

BUSINESS EFFICIENCY BOARD

At a meeting of the Business Efficiency Board held on Wednesday, 7 January 2009 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Leadbetter (Chairman), Lloyd Jones (Vice-Chairman), D. Inch, Jones, A. Lowe, Murray, Norddahl, Philbin and Worrall

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Osborne and Swift

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: I. Leivesley, M. Murphy and L. Cairns

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

BEB14 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th November 2008, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

BEB15 LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding the Council's draft Local Code of Corporate Governance.

It was noted that CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) and SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) had published an updated governance framework for local authorities entitled "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government". The draft Local Code of Corporate Governance attached to the report had been developed in response to that publication.

Good governance was defined as "the way in which an organisation ensured that it was doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner". Whilst adoption of a

local code of corporate governance was not a statutory requirement, it was considered to represent best practice. The purpose of the Code was to provide a public statement showing how the Council complied with the principles of good governance.

The Council's governance arrangements had been assessed against the principles set out in the Framework document by the Corporate Governance Group whose membership was outlined within the report for the Board's information. The review had informed the production of the draft Local Code of Corporate Governance.

Members were advised that the Standards Committee had also considered this report, looking at areas related to its remit, and were happy with the content.

In considering the draft Code, the following points were discussed/noted:

- further clarification was requested in relation to the constitution of the Older Persons' Engagement Network;
- the Financial Services Department was congratulated on its actions in relation to avoiding potential difficulties, for example the Council had not been affected by the Icelandic Banks incident;
- the Internal Audit Section undertook the external assessment role in relation to the Financial Management Standard in schools for the schools that were under the Local Authority's control. Schools not within the Council's control would have to make their own arrangements in terms of arranging an external assessment; and
- the Executive Board had set up a small group to look at the impact of the current financial situation on the Council, examining issues such as the collection of Council Tax. It was noted that a fine balance had to be struck between collecting outstanding debts and assisting those in need of benefits and welfare.

RESOLVED: That the Council be recommended to agree that the draft Local Code of Corporate Governance be adopted and included in the Council's Constitution.

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy providing an update on matters relating to the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

It was noted that the CAA looked at how well local services were working together to improve the quality of life for local people and would make independent information available to people about their local services, helping them to make informed choices and influenced decisions. CAA was to be introduced in April 2009 with first reports to be published in November 2009. It was advised that there were a number of trials taking place across the country at present.

Whilst the final CAA assessment framework was still being worked on by the Audit Commission, matters were starting to become clearer around how results would be presented and, therefore, some of the potential implications for the Borough, the Council and its partners. The Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy gave a presentation providing an update on the areas that would be assessed, the timetable for production and consultation on the CAA, and how the final version would be communicated to the general public on line. Members noted the tight timescale involved from initial production to publication.

Having viewed a prototype of a CAA Assessment currently available on the Audit Commission’s website, the Board noted possible implications and perceptions in terms of the communication of issues beyond the Authority’s control. Members also expressed their concern about the potential short-term view that could result from this method of measurement, which would not necessarily fit with the need for long-term stability. In addition, clarification was sought on the consequences of receiving a “red flag” for a service area.

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy

The Board was advised that final guidance in respect of the CAA was expected in time for the next meeting and a report would be provided at that time outlining any further significant changes. Members requested that a seminar be held before November regarding the implications of CAA.

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

BEB17 EFFICIENCY REPORT

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy providing an update on matters relating to the development and implementation of

the Council's Efficiency Programme.

It was noted that preparatory work had been taking place to ensure that delivery of the programme commenced in the New Year. This was important to ensure that initial savings for the programme were realised in 2009/10 and that substantial savings were realised in 2010/11 and beyond.

The Executive Board had requested that regular progress reports be made to the Business Efficiency Board and it was advised that, by the next meeting, all working papers and programme documents would be available and would be submitted for consideration.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and regular update reports be brought to this Board.

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy

Meeting ended at 7.40 p.m.