

CHANGE BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting held on 26th February, 2002.

Present: Councillor H.J.W. James (Chairman); Councillors G.J.M. Fletcher, C.P. Franks, G.C. Kemp, N. Moore and A.J. Williams.

(a) Minutes -

AGREED - T H A T the minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 30th January, 2002 be accepted.

(b) Management and Staff Development (CE) -

The report sought to promote debate on the style of Management Development and Staff Development programmes that were appropriate for the Council, against a background of the I&DeA diagnostic and other external reports and the Best Value programme. The report drew on academic research and best practice in the following areas:

- creating the learning culture;
- identifying the development needs;
- the role of Investors in People;
- setting out the Council's "Aspirations" for the Future.

The report set out the following "Aspirations" for the Future:

- The Council will strive to be a Learning Organisation;
- The Learning process will be championed by the Chief Executive and the Cabinet Member for Human Resources and Equalities;
- Development needs will be progressively addressed at all levels of the organisation;
- The Development initiatives will be conducted openly in order for genuine learning to take place;
- The Council believes that staff development comes first and then other benefits will flow from it;
- Senior management development will commence through a 'Development Centre' approach;
- A programme of personal development plans will cascade down the organisation linking the training needs of individuals to service objectives;
- Employees and their representatives will be involved in developing the learning culture;
- The Council will set out on the path of becoming an 'Investor in People';

- We will dream the possible - and achieve it.

AGREED -

- (1) T H A T the report be accepted, including the “Aspirations” set out above.
- (2) T H A T development programmes for elected members be progressed as a priority, having regard to the changing role of members as a result of the modernisation agenda.
- (3) T H A T the Head of Human Resources undertake an audit of the existing training and development provided by the Council, including budgets.
- (4) T H A T the Chief Executive report on taking forward the principles of Investors in People within the Council.
- (5) T H A T the appointment of a Training and Development Officer, already agreed in principle by the Council, be expedited.

Reason for Recommendations

(1)-(5) To start the process of development and training for members and employees at all levels within the Change agenda.

(c) Local and Regional Government Research Unit Discussion Paper: A Comparison of Local Authority Performance in England and Wales (CE) -

The report set out recent research comparing performance in England and Wales. While local authority performance in Wales was widely perceived as inferior to that in England, the study had found that there were few significant differences between English and Welsh Councils. Adverse opinions were often based on differences in management processes and methods of delivery, rather than on achievements. This judgement had adverse effects on inspection and audits throughout Wales, especially when inspection and audit personnel were recruited primarily from England.

AGREED - T H A T the report be noted, and that the implications of the negative perceptions be borne in mind when considering audit and inspection reports.

Reason for recommendation

Negative perceptions of local authorities in Wales have implications for audit, inspection and peer review teams that consist primarily of personnel from outside Wales.

(d) Employee Consultation Activities 2001 - 2002 (CE) -

The Council had adopted a Corporate Consultation Strategy in October 2000 in order to ensure a consistent standard of consultation across all service or issue areas. The report set out consultation with employees during the past year including focus groups, questionnaires, meetings, and external consultancy research. In response to the I&DeA Diagnostic the Trade Unions had requested to meet with and participate in the Change Board.

AGREED -

- (1) T H A T the consultation activities undertaken be noted.
- (2) T H A T up to four representatives from the Trade Unions be invited to attend meetings of the Change Board as and when necessary.
- (3) T H A T the Chief Executive submit a further report on developing the consultation process, to include Union consultation.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) In order to be aware of the scope and breadth of consultation activity taking place.
- (2) To give due consideration to Trade Union contribution to change.
- (3) An effective consultation procedure is a requirement for a continually improving Council.

(e) Correspondence with I&DeA (CE) -

The Draft Action Plan arising from the performance review undertaken by I&DeA had been presented to the Policy Committee on 20th December, 2001. Two subsequent versions of the Action Plan had been submitted by I&DeA. Arrangements had been made for representatives of I&DeA to attend the Change Board on 12th March, 2002, and a letter had been received from Mr. Ted Cattle of I&DeA, dated 11th February, 2002, dealing with a number of issues including a proposal for an "Improvement Partnership Board" to provide support and monitor progress. I&DeA had also proposed the appointment of a "Change Manager" at Director level.

Following extensive discussion it was

AGREED -

- (1) T H A T the proposal from I&DeA for an “Improvement Partnership Board” be not accepted.
- (2) T H A T a “Change Manager”, reporting to the Chief Executive, be appointed at Head of Service level, and that the Chief Executive submit an urgent report to the Policy Committee on 28th February, 2002 setting out terms of employment including salary commensurate with attracting a high calibre candidate, and that this post be permanent.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) The proposal is unnecessary and would compromise the democratic process of the Council.
- (2) To expedite an approach to this important position.

(f) Corporate Governance: Correspondence with the Audit Commission (CE) -

The report set out progress on relationships with the Audit Commission. Following a meeting, the Commission had agreed to postpone consideration of a Corporate Governance inspection until the end of 2002, in order to give the Council an opportunity to focus on the implementation of the Action Plans for Social Services and Education. The Council would be a pilot in Wales to develop a “Regulatory Plan” which would outline the key areas for improvements jointly agreed with the Council and all inspectorates. Preliminary discussions had taken place with the District Audit on the Regulatory Plan.

As an input to these discussions the Board needed to identify key priorities to improve services for 2002.

During a discussion the Board confirmed the following key priorities to improve services for 2002:

- Children’s Services (number one priority).
- Implementing the Post Estyn Inspection Action Plan.
- Preparation of the Community Strategy.
- Preparation of a Corporate Plan with improved alignment to Service Performance Plan, other statutory plans, and the annual budget.
- Development of Performance Management.
- Member and Staff development.
- Staff Appraisal commencing with Chief Officers.
- Communications.

AGREED -

- (1) T H A T the proposal put forward by the Audit Commission be welcomed.
- (2) T H A T the key priorities to improve services as set out above be approved, and that the Chief Executive be authorised to apprise the District Auditor of these priorities.

Reasons for recommendations

(1)&(2) The Regulatory Plan is a key element of the revised Best Value process (now called the Wales Programme for Improvement). It will be key to the Council's striving for continuous improvement and will assist in improving and developing relationships with the regulatory agencies.

(g) Corporate Governance: Progressing the Draft Action Plan (CE) -

The report set out proposals to progress the implementation of the Action Plan "Lifting the Vale" arising from the I&DeA review of Corporate Governance.

A Draft Action Plan had been endorsed by the Policy Committee on 20th December, 2001. The Change Board had subsequently expressed concern regarding the amount of consultancy work that was being undertaken, how it was packaged and exposed to competition. Any further external consultancy support would need to be referred to the Change Board for approval.

The Draft Action Plan addressing the issues highlighted in the I&DeA report identified numerous pieces of work that would need to be undertaken during the next three years. It highlighted a range of external support that was proposed by I&DeA to assist the Council to improve. I&DeA acknowledged that they were not able to provide the full range of support themselves and support work was often placed with external consultants already known to them to complete.

Appendix 1 outlined the recommendations and actions in the Draft Action Plan and set out ten "packages" that could be drawn up in specifications and considered for tendering. A specification for performance management, outlining the support required had been attached at Appendix 2.

The full costs of the I&DeA performance support was likely to be in excess of £500,000. The costs of managing the work in the way suggested in the report was likely to be a more economical option, while ensuring that the appropriate specialists were brought in to undertake the work. The proposal would also meet the requirements of Financial Regulations and Standing Orders.

AGREED -

- (1) T H A T the packages of work contained in Appendix 1 be approved and the proposed way forward for implementing the Action Plan agreed.
- (2) T H A T detailed specifications for each theme be developed.
- (3) T H A T the relative priorities for the Action Plan be considered.
- (4) T H A T the Chief Executive continue to hold discussions with the District Auditor on the basis of the above recommendations.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) The Action Plan needs to be progressed in a timely manner.
- (2) Detailed specifications will be needed to progress the work.
- (3) The full Action Plan would require several years to be completed, and not all actions will be able to be commenced immediately.
- (4) To maintain progress in this matter.