

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF PROVISION OF VALUE FOR MONEY WITHIN PLANNING
SERVICES TASK AND FINISH PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 21 JANUARY 2008
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.30 - 9.50 PM**

Members Present: Mrs L Wagland (Chairman), , R Bassett, M Colling, R Frankel, D Jacobs, R Morgan, Mrs P Richardson and H Ulkun

Other members present: Mrs A Grigg and J Knapman

Apologies for Absence: P McMillan and G Mohindra

Officers Present Steve Bacon (Service Business Manager), J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)

16. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

No substitute Members were reported.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None Declared.

18. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING - 3 DECEMBER 2007

Noted.

19. TERMS OF REFERENCE/ WORK PROGRAMME

The Terms of Reference and Work Programme were noted and agreed.

20. IT PRESENTATION

The Panel received a presentation from Northgate Solutions the suppliers of the Planning Services IT System. The Panel heard from Mr D Evans (Project Manager) Mr M Baker (Account Director) and Vicky Lindon (Management Consultant).

A full copy of the presentation was circulated to Members.

In response to the presentation, the Panel asked for ideas for securing further improvement? In response, Mr Baker saw value in looking at existing work practices as there was potential for improving these systems. It was noted that J Preston was in the process of undertaking a further review of the services to identify improvements. A Business Review of the Service was also underway.

The Panel requested the following information:

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- cost/benefit analysis of the IT system – details of savings, impact on performance, systems in place at other Councils – processes used, best practice, future work;
- Performance Information – benchmarking data, costs/benefits;
- The Performance Delivery Grant (PDG) – details of allocation, success of the measures, approaches applied by other Councils with details of outcomes,
- Officer time spent on cases - It was questioned whether there was provision on the software for tracking the costs and officer time spent on cases?
- Costs per application;

It was stressed that the information should be prepared in a 'user friendly' format, short bullet points.

ACTION: Northgate Solutions/J Preston to prepare report

S Bacon reported that an order had been placed for the installation of the Anite System earlier on in the day. As a result it was hoped that the system would be up and running by April 2008. It was envisaged that the system would provide an opportunity for further cost savings.

A Member also reported on the systems in place at Hackney Council. For the past 3 years, the Council had provided an On Line Planning Portal. It was suggested that the Panel should look at the operation on the systems possible through a fact finding visit to the Council.

21. STATISTICS - REVISED 2007/08 AND ESTIMATE 2008/09

The Panel received details of the Planning Services Budget covering the period 2001 – 2008.

The Panel expressed a wish for:

- more concise details of the budget for the last two years - information showing how the budgets totalled up.
- the narratives to be expanded for clarification.
- Appeals Decisions - to assess performance in this area,
- time taken to deal with Planning Cases, costs of an 'average case'

Action: R Sharp to provide the information.

22. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF PLANNING SERVICES - UPDATE OF DOCUMENT

Noted that officers were still preparing the information asked for by the last meeting. It was hoped that further information would be available for the next meeting.

23. CONSULTATION ARRANGMENTS - PLANNING AGENTS, APPLICANTS, LOCAL COUNCILS ETC

The Panel expressed a wish to canvass views on the quality of the Councils planning services:

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They expressed a wish for this to cover;

- The Members of the three Area Planning Sub – Committees
- The Town and Parish Councils (including the clerks)
- Sample the views of individual applicants
- Role of Members invited to speak at appeal
- Planning Agents –

It was suggested that officers look at adapting existing surveys on customer satisfaction in planning surveys to avoid any unnecessary duplication of work. It was therefore suggested that steps should be taken to find out what already existed.

It was also considered beneficial to invite an appropriate Legal Services Officer to the next meeting,

24. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None raised.

25. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

20 March 2008 in Committee Room 1.