

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel
MEETING DATE:	12 th March 2012
TITLE:	The Council's Use of Consultants: Councillor Working Group Report
WARD:	ALL
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM	
List of attachments to this report:	
1. Working Group's Report	

THE ISSUE

In August 2011, the Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel agreed to setup a small working group to investigate how the Council uses consultants by undertaking a series of interview case studies and desk research. This report is a summary of their research, findings and recommendations to be agreed by the Panel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel is asked to consider the report and make any further comments on the findings and recommendations.

Specifically, the Panel is asked to consider adding the following items to their workplan:

1. To strengthen transparency and accountability the working group recommend that the individual Service Action Plans which are presented to the Resources Panel for scrutiny as part of the budget process in January of each year, should detail the existing and proposed service needs for consultants within the workforce planning section of these plans.
2. The working group recommend that the Panel adds a report on the results from the latest staff satisfaction survey and how this compares to the previous years to their list of potential future items on their workplan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs associated with this investigation were met from within the annual budget available to the Panel

THE REPORT

The working group held an initial meeting in September 2011 to define the aims and objectives of the research and to identify potential case studies and questions. This was followed up by meeting the Divisional Director of Finance to finalise the interview questions.

The three case study interviews were conducted over September and November 2011. The working group also met with the Head of Audit, Risk and Assurance and the Corporate Procurement Manager to discuss the Council's Procurement toolkit.

The working group discovered the following:

- The Council has a comprehensive procurement toolkit that includes a section on engaging the use of consultants. This toolkit supports the Council's Contract Standing Orders which are in the process of being reviewed.
- The case studies revealed four potential reasons for using a consultant that complied with those set out in the procurement toolkit. Either to assist with managing capacity on a short-term basis, to provide specialisms that were not available in-house, to offer greater flexibility within a workforce to manage peaks and troughs of workflow and to demonstrate independence.
- The report also highlighted a number of good practice examples.

RISK MANAGEMENT

A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

EQUALITIES

Equalities issues are considered by the panel as part of their work in formulating their recommendations at the end of this review process

CONSULTATION

Overview & Scrutiny Panel; Staff; Other B&NES Services; Section 151 Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer

The working group consulted with the Divisional Director of Finance whilst scoping their investigation. The group then conducted interviews with three Divisional Directors. The draft report was written with input from the Strategic Director of Resources, Divisional Director of Finance/Section 151 Officer and Head of Audit, Risk and Assurance.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

Customer Focus; Human Resources; Corporate; Impact on Staff;

ADVICE SOUGHT

The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

Contact person	<i>Lauren Rushen- Policy Development and Scrutiny Officer 01225 396410</i> <i>Councillor John Bull- Chair of Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel</i>
Background papers	<i>National Audit Office Report: Central Government's Use of Consultants and Interims</i>
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	