

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY
PANEL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 27 MARCH 2008
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 8.00 PM**

Members Present: J M Whitehouse (Chairman), G Mohindra (Vice-Chairman), R Bassett, J Hart, D Jacobs, Mrs P Smith and K Chana

Other members present: Mrs D Collins, D Stallan and C Whitbread

Apologies for Absence: M Colling, R Morgan and Mrs P Richardson

Officers Present D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), P Maddock (Assistant Head of Finance), P Maginnis (Human Resources Manager), S Tautz (Performance Improvement Manager), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

52. 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.

53. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The panel noted that Councillor K Chana was substituting for Councillor M Colling.

54. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made.

55. NOTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes from the previous meeting held on 11 February 2008 were agreed.

56. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted the Terms of Reference and the Work Programme.

Terms of Reference

It was noted that:

- Item 1(a) of the terms of reference relating to Best Value Performance Indicators would be amended to reflect the new National Indicators coming into force in April 2008;
- That a suggestion would be made to the main Overview and Scrutiny Panel that a separate Customers Services Panel be set up in the new year;
- That performance monitoring in relation to the Council's statutory equality duties to be added to the Panel's Terms of Reference for the new year.

Work Programme

It was noted that Item 8, CPA improvement Plan – Performance Monitoring, would be deleted from the work programme, as all substantial actions had now been completed.

Councillor Mrs Smith asked for a position statement on item 5 of the work Programme, the Local Area Agreement (LAA) – Performance Monitoring. The Deputy Chief Executive replied that officers were now focusing on discussions with the County Council on LAA2. There was not, as yet, an outturn report on LAA1, which has run its course. But, one could be brought to this Panel in the new year if members desired.

It was also noted that LAA2 should be added to the new Terms of Reference.

57. REVIEW OF BEST VALUE AND LOCAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Panel noted that all service directors had undertaken a review of the current BVPI and LPI sets, with a view to the possible adoption of some existing BVPIs as LPIs from 2008/09 onwards, where these continued to reflect local priorities but had not been brought forward into the new National Indicator (NI) set in a broadly similar form.

At its last meeting this Panel undertook an initial review of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) adopted for 2007/08, looking at whether these priority indicators should also be carried forward into a new LPI suite. The results of these reviews of existing performance indicators and proposals for the adoption of a new suite of LPIs were set out for the consideration of the Panel, with proposed new LPIs highlighted. The review had resulted in the proposed deletion of several existing indicators, and the transfer of others to relevant business plans. In addition, it was noted that a range of asset management related LPIs had also recently been adopted as a result of recommendations made by the Audit Commission through the annual Use of Resources Assessment. These proposals were considered and agreed by the Cabinet at its meeting on 10 March 2008.

The Panel also noted that the Corporate Executive Forum and the Management Board had reviewed the National Indicator Set and had expressed specific concern over NI 14 (Avoidable Contact). This new indicator seeks to measure the average number of customer contacts (telephone, email or in-person) for each resolved request, in order to manage future demand resulting from customer contact that would be unnecessary if public authorities could get it right the first time, join up parts of the public sector for the customer so that they do not need to make multiple contacts, manage signposting and referral both within and across agencies, and set clear expectations at the outset so that the customer knows what to expect.

The Panel considered the proposed indicators, it was noted that some were carried forward in broadly similar form, such as the planning indicators. Some of these would be monitored at service level within Business Plans and not directly by members, which will be available in the member's room.

The Chairman noted that LPI H10 a, b and c on single homeless households placed in bed and breakfast, hostel and other temporary accommodation, measure different things and are not consistent. The Portfolio Holder for Housing replied that they are separate indicators. The Performance Improvement Manager added that they were likely to have originally derived from former Best Value Indicators.

Councillor Jacobs commented that the BVPI's on benefit fraud were not considered to be meaningful, although he thought them to be quite useful. The Assistant Head of Finance commented that the wording for BVPI 76c was wrong and it should be 'investigations carried out', and the Council were currently still collecting this kind of information. The Deputy Chief Executive concurred that it could be included in the new LPIs or be included in the appropriate Service Plan to be reported on at the end of the year. However, Councillor Mrs Collins did not think that this was a sensible criterion to check fraud by. The Assistant Head of Finance agreed that it just gave a number and did not strictly measuring a performance, so was not really relevant. However, he agreed to talk to the Director of Finance to find an indicator that better defines this type of criteria.

The Panel agreed to retain KPI BV79a as an LPI, Accuracy of Processing Benefit Claims, as the other indicators did not cover accuracy, only speed.

The Chairman noted that there was wholesale deletion of the Leisure and Young People Portfolio indicators; he asked if it was considered that a few should have been kept. The Deputy Chief Executive said some were contained within the Leisure Management Contract based around participation. The LPIs taken out were considered disproportionately difficult to collect and un-user-friendly, providing little value as management information.

Councillor Mrs Smith asked about LPI L1 (number of parishes in which the Council provides leisure opportunities) and L2 (number of parishes in which the Council has enabled leisure opportunities) which were proposed to be deleted. Would such information be collected in the future, perhaps on an ad-hoc basis when needed? The Deputy Chief Executive said that local liaison was part of general working in Leisure; who were regularly engaged in joint work with Parish and Town Councils.

RESOLVED:

1. The proposals agreed by the Cabinet for the continued reporting and monitoring of appropriate existing Best Value and Local Performance Indicators, following the introduction of the new National Outcome and Indicator Set from April 2008, be noted and that BV79a, Accuracy of processing benefit claims be added to the Local Performance Indicator set.
2. That the concerns of the Corporate Executive Forum and Management Board in respect of the future collection and reporting of performance information in relation to National Indicator 14 (Avoidable Contact), be noted.

58. RACE EQUALITY SCHEME AND PROGRESS WITH EQUALITIES WORK

The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the Race Equality Scheme and progress with general equalities work report. The Council is required under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to take actions which: a) eliminate unlawful discrimination; b) promote equality of opportunity; and c) promote good race relations. This is the type of work that the Council does generally to ensure that our services are acceptable to all members of the community. It is the Council's responsibility to consult with members of the Community, such as the recent consultation held with the representatives of the Disabled Community of the district.

In order to show how it will meet these duties, public bodies are required to produce a Race Equality Scheme (RES) and review it every three years. This also provides an opportunity for the Authority to explain the values, principles and standards that guide its approach to race equality. EFDC's first RES covered the period 2005-2008, and is now therefore due for review.

Councillor Jacobs noted that the report is based on information taken from the census carried out seven years ago, and asked if this information was being updated. He was told that the Council is looking at updating its information together with the LSP who are looking at purchasing analytical tools for use and to update its database.

Councillor Jacobs asked how it was possible to achieve a fair representation of racial or disabled groups within the district's workforce. The Human Resources Manager replied that the Council would welcome applications from any group. They would advertise in a range of publications to cover all these groups, and accept anyone as long as they were the best person for the post. The Deputy Chief Executive added that they had no influence over the make up of the general population of the district, but were happy to reflect this make up as one of the major employers of the district. The Council would happily make any reasonable adjustments for people with special needs, if they were the best person for that job.

Councillor Mrs Collins commented that with the low percentage of ethnic minorities in the district and thus being employed by the Council, even a small loss of one or two people would reflect as a big percentage loss in our figures. Councillor Mrs Collins asked about the loss of 6 ethnic minority staff during 2006/07, was there any particular reason for this? The Human Resources Manager said that despite having exit interviews no particular problems had been highlighted. Most of these officers had just gone on to better paid jobs.

Councillor Bassett asked, that with the expansion of the EU, has the Council seen an increase in the amount of Europeans workers. The Human Resources Manager replied that had not been a noticeable increase, but there was some increase in European workers in agency staff, such as ground maintenance workers.

Councillor Mrs Smith asked where the report goes to next; once this Panel has agreed the recommendations. The Performance Improvement Manager said that it was an ongoing process as the data had to be reviewed on a regular basis; the monitoring and updating report will go to members. This report will eventually go to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then to the Cabinet.

It was noted that all policies developed by the Council have to have an eye towards the race, disability and gender schemes. Councillor Mrs Collins asked how officers identify priorities from rarely heard from groups. The Deputy Chief Executive said that officers were undertaking some research into this. Officers also have access to the Youth Council, elderly persons forum and disabled persons groups.

It was noted that the equalities work was not on the Panel's terms of reference but it was agreed that it should be added in the new year.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel:

Race Equality Scheme

1. Noted the requirement to update the Race Equality Scheme (RES) on a three yearly basis;
Commented on the proposed redrafted Scheme;
Noted that the results of the community consultation on the revised draft will be reported to Cabinet; and
2. Recommends to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that a report be made to Cabinet proposing the adoption of the revised Scheme.

Equality Monitoring Policy

3. Noted the development of the Equality Monitoring Policy, and that Directorates will now consider which services should be monitored in fulfilment of the Council's statutory duties; and
4. Noted the outcomes from recent equality monitoring as set out in Appendix One to the RES 'Monitoring our Equality Duties 2007/08'

Equalities Impact Assessments

5. Noted that all Impact Assessments have been completed as required under the various strands of Equalities legislation, and that these form the basis for action planning in Directorates on equalities matters, and for the Corporate Equalities Action Plan.

Corporate Equalities Action Plan

6. Noted that this action plan has been updated to reflect progress with equalities work.

Consultation on the Gender and Disability Equality Schemes

7. Noted the consultation work taking place on the Gender and Disability Equality Schemes.

59. GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME AND DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the report on the Council's Gender Equality and Disability Equality Scheme. The Panel noted that the Council is required under the Equality Act 2006 to take actions which promote gender equality, proactively taking forward the statutory duties placed upon it. The general statutory duties placed upon the Council are:

- To eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment; and
- To promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

In addition the Council has specific statutory duties as follows:

- To prepare and publish a Gender Equality Scheme;
- To consider the need to develop actions to address the causes of any gender pay gap;
- To gather and use information on how the Council's policies affect gender equality;
- To consult stakeholders and take account of any relevant information;
- To assess the impact of its current and proposed policies and practices on gender equality
- To implement the actions set out in its Gender Equality Scheme; and

- To report against the scheme every year and review the scheme every three years.

This report was to inform the Committee of progress which has been made with the implementation of this scheme.

The Panel noted that this also should be added to their terms of reference for the coming new municipal year.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel noted the progress that has been made with implementing the Gender Equality Scheme and Disability Equality Scheme.

60. 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 the Race, Gender and Disability Schemes and to request that it be added to the future terms of reference.

61. FUTURE MEETINGS

The meeting noted that this was the last meeting of this Panel for this municipal year. The Chairman offered his thanks to the members and officers for their hard work during the year. The Chairman was, in his turn, thanked for his chairmanship during the year.