).

19.2 Councillor Pennington said he was requesting scrutiny of the procedures which had led to a current licensee of the old toilet building at Norfolk Square being required to re-tender for a new arrangement and losing to a nearby rival. His request would be considered at the next meeting.

MvB/Cllr RP

19.3 Replying to a question about information about scrutiny being made available on the council's website, the Principal Solicitor said this was on the 'to-do' list. City News had published information on the Eb4U scrutiny review.

**MvB/CO/J
H**

19.4 Councillor Allen said HOSP met only five times per year and wanted to have a greater impact. He felt the Panel was starting to move forward but he was conscious of the pressures on scrutiny support staff. The work programme was agreed and there were plans to visit health institutions.

19.5 Turning to OSOC's meeting with Chairs of Committees on September 14th, Members wished to add to the agenda an additional

MvB/IW

item on scrutiny members' involvement in internal audit and Audit Commission coverage of particular areas of concern and high risk.

19.6 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the report be noted.

MvB/JH

(2) That the half-day member development session on scrutiny be held on Friday morning, 7 October.

(3) That the topics for discussion with Committee Chairs on 14 September and Member Development on 7 October be agreed.

The meeting concluded at 7.45pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

2005