

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY
PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2010
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 10.25 PM

Members Present:	D Jacobs (Chairman), G Mohindra (Vice-Chairman), J Philip, A Watts, Mrs L Wagland, J M Whitehouse and D Wixley
Other members present:	R Bassett, Mrs D Collins, Mrs M Sartin, D Stallan, Ms S Stavrou and Mrs J H Whitehouse
Apologies for Absence:	K Angold-Stephens, J Collier, J Hart and W Pryor
Officers Present	D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), A Hall (Director of Housing), R Palmer (Director of Finance and ICT), J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), J Twinn (Assistant Director (Benefits)), P Maginnis (Assistant Director (Human Resources)), S Tautz (Performance Improvement Manager), B Moldon (Principal Accountant) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

43. PRESENTATION ON THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Panel welcomed Mr Stuart Elrick, who was working on behalf of the East of England Regional Assembly to provide support to local authorities in securing improvement against the requirements of the Equality Framework for Local Government. The Panel noted that the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) had been established in 2001 as a performance and improvement framework to enable local authorities to mainstream equality but had since been revised to take into account feedback received and that the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) replaced the previous ESLG in April 2009.

Members were advised that the EFLG had been designed to build on existing work by:

- Providing a simpler framework, reducing the amount of process and introducing a more outcome focused approach;
- Encouraging the use of the Framework so that it was proportional and relevant to the needs and circumstances of the authority;
- Simplifying the self assessment process backed by peer challenge;
- Integrating the public duties on race, disability and gender and providing a common performance framework for compliance;
- Enabling local authorities and their local strategic partners to identify and analyse equality priorities for inclusion in their Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and complementing the new performance assessment framework and the Comprehensive Area Assessment which took effect from April 2009;
- Allowing authorities to 'migrate' their achievements under the original Equality Standard.

The Council had set a target to achieve Level 2 (achieving) of the EFLG by the end of 2009/10, performance against which was measured by a Local Performance Indicator (LPI 01).

Mr Elrick said that councils should be seeking to secure 'equality outcomes' as part of everything they do, devising strategies and using the scrutiny process to make a difference. Equality and diversity was not about treating everybody the same, or providing an extra service for minorities or giving them more rights than others. It was about getting to know and understand the needs and aspirations of all communities within the district; getting to know and understand the needs and aspirations of the people to whom the council deliver's services; the Council should be meeting the needs and aspirations through working with them and its partners. The Council should have a workforce profile that represented its communities and service users; and should enable its employees to feel valued, empowered and supported in delivering the services.

The Council should be publicising the good work it does, which the Audit Commission had already recognised using the website to inform the public and other authorities.

Mr Elrick said the Council would also need to collect data and intelligence on its communities and to share this within the authority and with the Local Strategic Partnership and other stakeholders. Members were a good source of intelligence in this respect as they possessed local information about need within their individual wards. Information should also be fed in from outside sources such as the Primary Care Trust, via the Local Development Framework Consultation and the Fire and Rescue Services. This type of data would be needed to inform future improvement plans. It was noted that corporate plans were living documents and would be updated on a regular basis.

Members noted that a lot of authorities have an extra strand of 'rurality' to their service delivery apart from the six recognised equality strands of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age and religion or belief. 'Rurality' would indicate that they have a widely dispersed rural population and the problems encountered in accessing services. These strands should be used to improve services, but not all strands would apply to any on particular topic.

These strands should be used to improve services, but not all stands would apply to any one particular topic. It should be remembered that excellence in service delivery gets the council Equality and Diversity good marks and not the other way round.

Mr. Elrick reported that he was shortly to undertake an informal peer challenge of the Council's current performance against the EFLG. The informal peer challenge process was not an inspection, but an opportunity for the identification of the Council's successes and future challenges as it progresses against the Framework. The process would consider what had been achieved, what the authority's challenges were, and the barriers that may hinder progress to embed equality and diversity throughout the organisation. The results of the peer challenge process would enable the development and prioritisation of appropriate action to take the Council forward against the Framework.

The Chairman thanked Mr Elrick for this interesting and informative presentation. He then called for a 10 minute break before restarting the meeting.

44. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that Councillor D Wixley was substituting for Councillor K Angold-Stephens.

45. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made.

46. MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 12 January 2010 were agreed subject to the addition of Councillor Mohindra's apologies being added to the minutes.

47. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted that item 5 on the work programme, Essex Local Area Agreement, that the targets were contained in National and Local Indicators and it would be therefore better to have the report on an annual basis, when the country wide base targets are reviewed, instead of a quarterly one.

They also noted that a follow up report for item 15, Customer Transformation, would be brought to the April meeting.

48. CORPORATE PLAN AND MEDIUM TERM AIMS 2010/11 - 2013/14 AND KEY OBJECTIVES 2010/11

Councillor R Bassett, the Performance Management Portfolio Holder, introduced the latest report on the development of the new Corporate Plan. They had tightened up work plans and objectives and had now got just twelve objectives for the plan and this had been broken down into sub-objectives, this was now more complete than the last time it was reviewed. It has now been circulated to Service Directors to enable an early start for next year. Ian Davidson from the Audit Commission has also seen it and said that it looked a lot better than the original draft.

It was noted that a lot of work had been done in a short period of time and officers were thanked for this. This document now referenced other documents; they in turn should be referenced back. It should be a joined up process.

As mission statements, the five overall aims were considered valid as they were backed up and supported by the twelve corresponding objectives. Some of the Panel thought that the five aims should be taken out and the twelve objectives used instead. It was pointed out that the five aims were not objectives but statements as to what the Council were striving to achieve in general terms over the four year period of the plan. The twelve objectives pulled this all together.

The Panel noted that the LSP were in the middle of a consultation on the new Sustainable Community Strategy and that would eventually feed into the document

as well. The plans were a work in progress and this should not be considered to the final version.

At the April meeting of this Panel they would like a schedule and timetable for the 2011/12 to 2014/15 document and how the various strategies would slot into this. It would also make sense to refresh the medium term aims each year and not re-write them. They noted that there was a commitment for an annual refresh factored into the plans for the document.

The Panel would also like the 'Key Objectives' to link up logically with the 'Actions' and the 'Targets and how they are measured'. As presently illustrated, they did not quite link together, although it was accepted that this was a formatting issue with the production of the document and that the linkages would be explicit in the finalised version.

The Panel would also like the twelve objectives to be looked at and set into a priority order. The Performance management Portfolio Holder agreed to take this issue on board when reporting the proposed objectives to the cabinet in April 2010 for final adoption.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposed structure and format of the Council's new Corporate Plan for the period from 2010/11 to 2013/14 be agreed; and
- (2) That the Council's proposed Medium Term Aims for 2010/11 to 2013/14, and the draft key Objectives for 2010/11 be agreed subject to the comments made.
- (3) That the twelve objectives should be put into priority order.

49. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Director of Finance and ICT, Bob Palmer, introduced the report on the Quarterly Financial Monitoring. The report provided a comparison between the original profiled budgets for the period ended 31 December 2009 and the actual expenditure or income as applicable.

The Panel noted that:

- That there was likely to be little change between the originally expected use of General Fund Balances of £704,000 and the revised projection of £837,000;
- The salary schedule was shown on a Directorate basis and that there was a salary underspend of half a million pounds. The most significant underspend was in planning services;
- The pay award was lower than anticipated;
- Building Control was still suffering;
- Investment income – the bank rate was still at 0.5% and it will not do as well as in previous years;
- Recoveries from the Heritable Bank would be at around 85p in the pound;
- Currently MOTs yield a surplus to the general fund of a little over £50,000;
- The Housing repair fund was running at an underspend at present;

The Panel then went through the figures in detail and thanked officers for the work done on the presentations by Mr Maddock who had made it easier to read and understand.

RESOLVED:

That the revenue and capital financial monitoring report for the third quarter of 2009/10 be noted.

50. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - QUARTER 3

The Performance Improvement Manager, Mr S Tautz informed the Panel that the first part of the report was to review the performance of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the first nine months for 2009/10. The second part of the report was to review the KPIs for 2010/11 with a view to adoption of relevant indicators and targets reflecting the Council's core business and its corporate priorities. The Panel also noted details of the linkages between the proposed KPIs for 2010/11 and the Council's draft Medium Term Aims for 2010/11 to 2013/14.

The Panel went through the indicators individually, noting:

NI014 Reducing Avoidable Contact - noted that no target was required to be set for this indicator.

LPI 01 Level of the Equality Framework for Local Government to which the Council conforms – a 'peer challenge' of the Council's equality performance was to be undertaken in early 2010 and it was considered appropriate to retain the Level 2 target for 2010/11, [pending the outcome of this exercise.

LPI 50 Number of elderly people participating in physical activity – the panel noted the low target was due to it not including some of the programmes when it first started. The target will be revised next year.

LPI28 Number of working days lost due to sickness absence – noted that each quarterly figure had decreased and it was heading in the right direction.

LPI 40 Occupation rate of commercial and industrial property – asked if the figures were the number of occupancy days or just a snapshot as at 31 March. Officers were unsure and would find out for the Panel and report back.

NI192 Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, re-cycling and composting – asked why the performance levels were different on Mondays, the Panel was told that Mondays included collections from flats etc. and Mondays were always 3 to 4% down. The full reasons were not completely clear.

NI195 (a) Improved street and environmental cleanliness (Litter) – noted it was proving stubborn to get the figures below 11% / 10.5%. 10% was average for District Councils. Initiatives were being taken forward and a public education exercise was being undertaken.

NI195 (b) Improved street and environmental cleanliness (Detritus) – getting to the target was difficult because of the recent weather.

NI180 Number of changes of circumstances which affect customers 'Housing/Council Tax Benefit entitlement' within the year – Noted there should be no ticks on the sheet it should all be crosses. Asked if the target was unrealistically low the officer said that it was a new target and they were unsure as to what target to set. It would be reviewed next year.

LPI23 (a) Capital Projects 'Cost' – Noted that this was to be deleted and replaced.

LPI53 Number of completed fraud investigations carried out by the Benefits Investigation Team – noted that an investigation officer had been recruited but another one had resigned – so the section was still one down.

NI158 Percentage of Non-decent council homes – Noted that the Council had reached a milestone and at the end of March there will be no non-decent homes in the District.

LPI04 Rent collected as a proportion of rents owed on Housing Revenue Account dwellings – noted that the Courts were being more lenient than in the past.

NI157(c) Processing of planning applications –'Other' types – The Council is now within target and is the highest ever achieved. Good news.

NI86 Per capita reduction in CO2 emissions in the local authority area – Noted that green issues were very difficult to monitor as officers have to wait two years before any figures come through from the government. To take this off as there is no data at years end. The same applied to NI194 Air Quality.

The Panel noted that the results of the annual indicators were still to come in.

The Panel wanted the indicators to be graded in order of importance to the Council and of the indicators that the Council has no control over. Officers said they would do some modelling and bring it to the next meeting.

Proposed targets for 2010/11:

NI157(b) processing of planning applications as measured against targets - to set targets when planning reports come to scrutiny.

NI154 Net additional homes provided – to set the target at 180.

NI186 Per capita reduction in CO2 emission in the local authority area – to set the target at 8%.

LPI 45 – Numbers of appeals allowed against refusal of planning applications – to leave the target as it is and review again in June, depending on the government and policies in place at that time.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Council's performance for the first nine months of 2009/10 in relation to the Key Performance Indicators adopted for the year, be noted;
- (2) Subject to the concurrence of the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee:

- (a) the proposed Key Performance Indicators for 2010/11 (and draft targets) be agreed subject to the amendments listed above;
 - (b) the identification of a corporate KPI improvement target for 2010/11 be deferred until the next meeting of the Panel, in order that additional work can be undertaken to link the proposed indicators to the Council's proposed Key Objectives for 2010/11 in terms of relevance and priority;
 - (c) that proposals for the revision of KPI LPI 23 (a) capital projects, be agreed; and
- (3) That the linkages between the proposed KPIs for 2010/11 and the Council's draft Medium Term Aims for 2010/11 to 2013/14 be noted.

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

To report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a general update on the reports considered at this meeting.

52. FUTURE MEETINGS

The date for the next meeting was noted.