

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny 3 **Date:** 7 April 2005

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices,
High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 – 9.00 p.m.

Members Present: Councillors Mrs D Collins (Chairman), F Maclaine (Vice-Chairman), M Cohen, M Colling, J Demetriou, T Farr, A Green, J Hart, J Markham, R Morgan, D Stallan

Other Councillors: J Knapman, C Whitbread

Apologies: Mrs M Boatman, R Goold, J M Whitehouse

Officers Present: P Haywood (Joint Chief Executive – Resources), R Palmer (Head of Finance), T Tidey (Head of Human Resources and Performance Management), C O'Boyle (Head of Legal, Administration and Estates), A Scott (Head of ICT Services), R Barwell, G Lunnun, Z Folley (Research and Democratic Services)

48. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2005 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

49. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that there had been no substitute members appointed to attend the meeting.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made pursuant to the Council's Code of Members Conduct.

51. MATTERS ARISING

It was noted that there were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

52. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no urgent business for consideration at the meeting.

53. ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED:

That Agenda item 7 (Best Value Performance Indicators 2004/05) be taken as the next item of business.

54. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2004/05

The Committee considered details of the Council's performance for the third quarter of 2004/05 for the Finance and Performance Management, Corporate Support Services and ICT and People First Portfolios.

The Finance and Performance Management Portfolio Holder reported that overall the relevant services were short staffed and that this had affected performance in some areas. He questioned whether resources should be allocated towards addressing this shortfall.

- **Finance and Performance Management**

(i) The Percentages of Invoices for Commercial Goods and Services that were paid by the Authority within 30 days of such invoices being received by the Authority (BV8)

The Portfolio Holder advised that the target for this indicator had not been met. He advised that progress was being made in this area and that he was hopeful that performance would be in the top quartile next year.

(ii) Percentage of Council Tax Collected (BV9)

It was noted that compared to last year, performance against this target had decreased. The Portfolio Holder reported that this was partly due to the consequences of the changes to IT system which had now been completed.

(iii) Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. The number of investigations employed per 1000 caseload (BV76B)

The Head of Finance reported that the target would not be met as there was currently an Investigation Officer vacancy. He stated that the post had recently been advertised and as a result an experienced officer had been appointed. He advised that the successful applicant was serving out their notice with their current employers and would be joining the section shortly.

(iv) Speed of processing average time for processing new claims in days (BV7 8A)

The Portfolio Holder suggested that further improvements against this target needed to be made to ensure that the needs of claimants were met.

- (v) Percentage of Projects in approved Audit Plan completed (SS4A)

The Joint Chief Executive (Resources) reported that 86% of approved audit had been completed during the third quarter. He advised that a significant amount of planned audits had been completed during the latter part of the year and that this factor accounted for the improvements. It was noted that productive time measured the time spent on audit work.

- (vi) Percentage of telephone calls answered within 10 seconds ()

It was reported that this indicator measured direct calls to the services. The Finance and Performance Management Portfolio Holder stated that performance for this service needed to be improved. The Joint Chief Executive (Resources) reported that performance against the indicator reflected the need for officers to be away from their desks in order to deal with the backlog in work caused by the effect of the IT implementation. It was suggested that it would be more useful if actual numbers rather than percentage figures were shown for this indicator.

- **ICT and Corporate Support Services**

- (i) The number of working days lost due to sickness absence (BV12)

The Head of Human Resources and Performance Management reported that the target for this indicator for the third quarter had not quite been achieved. He advised that the information, however, was given based upon an estimate of performance using data available from the HR payroll system. It was noted that from 1 April 2005 the data would be up-to-date and a full picture could then be given. It was also noted that new procedures for absence recording would be put into place with effect from 1 April 2005. New initiatives would also be implemented from that date to deal with sickness absence to ensure performance against this indicator was improved.

- (ii) The Percentage of Local Authority employees declaring that they met the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 disability definition compared with the percentage of economically active disabled people in their local authority area (BV16AB)

It was reported that consideration was being given to initiatives aimed at raising performance against this indicator. It was noted that this could involve the implementation of different types of job advertising techniques. It was also noted that a survey which asked employees to declare whether they considered themselves to have any disabilities would be undertaken over the forthcoming year.

- (iii) The number of types of interaction that are enabled for electronic delivery as a percentage of types of interactions that are legally permissible for electronic delivery (BV157)

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported that the content of the website had increased and nearly met the target defined by the ODPM for this target. He advised that new software would be implemented to improve the search facility on the website and that interactions had significantly increased over the last year and now averaged 120 a day. It was suggested that information on job vacancies at the Authority should be made more accessible especially for non-Council employees.

- **Democratic Services**

- (i) Percentage compliance with statutory requirements for registration of interests within one month and percentages of executive decisions made by Cabinet members under delegated powers (DS4)

The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported that the above indicators would be deleted from 2005/06. He advised that consideration was being given to whether more executive decisions could be made under delegated powers to speed up the decision making process. It was noted that this could include changing the definition of a key decision to enable Portfolio Holders to take more decisions which at present had to be referred to the Cabinet.

- (ii) Percentage of electoral registration annual canvassers forms returned (DS1)

It is reported that the current indicator was still based on the register only being updated once a year at the annual audit. It was noted that with the introduction nationally of the register whereby changes can be made on a monthly basis there was no longer such an incentive for electors to complete and return a form at the annual audit. The Head of Research and Democratic Services reported that in recognition of this change a more realistic target was being proposed for 2005/06.

- (iii) Percentage compliance with statutory requirement for declarations of acceptance of office within two months (DS2)

It was reported that all Town and Parish declarations had actually been completed within the required timescale. The figures however implied that the timescale had been exceeded as they took into account the period between declarations being submitted and sent on to the District Council.

RESOLVED:

That the Council's performance for the third quarter of 2004/05 in relation to Best Value and Local Performance Indicators for the Corporate Support Services and ICT, Finance and Performance Management and the People First Portfolios be noted.

55. E-GOVERNMENT

The Committee received a report on the Council's e-government initiatives. The Head of ICT presented the report as the Portfolio Holder for ICT was not in attendance. He advised that the main focus for the plan was to use modern information and technology to improve the quality of public services and the way that local government delivered and managed its services. He drew attention to the projects undertaken by the Council which had benefited from the Government Implementing E-government Grants (IEG) together with the proposed IEG capital grant allocation for 2005/06 and the ongoing corporate ICT maintenance costs of these projects.

The Committee were advised that to monitor progress with the initiative and the required level of future capital grants, the Government had placed a duty on all local authorities to produce an IEG Government return which sets out the Council's current

status for electronically enabling all interactions by January 2005. The Head of ICT reported that the IEG return was the mechanism which allowed local authorities access to central Government grant and that as part of this year's return the Government had introduced two new elements to the monitoring of E-government targets. These centred around the current Best Value Performance Indicator on the percentage of enabled interactions and the ODPM introduction of priority outcomes for E-Government. The Committee noted the current IEG return which included the Council's progress with the priority outcome exercise. The Head of ICT reported that a response to the return had not yet been received.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the progress made with the implementation of the Council's current E-government strategy. Members were reminded of the strategy main themes which focused on the use of e-government's initiatives to improve customer services and corporate ICT systems. It was reported that the Council had moved forward several specific e-government projects focused on the Council's e-government strategy. It was noted that a specific officer group had been set up to monitor progress on these projects.

The Committee were also advised that the Council was being assisted in delivering its e-government objectives by the Essex On-line Partnership. The Head of ICT reported that the partnership had provided capacity to undertake specialist e-government research and assist with the implementation of Essex wide ICT infrastructure projects. It was noted that the Council had a formal commitment to the on-line partnership for a further two years and that based on its current performance would greatly assist the Council with its outstanding ICT objectives.

The Committee noted that the report before Members would be considered in detail by a standing panel in the New Year. It was suggested that Members of the new panel should ideally have some knowledge of ICT issues to facilitate the consideration of the issue.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the IEG capital grant allocation for 2005/06 be noted;
- (2) That the IEG Government return that was submitted to the ODPM in December 2004 be noted; and
- (3) That the consideration of the implementation of IEG priority outcomes and the local Government strategy be considered by a new standing panel in the 2005/06.

CHAIRMAN