

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**NOTES OF A MEETING OF FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY**  
**PANEL**  
**HELD ON THURSDAY, 10 JUNE 2010**  
**IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING**  
**AT 7.00 - 9.46 PM**

**Members Present:** G Mohindra (Chairman), R Cohen (Vice-Chairman), W Breare-Hall, D Jacobs, D C Johnson, J Philip, Mrs C Pond and Ms S Watson

**Other members present:** R Bassett, Mrs D Collins, B Rolfe, Mrs M Sartin, D Stellan, Ms S Stavrou, Mrs J Sutcliffe, C Whitbread and J M Whitehouse

**Apologies for Absence:** Mrs R Brookes and B Judd

**Officers Present** D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), A Hall (Director of Housing), J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), K Durrani (Assistant Director (Engineering Services)), M Tipping (Assistant Director (Facilities Management & Emergency Planning)), J Nolan (Assistant Director (Environmental Health)), V Loftis (Market Research Consultation Officer), M Warr (Performance Improvement Officer) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

**1. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)**

The Panel noted that Councillor Mrs C Pond was substituting for Councillor Mrs R Brookes.

**2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No declarations of interest were made.

**3. MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 22 April 2010 were agreed subject to noting that Councillor Angold-Stephens was not the Vice Chairman of Council at that time and that Councillor G Mohindra had given his apologies for the meeting.

**4. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME**

The Deputy Chief Executive took the meeting through their Terms of Reference and Work Programme for the year ahead. The Panel agreed to the addition of a report on the improvement plan in response to the Benefit Inspectors report. This would go firstly to the Audit and Governance Committee and would then come to this Panel.

**5. VALUE FOR MONEY COST AND PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS 2008/09**

The Panel considered the creation of a Value for Money sub-group to consider the Council's Cost and Performance Benchmarking Analysis, which was originally developed as a means to better understand the authority's unit costs for individual services and how they related to performance and compared with other

organisations. This analysis had been previously recognised as a model of good practice by the Audit commission.

**RESOLVED:**

On consideration the Panel nominated the following Councillors to sit on the on the Value for Money Sub-group. They are Councillors G Mohindra, J Philip, Mrs S Watson and D Johnson.

**6. MEASUREMENT OF AVOIDABLE CONTACT**

The Panel considered the report detailing the completion of the National Indicator 14 'avoidable contact' measuring exercise for 2009/10. It explained the background to the indicator and how, having been deleted as a national indicator, consideration was to be given to retaining it as a local one. Avoidable Contact for the Council as a whole for last year was 27.1%. Officers were looking to put together an improvement plan and looking to generate more meaningful data for analysis. An officer working group would be taking this forward and would be looking to involve frontline staff. It was hoped to show real progress by taking the work forward in a ractical way. The use of milestones throughout the calendar year would enable members to track progress.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) The Panel noted the report and the overall NI 14 result of 27.1% of Avoidable Contact for the Council for 2009/10.
- (b) The Panel noted the decision of the Department of Communities and Local Government to removed NI 14 from the National Indicator set and agreed that it should be kept as a Local Performance Indicator and the future nature of this indicator be one of milestones set in the calendar to be achieved and action based rather than on specific figure or percentage target.
- (c) The Panel agreed that the first milestone should be the production of an improvement plan based on the results for 2009/10 and a forward plan for the current year's exercise; these are to be reported at the September meeting.
- (d) The Panel agreed that the remaining details of the milestones be determined by the Avoidable Contact Working Party and reported to a future meeting of the Panel.

**7. COUNCIL PLAN 2006-10 - ANNUAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2008/09**

The Panel noted that the Council Plan for 2006 to 2010 was the authority's key planning document, setting out service delivery priorities over a four year period, with strategic themes matching those set out in the Community Strategy for the district. The Council Plan had been due for its fourth and final review at the end of March 2010 and a schedule setting out the progress was attached to the agenda.

The lifespan of the Council Plan was now concluded and members noted that work had commenced on the development of a new Corporate Plan to take the authority forward from 2010/11 to 2013/14, in conjunction with a similar development of a new Community Strategy for the district by the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership.

The Panel considered the progress report on the plan and commented on:

**GU1** – *to ensure that new homes provided in the district as a result of regional growth are sustainable, by good planning and the provision of adequate infrastructure (action b, joint planning of delivery with other local authorities)* – noted that this had not been achieved. There was a need to flag up how things have changed and why the Council has failed to meet it. This was due largely to the directive on Gypsy and Travellers. Officers are now awaiting the new Government's directions.

**HN2** – *to prevent homelessness scheme (action c, to further develop the Council's homelessness prevention service...)* – noted that the homelessness prevention funding was going to the County. EFDC has helped a great deal of people and are proud of their service. The funding will be available up until March 2011; in future 50% would be directed towards the County. There would be options to consider once more was known about the funding.

**HN4** – *to ensure privately owned homes are fit for people to live in* – noted that a more reasonable target was 5 homes per year. There had been an issue about staffing resources with insufficient staffing on the private sector side. This has resulted in the creation of an additional post for 3 years. An officer had been appointed but had not taken up post as yet.

**FL1** – *leisure management contract entered into with SLM* – it was surmised by members that the fitness equipment at Ongar was funded from Capital funding. Members were told that SLM had invested in Ongar leisure facilities. SLM had inherited fitness equipment under the lease scheme when they took over the centre, but they have now bought new gym equipment.

**FL2** – *increase access to opportunities for people...to lead a healthy lifestyle* – It was noted that the wording for FL1 may just be a copy and paste from FL2. Officers promised to look into this.

**EP6** – *to maintain and improve the links between the Council, local town centres and the business community* – noted a typo in the last line of the progress report for 31.3.10, it should read "...Finance Portfolio Holder as the authority's Business Champion."

It was noted that there was a lack of consistency in the progress reports; they needed to be clearer about what the Council was trying to do over the next year.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Scrutiny Panel noted the performance against the objectives, targets and actions contained in the Council Plan for 2006 to 2010, for the period to 31 March 2010.

**8. PROVISIONAL CAPITAL OUTTURN 2009/10**

The Assistant Director of Finance, Peter Maddock, introduced the report on the provisional Capital Outturn for 2009/10. The report set out the Council's capital programme for 2009/10 in terms of expenditure and financing and compared the actual outturn figures with the revised estimates. The revised estimates represent those agreed at Cabinet on 1 February 2010, which were based on the Capital Strategy adopted by Council on 22 December 2009.

It was noted that some items detailed in the appendices were still feeding their way through into the total figures and were not therefore the complete and finished figures for the year.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the provisional outturn report for 2009/10 be noted;
- (2) That retrospective agreement was recommended to the Cabinet over the underspends in 2009/10 on certain capital schemes as identified in the report;
- (3) That approval for the carry forward of unspent capital estimates into 2010/11 relating to the scheme on which slippage has occurred was recommended to the Cabinet; and
- (4) That retrospective approval for the funding of the capital programme in 2009/10 was recommended to the Cabinet.

**9. PROVISIONAL REVENUE OUTTURN 2009/10**

Peter Maddock introduced the report on the provisional revenue outturn for 2009/10. This provided an overall summary of the revenue outturn for the financial year 2009/10. It summarised the revenue outturn for the General Fund and the consequential movement in balances for 2009/10.

There was some cause for concern about the size of the non-salary related underspend that had occurred. The underspends also begged the question if they were needed in the first place. They were also expecting that the council would receive cuts from central government funding and officers were predicting cuts of 10 to 15% (or worse) in the coming year.

Councillor Whitbread agreed that some underspends were unacceptable and that there was a need to hone down those figures and that there would be tough decisions to be made.

Noted that:

- Some examples of underspends such as plant maintenance or gas and electricity or ICT maintenance should not be dismissed; although it was difficult to predict exact levels of expense on plant maintenance issues.
- There seemed to be an in-built contingency but not where they should be. It should be from a more central budget. More sensible planning for the future was needed which would also enable savings to be found.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Panel noted the overall 2009/10 revenue out-turn for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA); and
- (2) That the carry forward of £523,000 District Development Fund expenditure was also noted.

**10. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2009-10 - OUTTURN**

The Deputy Chief Executive, Derek Macnab, introduced the out-turn report on the Key Performance Indicators adopted for 2009/10.

A range of fifty-eight KPI's were adopted for 2009/10; next year this would come down to forty-nine. The panel had set an overall target last year of 80% and 70% for this year. 31 (53.4%) had achieved their performance target for 2009/10, but there were still some that could not currently be reported on. If these were on target, then the total would go up to over 60%.

**LPI 24 (b)** – *quality of the Council's Website* – this had recently achieved an independent accreditation rating in the top 25% in the country. The Website will be re-launched in September. It has also been nominated for a national award.

**LPI 49** – *number of pupils visiting museums and galleries in organised school groups* – this has now dropped of the KPI list, but it would continue to be monitored.

**LPI 02 (a, b & c)** – *hackney carriage / private hire licence applications* – to get a consistent rule applied to all three indicators.

**LPI 28** – *number of working days lost due to sickness absence* – noted that the target was not being achieved, but it was heading in the right direction. 21% of staff have 70% of the absences, mostly long term. It was suggested that if a person was off for over six weeks then they should be taken out of the figures as it would distort them. The Panel agreed to that the responsible officer be invited to the September 2010 meeting to provide a detailed report on the background to this indicator and the steps being taken to improve it.

**AGREED:** That the Assistant Director HR be invited to the September meeting to give a detailed report on sickness absences.

**LPI 39** – *rent arrears as percentage of rental income* – this indicator was not doing so well this year due to the recession. Also, there is a unit now being used for museum storage and there was one long standing vacancy – if these were taken into account then the Council would be meeting its target.

**LPI 184** – *food establishments which are broadly compliant with food hygiene law* – target to be revisited at the first quarter.

**NI 195(a)** – *improved street and environmental cleanliness* – the 11% figures was questioned, should it be 9%? To be clarified at the September meeting.

**NI 196** – *improved street and environmental cleanliness (Fly-tipping and Annual)* – to keep track of, as figures were getting worse.

**NI 158** – *percentage of non-decent council homes* – noted that at the end of a seven year programme the Council had reached its target of 0%, a significant achievement given that there are very few other authorities who have reached the target.

**NI 160** – *local authority tenant's satisfaction with landlord services* – noted that the DCLG were asking landlords not to undertake this survey this year. Councils will need to wait and see what national guidance emerges.

**LPI 04** – *rent collected as a proportion of rents owed on Housing Revenue Account dwellings* – asked how other Councils were doing on this indicator, it was noted that they were experiencing the same problems as us. Their rent collections were also going down. The target for next year would be 97%.

**LPI 16** – *Average time for processing new benefit claims* - noted that new claims tended to take longer to process, but the trend was in the right direction and an improvement plan was being put into place.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Panel noted the Council's outturn performance for 2009/10 in relation to the Key Performance Indicators adopted for the year.

**11. CONSULTATION PLAN 2010/11 AND REGISTER 2009/10**

The Market Research and Consultation Officer, Val Loftis, introduced the report on the Consultation Plan 2010/11 and Register 2009/10.

Every year a list of all consultations planned and carried out by the Council was published on the website and reported to this scrutiny panel.

It was noted that:

- Officers were carrying out more consultation internally since the SNAP software had been in use. Using these online surveys over 24,000 A4 pages, envelopes and return postage had been saved;
- The consultation plan was not static and was always being updated, such as the recently commissioned Council Website Survey and a Benefits Survey;
- The Consultation Register was a list of consultation exercises which have been carried out for or by the Council from March 2009 to March 2010;
- The Council generated about 2 to 3 surveys each month and were listed on the website;
- A revised Guide to consultation was being drafted which would include any new legislation coming up and best practice for local authorities; and
- Officers are trying to improve the register and it was agreed by the Panel that members would like a blanket list of all minor Housing Surveys regarding trees and shrubs in the future.

Members liked the layout of the report detailing the consultations undertaken and found the background comments to them very useful.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Panel noted the Consultation Plan for 2010/11 setting out the issues on which public consultation was planned to be undertaken during the municipal year and the detail of those consultation exercises completed during 2009/10.

**12. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY - PROGRESS REPORT 2009/10**

The Panel noted that the Government had introduced new equality legislation in the Equality Bill 2010, which both extended and simplified the Council's responsibility towards equality and diversity. The bill had extended the range of groups covered by equalities legislation to include, faith/belief, sexual orientation and gender reassignment and had placed two new duties on public bodies. The first of which was the 'Equality Duty' which required that people must be treated fairly and equally. The second duty was 'The Socio-Economic Duty' which requires public bodies to consider an individual's background and where they were born when providing services. The

Equality Bill also required public bodies to tackle discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and encourage good community relations.

The Council was performing better than hoped and was approaching the 'Achieving' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government. There would be an assessment carried out later this year.

A Corporate Equality Working Group had been set up in May 2009 to provide support to implementing the Council's Corporate Equality Action Plan and progress the overall equality agenda. They had also undertaken a staff equality survey.

Members requested an updating report later in the year, in respect of the Council's progress in meeting the 'Achieving' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Panel noted the current progress in relation to the development and implementation of the Council's approach to Equality and Diversity and with regard to specific equality initiatives.
- (2) That an updating report be brought back to this Panel later in the municipal year.

**13. 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.

**14. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The dates for the future meetings of this Panel were noted.