SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TASK GROUP REPORT NO. 6

WAY TO WORK

JULY 2000
Way to Work Scrutiny Task Group

1. The Brief

“To review the service provided by Way to Work”.

2. General Introduction

At its meeting on 13 December 1999, Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider the operation of Way to Work, a part of the Council, which offers employment and training opportunities for young people. The normal route for items to come to Scrutiny Committee is through Member or officer suggestions, this item was different; a parent of a young person placed by Way to Work asked for it to go on the agenda, as there were issues he felt unhappy with. The parent then came to the Committee and spoke in favour of this service being reviewed. There had also been a recent report by the Training Standards Council, which highlighted points that needed to be addressed and drew attention to the fact that ultimate responsibility for the service rested with the elected Members (extract attached at Appendix).

Scrutiny Committee was particularly concerned that high numbers of trainee administrators were leaving without achieving a qualification. Committee agreed to set up a Task Group comprising Councillors Mackenzie (Chair), Lee, Stanier, Style and Butler. Unfortunately Cllr Butler was unable to attend the meetings as these were held during the day. Lorna Gill, from Personnel and Business Planning assisted the Task Group.

3. Methodology

The Task Group met on 9 occasions and interviewed 10 witnesses (listed alphabetically):

Sonia Asaa (WTW Trainee - Revenues and Benefits)
Mary Castledine (Recruitment Co-ordinator)
Mark Cox (WTW trainee - IT)
Sailesh Devani (West London Careers)
Dillwyn Rosser (Manager of WTW)
Keith Sangster (Parent of WTW trainee)
Andrew Scully (Personnel manager)
Ravinder Sidhu (WTW trainee - Revenues and Benefits)
Rosie Staves (WTW trainee - Personnel)
Lindsay Thomas (Schools careers - Orleans Park).
Members of the Task Group also made the following visits:

Capital Property Care - building maintenance
Currie Motors - Car sales and maintenance
Noah’s Ark - nursery.

In addition, Cllr Stanier talked with Working Mums nursery over the telephone.

4. Findings

4.1 Way to Work is a business unit of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, formerly situated in the Corporate Services Department of the Council but now reporting to the Education Department. It organises training for approximately 130 young people through contracts with two Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs): West London TEC and Northwest London TEC. Its main areas of business are in childcare and business administration, although small numbers have been trained in horticulture, warehousing and care of the elderly. Way to Work does not itself provide training but subcontracts this to other agencies.

4.2 Way to Work matches young people who do not wish to continue in formal education with companies who are prepared to employ young people and allow them to train on the job. Most of the trainees will be working towards level two or level three of an NVQ. External assessors visit the trainees every three weeks to check that the work they are being given is of a sufficient standard for them to achieve their qualification and to assess what further training they may require. The report from the Training Standards Council referred to above highlighted weaknesses in the Business Administration side and this was the area that the Task Group concentrated on, although some Members did make contact with nurseries who trained young people in childcare.

4.3 The Task Group found that although costs were difficult to identify, Way to Work provided good value for money and had helped significant numbers of young people who might otherwise never have obtained qualifications. They pay rental for their accommodation in Regal House and also have Service Level Agreements for some other council services such as post. The costs that were difficult to identify were Legal, pay roll, personnel etc, although best estimates were in the region of £10,000 per year. When these costs were considered in line with council strategies, in particular, opportunities for all, working together and lifelong learning, they were found to be acceptable. Income for Way to Work comes from the TECs and the employers who pay a recruitment fee to Way to Work. Although it is not an expensive service for the Council to run, it was felt that it would
have trouble if it was floated off and had to become a stand-alone business.

4.4 It was clear from our interviews with secondary schools and the Careers Service that the role of the Way to Work recruitment co-ordinator was particularly highly valued. Mary Castledine gives general careers guidance talks to year ten and eleven pupils highlighting all the options that are available to the students. However many of the young people come to Way to Work after a spell at the tertiary college, when they find they would prefer to learn in a different way. It was acknowledged that many of these young people may feel vulnerable and possibly let down by the education system, so it was important they got the best possible chance with Way to Work. It was also acknowledged that Way to Work helps many young people who have become disenfranchised, although its style may suit some young people more than others. We understand that no one in the Way to Work office has career guidance qualifications, although two members of staff in the Way to Work office have worked within the careers service.

4.5 The Task Group was surprised to find that the young people who are recruited by Way to Work come not only from this borough or our neighbouring boroughs but also from a very large catchment area, some coming from as far away as Clapham or Battersea. Way to Work vacancies are posted through the careers network and are therefore available over a wide area. Employers are also not confined to this borough. Members of the Task Group spent a long time discussing the rights and wrongs of the Borough running a service where so many of the trainees and employers were from outside our borders.

4.6 It appeared to the Task Group that, while providing a valuable service, for a business unit Way to Work was not as accountable to the Council as we would have expected. Some of their literature contains the LB Richmond upon Thames logo but some does not. Some adverts are in the Council colours, some are not. The Task Group was particularly worried by an advertisement, which went out recently on the back of local buses. This was in the Council livery but with no logo and was felt to send out the wrong message to employers unless they read the small print very carefully. The Training Standards Council report highlighted equal opportunities as an area for concern. Corporately we take this very seriously and it was felt that Way to Work is working towards addressing this. It was also felt that the recording of complaints was not done systematically. Again this is an area which concerns all of us.
4.7 LBRuT is a large employer of Way to Work trainees and the Task Group interviewed a number of these young people. These interviews were in no way statistically valid and only gave us a flavour of their experiences (Way to Work had conducted its own survey last year and the Task Group had access to these documents). What emerged from our interviews was a confused picture. Some trainees had a very good feeling about Way to Work. They were happy with the recruitment procedure, felt the job they were in gave them a good range of tasks to help achieve their NVQ and they were treated as part of the team. Others were less content. The work they were allocated was not up to the standard or the variety they required. They felt isolated, one girl being asked after six months in the department who she was! But most of all they felt that no one was listening when they voiced their concerns.

4.8 Although we accept that this may not be the case, the Task Group had the impression that employers were sometimes seen as more important to Way to Work than its trainees. We understand how important it is to keep employers on board so that there are placements for trainees but the needs of these young people should be paramount.

4.9 As stated previously, the number of trainees and employers who come from outside the Borough surprises us. Way to Work works very independently and it is not clear whether its activities are sufficiently managed by the Education Department, where it now lies. We wondered if the time was not right for Way to Work to become an independent organisation, either joining with other training providers or basing itself alongside the Tertiary College or the Adult Education College.

5. Conclusions

Way to Work is a valuable business unit within the Council, which provides jobs and training for many vulnerable young people. It plays a key part in delivering the Council’s strategy. It enjoys a large measure of independence from Council control. It is cost effective, gaining much of its funding from outside the Council. Its work is not co-terminus with the Council’s borders. The Council is one of the largest employers of Way to Work trainees.

6. Recommendations

6.1 More corporate control is exercised over the Way to Work business unit, by its line management, who should be a senior member of staff in the Education Department.

6.2 Way to Work staff should obtain qualifications in careers guidance.
6.3 Taking account of the views expressed above (particularly in paragraphs 4.3 and 4.9), the Education Department should consider the status of Way to Work.

6.4 A senior member of the Personnel department should take responsibility for Way to Work trainees employed by LBRuT. They should have a regular forum where they can meet and discuss their experiences.

6.5 Way to Work should use the Council complaints procedure for recording and dealing with all complaints.

6.6 Accurate costings for Way to Work should be reported each year to the Education Committee.