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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 November 2007 – 6.30 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor Williamson (in the Chair); Councillors Burroughs, M Coleman, Collins, Cook, Easter, Field, Reynolds, D Thompson and Wainwright.

Councillor B Walker attended as a sub for Councillor C Walker.

Mr S Duncan (Head of Financial Services) Mr D Frowde (Technical Director of Community Housing), Mr R Hodds (Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer), Colin Rowland (Executive Officer- Central Services) and Miss K Edmonds (Senior Member Services Officer).

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2007 were confirmed.

2. TOWN HALL REPAIR

The Committee considered the Community Housing Technical Director's report detailing the overall condition of the Town Hall, the works that have been carried out and the work still required.

It was reported that the Town Hall was 125 years old and had been built on fill. By 1886 the settlement of the building was so bad that screw piles were installed under the western section of the building to stabilize it. This movement has decelerated with time and in recent years only relatively minor movement has been recorded. There is now no need to underpin the east side of the building. If this had been necessary, it would have been very disruptive and would have meant road closures and staff being relocated while work was carried out.

In recent years major refurbishment works have been carried out on the northern and western elevations, and an effective lightning protection system has been installed. Next week work on the re-roofing of the Town Hall and the repair of brickwork, stonework and windows will start. Water ingress has resulted in a serious problem with dry rot in the drawing office on the second floor. It is likely that more dry rot would be found when the roof was removed.

As the Town Hall is Grade 2* listed, listed building consent had been applied for. A road closure would be in place between the Town Hall and Trafalgar Road so that the contractors could work from the area.

Once the Town Hall roof has been replaced, other areas within the building, such as the Minstrels Gallery and the redecoration of the Assembly Room, can be tackled.

Members discussed the need to carry out regular inspections after the work is completed and also asked where the funding would be coming from in order to pay for the repairs. The cost of the works was estimated to be approximately £1.4m, and the funding for these works had been agreed by Council.

The Chairman referred to the Integrated Service Centre (ISC) and asked if there were any additional or alternative usages for the Town Hall building. The Technical Director stated that a limited number of people were able to use the Assembly Room due to Fire Evacuation constraints. However, he was aware that the local Registrars Office had shown an interest in coming to the Town Hall. It was reported that a meeting would be held on 30 November to discuss the future of the ISC.

Members discussed delaying a review on possible uses for the Town Hall pending a decision on Local Government re-organisation as this could have an impact on any recommendations agreed.

A Member asked if the Council had an agreement in place with the contractor with regards to the scrap value of the existing lead work that would be removed from the roof. The Technical Director confirmed that an appropriate allowance would be made in payments to the contractor.

RESOLVED:

That the Chairman and the Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer be asked to monitor the progress of a decision on local government reorganization with a view to the presentation of a report on alternative uses for the Town Hall at a future meeting.

3. SPORT AND LEISURE TRUST ACCOUNTS

Members agreed that the Great Yarmouth Sport and Leisure Trust item be deferred to a future meeting of the Committee when an officer or a Member of the Trust can attend and detail the accounts.

4. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Executive Officer asked Members to consider the coloured copy of the Performance Indicators and he detailed the ones which were performing below target as follows:-

BV8 – It was reported that this performance was below target as the Invoice Section had experienced problems at the start of the financial year, due to the change-over to the new financial management system and staff were familiarising themselves with the system. It was noted that a 100% achievement of this performance indicator was not realistic, as no Council in England had achieved it.

BV9 – It was reported that the Council was moving towards the top quartile in the country.

BV12 – Members discussed the number of working days lost due to sickness and agreed that there was a need to investigate the reasons why sickness was so high.

The Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer reported that the Executive Board had discussed action being taken to reduce sickness levels, and that these could be reported to the Scrutiny Committee.

BV78A – Members discussed the average time for processing new claims which was now down to 31 days due to work carried out with Kendric Ash which meant the Council was striving to be in the top quartile in the country.

BV78B – The average time for processing notifications of changes of circumstances had been reduced from 36 days to 16 days.

BV79B – The amount of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered as a percentage of all overpayments. Members asked how efficient the Council was at this and who covered the cost of overpayment. It was reported that if this was a Council employee error then the Council would have to cover the cost of the overpayment.

BV109B – The percentage of planning applications determined 65% on minor applications in eight weeks. It was reported that this indicator was below target, mainly due to staff vacancies in the Planning Department. Members discussed the recruitment difficulties within this department stating that these needed to be addressed.

BV199C – It was reported that fly-posting was now being reported by residents as well as officers in the DLEQ surveys. It was noted that the public's experience of undertaking these surveys was not as great as officers.

RESOLVED:

(i) That the HR Service Manager report on sickness levels that was submitted to Corporate Management Group (CMG) and Executive Board (EB) be referred to Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

(ii) That the Head of Planning and Development be requested to provide a report detailing what recruitment measures they have within their department.

5. FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Head of Financial Services reported that all Service Unit Managers had now been given the responsibility for monitoring their own budgets. It was reported that this was the first time that budgets were being monitored closely.

There was currently a £1.6m under spend, and it was hoped that by next year the variances would be approximately £5,000 and that these would be identified regularly. £200,000 savings had been identified.

Members asked for clarification on the £686,000 under spend in the Regeneration and Environment Department, and it was reported that this was due to major grants being awarded and that by the end of the year this would have levelled out. It was stated that if this department did have an under spend at the end of the financial year, this would be placed into the general pot.

Members were informed that the recent flooding threat in the Borough would result in an additional cost to the Council of approximately £25,000 - £50,000, although it was noted that funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government had been applied for.

RESOLVED:

That an update on Financial Monitoring be provided in February 2008.

6. FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan for the period of 1 November 2007 to 29 February 2008 was noted and it was agreed that the Shoreline Management Plan would need to be added to the Forward Plan.

7. SCRUTINY CONFERENCE

The Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer reported on the Scrutiny Conference on Friday, 16 November 2007 held at Norwich UEA Sport Park. The conference was chaired by Shaun Lowthorpe from the EDP and speakers included Richard Grice (IDeA), Gareth Wall (CfPS) and Chris Coath (NCC). The Scrutiny workshops included:

- The four principles of Scrutiny
- Developing a Scrutiny Work Programme and scoping of scrutiny projects
- Scrutinising Partnerships
- Scrutiny of Performance.

New powers to be introduced by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 relating to the "Councillors Call for Action" where any Member can refer an item to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration. Delegated decision making in wards can be given to Ward Councillors if adopted by the Local Authority and accountability for decisions made will be given to the Ward Councillor which can then be called in by the Scrutiny Committee.

The Members of the Committee who attended the conference were asked for their comments and the following points were raised:

- The presentation by Richard Grice from the IDeA detailed the Improvement Agenda.
- The presentation by Gareth Wall from CfPS referred to the implications of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 which was delivered in a form that was clear to elected Members.
- Scrutiny would be able to identify priorities.
- The relevance of Scrutiny in light of the Local Government Re-arrangement issue.
- There is a need to ensure that the Committee recommendations are actually implemented.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, 15 January 2008 at 6.30 pm.

9. **CLOSURE OF MEETING**

The meeting ended at 7.45 pm.