

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY
PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2006
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 9.31 PM

Members Present: J M Whitehouse (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby, R Church, R D'Souza, P House, D Jacobs and R Morgan

Other members present: J Knapman and Mrs M Sartin

Apologies for Absence: M Colling

Officers Present T Tidey (Head of Human Resources and Performance Management), S Tautz (Performance Improvement Manager), J Gilbert (Head of Environmental Services), A Hall (Head of Housing Services), D Macnab (Head of Leisure Services), P Maddock (Assistant Head of Finance), J Preston (Head of Planning and Economic Development), A Scott (Head of Information, Communications and Technology), C O'Boyle (Head of Legal, Administration and Estates), C Overend (Policy & Research Officer), Mrs J Tautz (Senior Local Land Charges Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and B Bassington (Senior Auditor)

Also in attendance:

11. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

No Substitute members were reported.

12. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made.

13. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING - 15 AUGUST 2006

The notes of the previous meeting were agreed.

14. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The current work programme was noted.

15. QUARTERLY KPI MONITORING REPORT - 2ND QUARTER.

The Panel noted that this was the second quarter when the new performance monitoring system had been used to provide information on KPI's.

On the specific KPI's the following questions were asked:

KPI 082a (i) Household Waste Management (recycling): it was noted that there were no accurate figures available for the first quarter because for the first six weeks

the Council was with the old supplier and the next six weeks the Council was with the new supplier. The figures given are based on Essex County Council figures. It was noted that in the district as a whole, recycling is running at the mid 30% mark, in the alternative collection areas it is running at just over 40%.

KPI 084a Household Waste Collection (kilograms per head): Noted that the actual figure for Q1/06/7 should read 110 and not 38.01.

KPI 091a – Kerbside Collection of Recyclables (one recyclable): Noted that there was a drop in household recycling. Now that about 90% of properties have wheeled bins the Council will next be looking at recycling from flats etc. to increase the percentage.

KPI 199a – Local Street and Environmental Cleanliness – Litter & Detritus: Noted that the actual figure for Q1/06/7 should be 6%.

KPI 199b - Local Street & Environmental Cleanliness – Graffiti: Noted that the target is 10% and we continue to achieve 0%. This means that the council has not seen any graffiti in the areas identified. The target of 10% will have to be reviewed.

KPI CEM1c - The number of Penalty Charge Notices issued during the year that were subject to an informal challenge: Noted that the figures should read as percentages.

KPI CEM1f – The percentage of challenges allowed against the issue of a Penalty Charge Notice during the year: To put some comparative figures against this chart.

KPI CEM1g - The percentage of Penalty Charge Notices issued during the year where collection was obtained: To put some comparative figures against this chart.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services commented that he would like to see the KPI figures before they come to this Panel so that he could add his comments. He would also like to see more use made of the 'comments' and the 'corrective action' section. Also, perhaps the Panel should only see the KPIs that were going wrong. The Head of Human Resources and Performance Management replied that all KPIs are subject to an improvement plan and are monitored by Management Board.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council's performance for the first six months of 2006/07, in relation to those Key Performance Indicators adopted by the Cabinet that are monitored on a quarterly basis be noted;
2. That, in future, performance in relation to Best Value Performance Indicators BV63 (energy efficiency of council dwellings) and BV184 (decent homes) be monitored by the Scrutiny Panel at year-end only; and
3. That, subject to the concurrence of the Cabinet, Best Value Performance Indicator BV164 (race equality in housing) be discontinued as a Key Performance Indicator from 2007/08.

16. COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT - IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Councillor Jacobs noted that the affordable housing numbers were lower than the target; the Head of Housing Services said that this was due to a lack of land availability, however there were a number there were a number of potential affordable housing schemes in the pipeline. The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services commented that the District is very near to being a “negative affordable homes authority” (i.e. that the number of new affordable homes built was less than the number sold under the right to buy).

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the concurrence of the Cabinet:

- (a) Those actions contained within the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Improvement Plan that have been achieved, be formally signed-off as having been completed;
- (b) That those outstanding service related actions within the CPA Improvement Plan be transferred to the Best Value Performance Plan, the relevant Business Plan, or identified for action by the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s) for completion; and
- (c) That, with effect from January 2007, progress towards the achievement of those outstanding corporate actions within the CPA Improvement Plan be monitored on a quarterly basis by this Scrutiny Panel.

17. ESSEX LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

The Head of Human Resources and Performance Management introduced the report on the Essex Local Area Agreement. The meeting noted that the Council is not required to subscribe to all the priorities listed, but have agreed to the following:

Priority 3 – Ensure development is designed to promote healthier living in the built environment;

Priority 8 – Keep vulnerable children and young people safe;

Priority 10 – Reduce crime, the harm caused by illegal drugs and to reassure the public reducing the fear of crime;

Priority 11 – Build respect in communities and reduce anti-social behaviour; and

Priority 12 – Actively manage our environment.

Under target 2 in Priority 3 the Panel were unsure what a Lifetime home was, the Head of Planning and Economic Development explained that it was a house that could be lived in from the cradle to the grave. As the Council is already achieving 3%, it may need to raise its target.

Councillor Jacobs queried the recycling target for March 2008, he thought that the previous Panel agreed a 40% target instead of 36%.

It may be that some targets and actions need to be more precisely defined and more tangible targets need to be devised.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel:

(a) Considered and agreed the proposed actions and targets within the priority areas of the Essex Local Area Agreement adopted by the council, subject to some targets and actions being more closely defined; and

(b) Agreed the appropriate performance management arrangements for monitoring the achievement of targets within the priority areas of the Local Area Agreement.

18. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Assistant Head of Finance introduced the second quarterly report for 2006/07, covering the period from 1 April to 30 September 2006. The Panel noted that overspends were shown as positive numbers and underspends were shown as negative numbers.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services commented that the figures on waste management made the Council look better than it really was, as the big bills would be coming in during the third and fourth quarters. The Council would need to find about a half million pounds in savings, as money would need to be found for an annual weekly waste collection and the Cabinet would need to say 'no' to further CSB Growth bids.

The Chairman asked about the underspend on the telephony system, the Head of Information and Communication Technology replied that the system had been delayed for 12 months and that this would provide future savings on the cost.

RESOLVED:

That the panel noted the financial monitoring report for the second quarter of 2006/07 including the Capital Monitoring reports.

19. FEES AND CHARGES - 2007/08

The Assistant Head of Finance introduced the report on Fees and Charges for the forthcoming financial year (2007/08). The general premise is that fees and charges would be increased by 3.5% in line with the retail price index. However where it could be justified a higher increase should be considered.

The meeting debated the relative merits of increasing the short stay car parking fees as opposed to raising the long stay fees and concluded that they would rather see the short term fees (for half an hour) kept the same.

The Head of Planning Services and Economic Development commented that a report would be written to detail and justify the increases in Building Control fees and that publicity should be given to this.

The Panel noted that Licensing now came under Environmental Protection and not Community Wellbeing and a new range of charges would be issued on licensing fees.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel considered the policy of increasing fees and charges for 2007/08, and recommended a general increase of 3.5% to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee.

20. CONSULTATION PLAN 2006/07

The Panel considered the Council's Consultation Plan for 2006/07. It noted that the web-based consultation on Waste Management had received around 70 to 80 responses and that no responses were against the use of wheeled bins. These responses would colour how the Portfolio holder would negotiate the new contract. Councillor Knapman expressed caution about using such a small number of respondents against the overall number in the district, as we currently cannot afford weekly collections. The Head of Environmental Services commented that a more involved form of public consultation would set back the procuring of a new waste management system some time, so this type of consultation was settled upon.

Councillor D'Souza argued that this was not a perfect way to consult with the public and councillors should talk to people in their wards. The Councillors should take more responsibility on themselves to find out the thoughts of their constituents. Councillor Jacobs stressed that if people are not told the financial consequences of any actions they are being consulted on then they could not draw any valid conclusions.

In conclusion, the Chairman summed up the Panel's feeling that they were largely unhappy with the way the consultation was taking place, as it was restricted to people with computers or who read the local papers.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel noted the Consultation report, but were unhappy with the limited type of methods of consultation being undertaken by the Council.

21. VALUE FOR MONEY ANALYSIS

The Head of Housing Services introduced the Value for Money Analysis 2005/06 report. He reported that the Audit Commission undertakes an annual Use of Resources (UoR) Assessment, which evaluates how well councils manage and use their financial resources. The Audit Commission's overall score for EFDC's use of resources in 2005/06 was '2' and had identified a number of actions that needed to be undertaken to improve its use of resources. In response the Management Board had set up a working party to consider how to bring up the Council's score by one level.

The Working Party, Project Team and individual officers had been working through the Work Programme since June 2006 and had made significant progress in completing its tasks. This has included:

- Production and approval of a Value for Money Strategy, Data Quality Strategy and Staff Code of Conduct;
- Formulation of the Council's Value for Money Self-Assessment;
- Introduction of many new approaches and procedures (e.g. procedure note for closure of accounts processes and a proposed consultation on the Medium Term Financial Strategy);

- Production and approval of a Business and Internal Control Assurance Framework;
- Formulation of proposals for the introduction of an independent Audit and Governance Committee from May 2007;
- Approval of the Corporate Risk Register and Risk Management Strategy by members, and the embedding of risk management within the organisation; and
- Improved budgetary information to members and monitoring by officers.

In order to better understand the Council's unit costs for services and how they relate to the Council's performance and compare with other organisations, the Working Party had formulated a Value for Money (VFM) Analysis, which was attached as an appendix to the Head of Housing Services report. He explained the approach adopted with the Analysis.

He explained that the VFM analysis would need refining and updating on an annual basis and that the purpose of the analysis is to provide an indicator; it would therefore be unwise to take any action based solely on this analysis.

The Chairman noted that this was an important and massive piece of work that should be looked at in greater detail. In order to do this the meeting agreed that a sub group from this Panel, comprising of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman and Councillor Jacobs be convened to look at the report in detail and make any comments.

RESOLVED:

(1) That a Sub-Group be formed to look in detail the Value for Money Analysis report, including the outstanding information from Housing and Environmental Services. The Sub-Group is to be comprised of the Chairman (Councillor J Whitehouse), the Vice Chairman (Councillor J Hart) and Councillor D Jacobs. The sub group is to be assisted by The Head of Housing Services and the Head of Human Resources and Performance Management.

(2) That the Sub-Group considers whether any of the information provided by the VFM Analysis should be brought to the attention of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to help inform the Committee's Work Programme for 2007/08.

22. EVALUATION OF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGY

The Head of Human Resources and Performance Management introduced the report on the evaluation of recruitment and retention strategy. Currently the Council was in a better position than it has been in for a while. It is successful in the area of attracting trainees and having them continue on in post once they have been trained up. It would like to extend the health checks currently offered to staff over the age of 40 to staff of all ages.

The Council would now like to concentrate on the managing of absences and bring those figures down.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the progress that has been made with the implementation of the Council's recruitment and retention strategy be noted;
- (2) That further publicity be made available to staff on the existence of subsidised Leisure Centre membership, health checks, the Banked Holiday Scheme and the Busy Bees childcare voucher scheme;
- (3) That the provision of health checks to staff at or over the age of 40 be extended to all staff in the light of the success of the scheme and the age discrimination legislation now in force, and
- (4) That this Scrutiny Standing Panel recommends to Cabinet that the current initiatives continue but that attention is refocused on the issue of the Council's increasing sickness absence levels, in terms of future HR activity and focus.

23. LOCAL LAND CHARGES

The Head of Legal, Administration and Estates updated the Panel on the current performance of the Local Land Charges Section, following the report presented to the Panel at its meeting on 1 June 2006 regarding income generated from Local Land Charge searches and personal searches, the performance in respect of standard searches and actions taken to address the current situation at that time.

The Panel noted that the table in paragraph 2 of the report had a typographical error in it. Under the column headed 2004/05 the first figure should read 458,471 and not 548,471.

The Panel was advised that, since the last report, Local Land Charges had succeeded in improving the turnround time for Searches from fourteen working days to between six and eight days.

It was reported that the Head of Legal, Administration and Estates and the Senior Local Land Charges Officer had recently met with the Acting Area Highways Manager at Essex County Council to discuss the speed of highways search replies. Members noted that, following this meeting, the County Council had provided an additional resource of one FTE to support the Technical Officer that had previously had sole responsibility for the search replies, which had improved turnround time for highways replies to six days. The Senior Local Land Charges Officer reported that the email link to Essex County Council's Area Highways Office was still to be put in place, but that once this was done the turnround time for highways search replies should be reduced by a further two days.

The Head of Legal, Administration and Estates reported that Essex County Council were not at present prepared to enter into a service level agreement to reflect the five day guaranteed turnround time referred to by the County Council's Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transportation, Councillor R. Bass, at a meeting held with the council's Joint Chief Executive (Community) earlier in the year.

The Panel also noted that the new Local Land Charges ICT System which was to be integrated with the Planning and Building Control systems, was due to be implemented within the next few months, and that from 1 April 2007 the current LLC1 fees were to be deregulated and that from then all registering authorities (includes district councils) would set their own fees based on the actual cost of providing the Local Land Charges service. The Senior Local Land Charges Officer advised the

Panel that the Home Information Pack (HIP) was due to be introduced on 1 June 2007 and that, as the Local Land Charge Search would be required to be included in the pack, current processes would have to be reviewed over the next six months.

RESOLVED:

That the panel noted the updating report on Local Land Charges.

24. FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted that the next meeting would be held on 15 January 2007, at 7pm.