

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY
PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2008
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 8.56 PM**

Members Present: J M Whitehouse (Chairman), G Mohindra (Vice-Chairman), R Bassett, M Colling, D Jacobs, R Morgan, Mrs P Richardson and Mrs P Smith

Other members present: Mrs D Collins and C Whitbread

Apologies for Absence: J Hart

Officers Present D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), A Hall (Director of Housing), B Land (Assistant Head of Planning and Economic Development), P Maddock (Assistant Head of Finance), P Maginnis (Human Resources Manager), S Tautz (Performance Improvement Manager), Mrs J Twinn (Assistant Head of Finance), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

40. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman made a short address to remind all present that the meeting would be broadcast on the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings. The Panel noted the Council's Protocol for Webcasting of Council and Other Meetings.

41. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

42. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made.

43. NOTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 14 JANUARY 2008

The notes from the last meeting, held on 14 January 2008, were agreed.

44. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted the work programme and terms of reference. It was noted that the new Best Value Performance Plan would be produced in June 2008.

45. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2007/08 - QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Panel considered the quarterly performance monitoring for Key Performance Indicators. A range of forty three Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2007/08 had been adopted by the Cabinet at its meeting in July 2007. The Panel noted that some

indicators would not be reported until the end of the year because little change was likely over each three month period.

The Panel went through the indicators concentrating on the ones that may not meet their target by the end of the year.

BV008 – Councillor Mrs Collins thought that there was a good chance that the Council would meet this objective and that officers were being too conservative in classing the outcome as being ‘uncertain’.

BV012 – it was noted there had been some improvement, managers are now receiving monthly reports on sickness absence and staff are recognising the importance of keeping their sickness levels in check.

BV066a – the Director of Housing noted that the Council was very close to achieving the target. Asked if people were getting into trouble now because of the sub prime issue with mortgages, the Director of Housing replied that it was safe to say that people were currently experiencing problems with debt and the Council had to follow its rent arrears protocol before they could take someone to court.

BV078a – it was noted that the Council has 9 BVPI's in the benefits section at present that will go down 2 in April. They still have temporary staff in that section and there was a good chance they would not meet their targets this year because of the low staffing levels.

BV082a (i) – it was noted that this target would be met although the garden waste season does go on longer than it used to.

Councillor Mrs Smith asked if household compost went towards our total figures. The Director of Environment and Street Scene replied that it did not and this is a problem for all local authorities. There will be new Government targets coming in and we will be focusing on those targets.

BV084a – Councillor Jacobs remarked that it looked like we would not achieve that target. What steps can we take to meet this target, especially as when we collect grass cuttings, if they are wet, it would increase the weight of the collection. The Director of Environment and Street Scene said that there was no easy solution, but the Council did benefit from home composting as it reduced the weight given to us. Councillor Bassett commented that as we were so good at recycling, had this had any effect on flytipping? The Director replied that flytipping incidents had gone down over the last 12 months.

BV109a,b & c – the Assistant Head of Planning Services reported that ‘b’ and ‘c’ were headed in the right direction; 109a and b should hit their targets at the end of the year.

Councillor Morgan asked how much the figures would improve if the three week cycle for planning sub-committees was adopted. He was told that this had to be combined with the other actions to see a noticeable improvement. Councillor Mrs Smith commented that it was important to keep a full complement of staff and keep staff with relevant experience. Councillor Bassett said it was important that the Council continued to carry out enforcement actions rigorously.

BV170a & c – the Deputy Chief Executive explained that a lot of their targets were outside their control such as the reclassification of the Royal Gunpowder Mills. The Council used to be credited with a proportion of the visitors, but not any more. Also North Weald Airfield Museum had not had many hits on their website recently. This

year is the 50th Anniversary of the last Hurricane squadron leaving the airfield and there are a number of commemorative events planned, which should add more interest to their website and increase their hits. The top quartile will always stretch us, but there is scope for improvement next year.

BV199a – it was noted that there were issues causing difficulties with monitoring. The Council has been in conversation with DEFRA who have offered us 5-6 days of consultancy to help us with our monitoring. A fundamental revision was needed to get the baseline right. It was noted that the new contractor was improving our figures and will get our base level right next year.

Councillor Bassett asked why were the figures for last year were 2 or 3% and this year 28 and 33%. He was told that they were just measuring the figures wrongly, hence having DEFRA coming in to help us get our monitoring corrected. Councillor Bassett then asked if the state of the local rural roads counted against us. The Director of Environment and Street Scene replied that it did indeed count against us. We have made the point that this is not fair and we have now separated out our detritus from the litter, so it will not count against us for litter.

BV204 – it was noted that there was an unfortunate set of decisions in the last quarter with some unforeseen decisions that have gone against us. The Government is pushing the building of new houses but until Council policy changes we will keep on pursuing its policy of not cramming development into the built-up areas, even though it may lose on appeal.

BV212 – Councillor Mrs Collins asked if there was likely to be any improvements in DLO/Repairs. The Director of Housing said that they had been improving over the last two quarters. They would be looking at the works unit that will be coming into the Housing Directorate in May and have set up an officer working party on void properties. Choice Based Lettings in some cases lengthen the turnaround period for some properties. Highly sought after properties will increase our turnaround.

H15a – the Director of Housing commented that they knew the figures would be poor at this time with no main schemes in the offing. However there is good news, the Council was tracking all potential affordable housing schemes, where there are about 470 affordable homes in the pipeline; there are a further 240 possibles, but it would take some time for these to go through the system. Some of the big ones are Epping Forest College, St Margaret's' Hospital and the White Lodge Developments at Waltham Abbey.

The Chairman in summing up the item asked that as we are currently on track to meeting about 55% of the indicators target for 2007/08, and about 45% have fallen short; do we have any idea of how close we are to meeting our 75% performance target including the yearly ones. The Performance Improvement Manager replied that they were not sure at the moment as we have number of indicators that are only monitored at years end. This Panel will get the results of these indicators at the next meeting, when we will have a better idea.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel considered and commented upon the Council's performance for the first nine months of 2007/08, in relation to the Key Performance Indicators adopted by the Cabinet.

46. USE OF RESOURCES ASSESSMENT - AUDITOR JUDGEMENTS 2007

The Panel considered the report on the 'Use of Resources Assessment – Auditors Judgements 2007' and noted the Council's results. It was a 'good news' item, where we have improved from an adequate level 2 to a good level 3. It was noted that the Council had made good improvements (although it had gone down on one of its assessments), and officers should be congratulated on this improvement.

It was noted that this was no longer a draft report but the final version.

Councillor Jacobs queried the figure on page 60, item 2.3 – 'Council manages its assets base'. This had gone down from a 3 last year to a 2 this year. Officers were not clear why this had gone down. The officer's group will be focusing on this theme as something the Council would need to improve on. They will be producing an action plan to address weakness around this area. Page 65 showed the Audit Commission's views on how we can improve this.

The Chairman drew attention to page 69 and the findings on Value for Money. He wanted to know if officers could identify sections of unintended areas of high spending and intended areas of high spending. He was told that officers were looking at this in detail through the Use of Resources Working Party and focusing on all issues of Value for Money. They will identify them and any further work to be done on them.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel noted the Council's results in respect of the annual Use of Resources Assessment for 2007, including the key findings, conclusions and improvement opportunities identified by the Audit Commission.

47. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2008/09 - SUMMARY VERSION

It was noted that the Council had been producing BVPPs since the late 1990's, but this will no longer be required by the Government. A summary version is published with the annual Council tax demand, while the full version has to be published by 30 June each year. Officers will circulate a copy of this to each member of the Panel in the new municipal year for their views and put it to Council for final agreement. It will also be circulated to the Cabinet for their views.

Councillor Bassett thought that the statement at the end of page 77 that "we have reviewed our parking policies and now provide free parking on Saturdays throughout the year" needs more of an explanation.

The Chairman commented on that if Cabinet members were accountable for meeting the targets and commitments, then they should have the opportunity to comment on the document and on the lack of statistics.

Councillor Mrs Collins said that it was urgent that this summary went out, but it needed updating as it looked old fashioned, there were lots of things that the Council had accomplished this year that was not in it, such as Choice Based Lettings. There is a need for an update. Officers will liaise with Mrs Collins to update the summary.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That subject to comments received from Cabinet members, the altered draft will be circulated again to members of this Scrutiny Panel and the Summary Best Value Performance Plan for 2008/09 be agreed; and
- (2) The Panel agreed the proposed arrangements for the consideration of the full version of the Best Value Performance Plan for 2008/09.

48. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Assistant Head of Finance introduced the Quarterly Financial Monitoring report for the third quarter of 2007/08.

The Panel noted that:

- The income budgets (pages 87 & 88 of the agenda) have improved slightly;
- That recycling credits (page 89) were performing particularly well;
- The revenue side of the HRA (page 92) was looking better than it had been;
- The capital shown on page 95 will have an underspend at year's end;
- There was an underspend on heating, this was because last year a rise in heating costs was anticipated for this year, but it may have been on the high side;
- The latest total project cost for the Springfield Improvement Scheme (page 100) would be reduced to £3,548 million instead of £4,124 million this was due to the overall cost being reduced slightly from 2% to -12%.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel noted the Revenue and Capital Financial monitoring report for the third quarter of 2007/08.

49. NATIONAL OUTCOME AND INDICATOR SET

The Performance Improvement Manager introduced the report on the new National Outcome and Indicator Set that is to be introduced from April 2008. This has been introduced by the Department for Communities and Local Government as a set of new national indicators to replace all other suites of performance indicators including Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs). Currently a review is being held of all existing BVPIs and Local Performance Indicators (LPIs)

The White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' outlined a new performance framework for local government, aimed at:

- reducing the burden on local authorities to collect performance information, by imposing fewer indicators centrally;
- local authorities setting their own priorities, determining performance measurement, and monitoring performance through partnership working, thereby focusing on and responding to local priorities; and
- devolving power to local authorities and their partners by making them accountable for all delivery of service to their citizens.

The new National Indicators are grouped into four themes:

- Stronger and Safer Communities;

- Children and Young People (the Council has no NIs under this theme);
- Adult Health and Wellbeing and Tackling Exclusion and Promoting Equality; and
- Local Economy and Environmental Sustainability.

The Panel noted that:

- the appendix attached to the report was the published national Indicator set. The ones greyed out were the ones that were thought to be applicable to this Council. The Panel went through this list and noted that the following two indicators, NI 14 and NI 179, were statutory;
- Some of the information to be collected may be the responsibility of other organisations;
- Service Directors have been asked to critically review existing BVPIs that are still important to the Council, such as waste management issues and come forward with a shorter list of old BVPIs and LPIs that may still have value. This will be reported to the Cabinet on 10 March and brought back to this Panel at their March meeting;
- Indicators will be more of a corporate nature;
- Members of the Panel were asked if that had any current indicators they would like to see continued.

Councillor Mrs Collins commented that the new indicators based on concepts and perceptions looked almost impossible to measure. The Performance Improvement Manager said that perception indicators would be measured by a survey. As from next year we will be required to do a two yearly survey. We have yet to receive the methodology on how they are to be conducted.

Councillor Mrs Richardson asked that as some survey will be undertaken by the LSP and not the Council, who would fund them? She was told that the Council was currently in discussion with the LSP on this. There may be economies of scale on conducting these surveys. About 35 would be shared with the County. Councillor Bassett asked if they were obligatory and was told that they were. It may be we would want to incorporate some of the BVPIs that we wish to keep, into these new surveys.

The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that as a starting point we should adopt the current KPIs as staff are familiar with these. Councillor Bassett asked would the auditors look at our KPIs as well and would it cause any problems if we did not use them. He was told that, yes it may cause a lot of problems.

The Panel then considered the current BVPIs and which ones should be carried forward into the regime. The following were chosen:

- **BVPI 175** - % of racial incidents reported to the Council that resulted in further action;
- **BVPI 66(a)** (to be amended) – Rent collected by the Council as a proportion of rents owed on HRA dwellings;
- **BVPI 184(a)** – the proportion of the Council's dwellings which were non-decent at the start of the financial year;
- **BVPI 212** – the average time (days) taken to re-let Council dwellings;
- **LPI H15(a)** – the number of affordable homes completed and ready for occupation during the year;
- **LPI H15(b)** – the amount of affordable housing required as part of section 106 agreements signed during the year for all large residential development sites,

expressed as a % of the total number of homes to be provided on large residential development sites;

- **BVPI 08** – the % of invoices for commercial goods and services that were paid by the Council within 30 days of receipt or within the agreed payment terms;
- **BVPI 09** – the % of Council Tax collected by the Council in the year;
- **BVPI 10** – the % of non-domestic rates collected by the Council in the year;
- **BVPI 12** – the number of working days/shifts lost to the Council due to sickness absences;
- **BVPI 82(a)(i)** – the % of household waste arising which have been sent by the Council for recycling;
- **BVPI 82(b)(i)** – the % of household waste sent by the Council for composting or treatment by anaerobic digestion;
- **BVPI 84** – the number of kilograms of household waste collected per head of the population of the district;
- **BVPI 91(a)** – the % of households resident in the district served by kerbside collection of recyclables;
- **BVPI 166** – the Council's performance against an environmental health service checklist;
- **BVPI 106** – the % of new homes built on previously developed land; and
- **BVPI 204** – the number of planning appeal decisions allowed against the Council's decision to refuse planning applications, as a % of the total number of planning appeals against refusal of planning applications.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Panel noted the details of the new National Outcome and Indicator Set to be introduced from April 2008; and

(2) The Panel reviewed the current reassessment being undertaken into the continued monitoring of appropriate existing Best Value and Local Performance Indicators and made their own recommendations of BVPIs to be carried on (as indicated above).

50. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

To report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that this Panel had considered in detail the new National Outcome and Indicator Set.

51. FUTURE MEETINGS

The Panel agreed that an extra meeting be added to their schedule and that this should be set for Thursday 27 March 2008.