Task & Finish Group from the Major Projects External Bodies Panel

Project Board Investigation

Introduction

As part of the standard project management process, all projects under the management of Development & Major Projects have Project Boards.

Having now been functioning for 18 months there have been some questions raised as to the Project Boards' role and operation processes within the major project management system. Although the instigation of Project Boards has resulted in a greater distinction between the client and the project, issues still exist over how decisions or recommendations are progressed from the Project Board. Councillors and officers alike have questioned their effectiveness and whether there is a consistent approach being taken across each of the boards. Concerns have also been expressed as to the wider engagement with these Project Boards from services outside the Development & Major Projects directorate.

A small task group from the Major Projects External Bodies Overview & Scrutiny Panel have undertaken to review the operation of the project boards, with the view making recommendations for improvements to their role and operation.

Background

Development & Major Projects Directorate operate the following project Boards.
  • The Spa Project Board
  • Combe Down Stone Mines Project Board
  • Bath Western Riverside Project Board
  • Schools Project Board
  • Residential Homes Project Board
  • South Quays Project Board

The Project Boards are constituted to include the following representatives:
  • Executive Member (relevant portfolio)
  • 1 Other Member (from a different political group to the Executive member)
  • Project Sponsor (normally a Director)
  • Legal officer
  • S 151 (Finance) officer

Boards meet monthly to:
  • Receive comprehensive update reports from the Project Leader
  • Monitor and review project progress in relation to time, cost and quality
  • Make recommendations for any decisions and action required to meet the project objectives

There is also a body called the Project Programme Board (PPB) whose role it is to provide strategic monitoring and control of the projects and a higher level of governance. Project Boards may refer significant issues up to the PPB for consideration and the PPB may choose to focus on one project at their meetings. The membership of the Project Programme Board consists of
  • The Chief Executive
  • Resources Director

- Executive Member for Major Projects
- Executive Member for Resources
- The relevant project leader/project sponsor as requested

In the weeks running up to the Project Board meetings each project manager produces a monthly update report that is interrogated by the director of Development & Major Projects. The information within this report is then frozen for that month and this report is fed into the project boards and ultimately the Project Programme Board. Each month a summary version of this information also goes to the Director's Group, an Informal Executive and bi-monthly to the Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

For a comprehensive overview of the Project Boards' monthly reporting cycle see the diagram at the end of this Terms of Reference.

Review Objective

- To assess whether the Council's Project Boards are achieving the objectives set out in their conception.
- To recommend ways in which the Project Boards can function more effectively

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Scope

System Overview

The Panel will take an overview of the project management reporting system with particular focus on
- The reporting sequence of the boards and the problem of time-lag
- Attendance rate of the boards including implication of no shows and level of substitution

Case Studies

The Councillors will use the **Schools Project Board** and the **Combe Down Stone Mines (CDSM) Project Board** as case studies for their investigation. They will review these against the three generic objectives of the boards which are:

Project Board Objective	Panel's suggested line of enquiry
(a) To receive comprehensive update reports from the Project Leader	• Compare the Project Manager's report with the reports that go to the other five boards.
(b) To monitor and review project progress in relation to time, cost and quality	• Enquire as to how the boards approach project gateways and assess if the system is flexible enough to respond to crucial project milestones. • In relation to the Schools Project Board the task group will also look at the issues associated with reporting on several projects that come within a master project.
(c) To make recommendations for any decisions and action required to meet the project objectives	• The decision making structure and escalation/delegation route • The choice of delegating a decision to a senior officer or an Executive Councillor and the accountability in this.

	• Assess awareness to decision making protocols • Track the board's recommendations – what has happened to these and what level of authority do they carry?

Excluded from Investigation

The Panel will not consider the operation of the other boards that are functioning with the Development & Major Project Directorate. These include the Project Programme Board, the Development Boards and the long term strategy group. The panel's recommendations, however, may also be relevant to improving the operation of these bodies.

Approach

This investigation is being undertaken by a small task & finish group who will report their findings and recommendations back to the Major Projects Panel for endorsement, before being sent to the Executive Member for Major Projects.

To achieve their scope the panel members will observe the project boards in action and hold interviews with board participants. Their program of activity is set out below.

Date	Activity	Who
By end of Feb (by April)	Background reading to include: • Council minutes of the meeting when project boards initially discussed. • Short explanatory introduction to the background of project boards • List of All project boards / membership and dates of meetings, including previous 3 meetings • The Terms of Reference of the project boards chosen as case studies and the minutes from their 2 previous meetings and a meeting 6 months ago. • Responses so far to internal questionnaire on efficiency of board meetings	AB DL/CW DL/CW CW CW
Before board meeting	Councillors check progress on action points in previous minutes	CG/NR
22nd March	Councillors attend Schools Project Board	CG/NR
30th March	Councillors attend CDSM Project Board	CG/NR
6th/7th April (TBC)	Steering group meeting	All
11th April (TBC)	Half day private meeting – Councillors interview those involved in project board – members and officers.	All
Mid April	Councillors make recommendations based on findings and report written	CG/NR/AB
23rd May	MPEB PANEL MEETING (Lead-in Date 12th May)	

Project Team

Cllr Charles Gerrish – Chairman of the Major Projects External Bodies Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Cllr Nigel Roberts – Panel member
David Langman – Major Projects Team Manager
Claire Wiley – Major Projects Reporting Systems Co-ordinator
Anna Burgess – Overview & Scrutiny Project officer