

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY
PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 16 JUNE 2009
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 9.20 PM**

Members Present: D Jacobs (Chairman), G Mohindra (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, J Hart, J Philip, A Watts, Mrs L Wagland and J M Whitehouse

Other members present: C Whitbread

Apologies for Absence: J Collier and W Pryor

Officers Present D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), R Wilson (Assistant Director Operations (Housing)), P Maddock (Assistant Director Accountancy), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), V Loftis (Market Research Consultation Officer), P Maginnis (Assistant Director Human Resources), R Pavey (Assistant Head of Finance), S Tautz (Performance Improvement Manager) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

1. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made.

3. MINUTES

The notes from the previous meeting held on 31 March 2009 were agreed.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Terms of Reference and Work Programme were noted.

5. CONSULTATION PLAN 2009/10 AND REGISTER 2008/09

The Panel received a report on the Council's consultation plan for 2009/10 and the register for 2008/09. Valerie Loftis, the Market Research Consultation Officer informed the Panel that this summarised the consultations undertaken by the council. All consultation and engagement exercises undertaken by and on behalf of the council were required to comply with the provisions of the Public Consultation and Engagement Strategy and to this end a revised consultation guide was produced in order to standardise consultation approaches and methodologies wherever possible.

The Panel noted that all dates shown in the plan were best estimates or in some cases had not yet been decided. There were a number of very small scale ad-hoc

surveys carried out such as 'Housing Interview Exit Surveys' and 'Safer Communities Exit Surveys' which had not been reported on.

Probably the most significant however, with regard to size and impact on the community, was the major work which had been ongoing around the Development Plan Provision for Gypsies and Travellers.

Mrs Loftis informed the Panel that under ref.5091, 'Debden Community Consultation event' under the method section there was a typo and it should read as 'events will also be held in Sheering, Roydon, Waltham Abbey and North Weald.'

The meeting noted that the Council was currently carrying out Staff Focus Groups for a Gender Equalities Survey; these focus groups for both male and female staff would help set an appropriate questionnaire to all staff during the summer. A pilot survey was carried out last year with the training course, 'Springboard' for women group.

The Consultation Register incorporated the results of consultation exercises undertaken during the proceeding 12 months and gave details as to the purpose, the start and finish dates, and the service area that carried out the survey. Also, where the results were published and some key findings.

The most significant consultation in terms of size and impact were:

- The Big Youth Debate (ref 6081);
- Loughton Broadway Regeneration (ref 6083);
- Waste and Recycling Service (ref 8082);
- The Place Survey (ref 9085); and
- Call for Sites and the Gypsy and Travellers Development of Options.

The Gypsy and Travellers Development of Options Survey and Call for Sites were clearly the most significant area for consultation in 2008 and a great deal of work was still being carried out on the Local Development Framework (LDF). The survey was principally carried out by Planning Services with support from Public Relations in setting up an online questionnaire and the use of a software consultant to handle and analyse the huge response to both the paper based and online consultation.

Councillor Mrs Wagland commented that she had not seen anything in the report about the Statement of Community Involvement. In addition, Councillor Mrs Wagland commented that the results of the Gender Equality Scheme did not square with the feedback she had received from the 'Springboard' exercise. She also thought it would be useful to have as many figures on this annual report as possible, such as the number of people consulted and the number of returns.

Councillor Watts asked about the Statement of Community Involvement (ref.4093), when would the council decide what to do with this. The Director of Planning and Economic Development replied that they had not been able to progress this as they were now doing a separate Gypsy and Traveller exercise. Councillor Mrs Wagland said it would be a useful document and as they had now finished with the Gypsy and Traveller exercise could they not look back and take the best bits and put them in with our own consultation results with the LDF. Councillor Watts said the problem seemed to be a resourcing one, not enough staff to do both exercises. The Head of Service and the Portfolio Holder should sort this out. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that the Director of Planning could bring a report on this to a future Planning Scrutiny Standing Panel indicating what was happening and how they were to proceed. This was agreed.

Councillor Philip queried the 'Development Plan Provision for Gypsies and Travellers Sustainability Appraisals/Strategic Environment (ref. 4091). The report said the consultation had started on 21 April, and he was concerned that he had missed it? The Director of Planning and Economic Development replied that it was a target date and they were still working on the documents with County Officers. The study would need to be put to the LDF Cabinet Committee. Their next meeting was to be early July.

Councillor Philips said that a lot of the plan did not seem to be updated. The Chairman agreed and added that it would be helpful if officers could update the plan more thoroughly.

Councillor Watts inquired about the 'Public Consultation Decision Matrix for Strategic Assessment Priority Considerations' (ref. 1082), what did the title mean? He was informed that it was a survey carried out by the Safer Communities Team to determine crime and disorder priorities in the district.

Councillor Philip asked about the 'Transport and Access needs Travel Survey' (ref. 2081). He was told that it was with county officers to follow up action on the survey results.

Councillor Philip also asked about the 'Homeless interviews exit survey' (ref.3082). He was advised by the Assistant Director of Housing that both 3082 and 3083 had been completed and that the register needed updating. The Panel noted that 6083 (Loughton Broadway Regeneration Consultation) also need updating.

The Panel also noted that the Older People's Summit (ref. 6082) had only been attended by the service providers and not by any of the public so it was judged not fit for purpose.

Councillor Watts commented that the Audit Commission would be looking at this register and it would not hold up well. The Deputy Chief Executive said that it showed that there was a lot of detailed consultation taking place across the council and he expected the Audit Commission to be satisfied with the scope of the consultation activity. However, officers did accept the points of detail made by the councillors.

Councillor Philip said it would be useful if they had some results to go with the 'Leaseholders Satisfaction with Information Survey' (ref. 9081). The Assistant Director of Housing accepted this and reported that the results were reported back to the Leaseholders Association, there were no major issues that were raised by the survey, although some individual leaseholder queries were responded to in writing.

Councillor Philips queried the Call for Sites (ref. 10081); he thought they had already dealt with this. The Director of Planning and Economic Development said it had got complicated by the gypsy and travellers plan. As such, the results were not fully known. They had lots of comments from the private sector and a few from public bodies. A lot of the results had been put on the website.

The Panel asked that the 'Safer Communities Survey' (ref. 2092) be deleted from the register as it was part of a management trainee exercise and the outcome was inconclusive.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse commented that the register was generally missing the parking reviews that were now underway. It would be helpful to learn good practice

from these surveys and provide more information on the results. Tom Carne the Public Relations and Marketing Officer said they were looking at this and were asking people to further analyse their results for the next review.

RESOLVED:

That the Consultation Plan for 2009/10 and Register 2008/09 be noted and the points raised with respect to the inclusion of additional data be included in future years.

6. PROVISIONAL REVENUE OUTTURN 2008/09

The Assistant Director Accountancy, Peter Maddock introduced the report on the provisional Revenue Outturn for 2008/09. The Panel noted that the final closing balance on 31 March 2009 was £8.19million.

The Continuing Services Budget (CSB) expenditure was £509,000 below the original estimate and £187,000 below the revised. In common with recent years salary savings made up a large proportion of this saving. The District Development Fund (DDF) showed an under spend of £169,000 net, even taking into account a £280,000 carry forward. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) balance was still in excess of £6 million and fairly healthy.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the overall 2008/09 revenue out-turn for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account be noted; and

(2) That as detailed, the carry forward of £280,000 District Development Fund expenditure be noted.

7. PROVISIONAL CAPITAL OUTTURN 2008/09

The Assistant Director Accountancy, Peter Maddock introduced the report on the Provisional Capital Outturn 2008/09. This report set out the Council's capital programme for 2008/09, in terms of expenditure and financing and compared the actual outturn figures with the revised estimates. The revised estimates were those agreed at Cabinet on 5 February 2009.

The overall position in 2008/09 was that a total of £10,474,000 was spent on capital schemes, compared to a revised estimate of £12,900,000. This represented an underspend of £2,426,000 or 19% on the Council's revised capital budget. The underspend was evenly balanced between General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) schemes. Expenditure on General Fund projects totalled £3,801,000, which was £892,000 or 19% less than anticipated, whilst expenditure on the HRA totalled £6,673,000, which was £1,534,000 and again 19% less than anticipated.

The majority of the underspends on the General Fund and HRA schemes relate to slippage of expenditure and it is proposed that this is re-phased into 2009/10. The three General Fund projects which incurred the greatest slippage were Bobbingworth Tip, the Civic Office Works and the Children's Play Programme.

In addition to the above, the General Capital Contingency was not fully utilised in 2008/09 and it was suggested that the full unallocated sum of £177,000 be carried

forward to cover unforeseen capital expenditure requirements in 2009/10.

RESOLVED:

That the provisional outturn report for 2008/09 be noted.

8. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2008/09 - OUTTURN

The Performance Improvement Manager, Mr S Tautz, introduced the key performance Indicators (KPI) relevant to the Council's core business and its corporate priorities adopted by the Cabinet each year.

He started by drawing the Panel's attention to an error in the report. Paragraph 11(c) should read: "6 (54.5%) of those (11) that did not achieve the performance target for 2008/09 were within 5% of the target for the year."

The Panel were asked to consider the Council's performance for 2008/09 in relation to the Key Performance Indicators adopted for the year. Not all the indicators had finished outcomes so could not be reported as yet. So far they had achieved 57.7% success for the year. The introduction of the new National Indicators set from 1st April 2009 had meant that it was difficult to assess overall levels of KPI improvement between 2007/08 and 2008/09.

The Panel noted the KPIs for 2008/09 was as follows:

- (a) 15 (44.1%) achieved the performance target for 2008/09;
- (b) 11 (32.3%) did not achieve the performance target for 2008/09;
- (c) 6 (54.5%%) of those (11) that did not achieve the performance target for 2008/09 were within 5% of the target for the year;
- (d) 6 (17.6%) cannot currently be reported;
- (e) 1 (2.9%) was subject to a revised National Indicator definition that removed the Council's responsibility to report; and
- (f) 1 (2.9%) secured no progress as a result of competing priorities.

Councillor Watts asked when would the 2010/11 KPIs be agreed. He was advised that it was brought forward to March 2010 prior to the beginning of the new municipal year, when they would be looking to identify targets based on third quarter data.

Councillor Whitehouse commented that the Council was some way off the 75% originally proposed. Was there any common factor on the missed targets or were these individual problems. The Deputy Chief Executive, Derek Macnab said it was difficult to identify any particular pattern although the main area of impact had been identified in the Value for Money Review which had also identified that other authorities had taken a more flexible and creative approach to the way data was recorded. We have however, been steady over the year. Councillor Whitehouse asked how we could move on from being just steady. Mr Macnab said the council needed to reinvest in poorly performing services.

Councillor Whitbread added that any money saved would be needed to keep council tax down. Mr Macnab said that the council needed to be more robust in its improvement plans. Councillor Whitehouse said that this committee had expressed doubts whether this was a sensible target to set at the time. Councillor Whitbread believed that the council needed to aim high to achieve the best it could. They had to work for a better performance. Councillor Whitehouse questioned whether the council

should just aim high but ignore resource issues. Councillor Whitbread said that they were not ignoring them; but it must use its resources to its best advantage.

NI 57a - "*processing of planning applications – ‘major’ applications types*". Councillor Jacobs noted that there was a problem with senior staff vacancies and the working associated with this. The Director of Planning and Economic Development, John Preston, said that the leaving of a senior officer had caused problems. There were also a small amount of applications because of the depressed economic climate. Councillor Mrs Wagland commented that major applications warranted a longer period for assessment. On minor applications, other councils insist on completely valid and detailed applications to assess them. Things such as this should be looked at; we must have all the information before we start the clock running. Mr Preston agreed and said that they had some draft requirements laid out and he would report back to a future panel meeting. The Panel agreed that the relevant part of the 'Planning Improvement Plan' could be put into the 'corrective action' part of the report next time to inform the panel of any actions taken.

NI 160 – *Local Authority Tenants' Satisfaction with Landlord services*. The Assistant Director Operations (Housing), Roger Wilson, explained that in real terms there had been an improvement in the figures, although there had been a change in the definition to exclude sheltered housing residents (some of the Council's most satisfied customers). The national average was 77% and EFDC was at 83.5%, and therefore doing very well. Councillor Jacobs asked if the target was set too high since the changes came in. Mr Wilson agreed that in the circumstances they were.

NI 195(a) – *Improved Street and Environmental Cleanliness*. The Director of Environment and Street Scene, John Gilbert, said that the indicator had been doing well but had been changed. They were now making some improvement on it.

NI 195(b) – *Improved Street and Environmental Cleanliness*. Councillor Philip was worried about the rising trend in quarter four. Mr Gilbert said that detritus was a difficult and challenging target. The trend was not in the right direction and officers would keep an eye on it.

NI 197 – *Improved Local Biodiversity*. The Panel noted that this was no longer needed as the definition had changed in the middle of the year.

LPI 02c – *Average Time (days) to Determine Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licences Under Delegated Authority*. The Panel noted that these generally got done on the same day. They thought it should be kept for a full year and reviewed at the end.

LPI 12 – *Affordable Homes built and acquired*. Asked if the current economic situation was affecting this target; Mr Wilson replied that it was partly that and things would improve on the economic upturn. The district had always suffered from lack of sites, although around 57 properties are planned for the current year.

LPI 14 – *Percentage of Council Tax Collected*. Councillor Hart commented that this seemed to be a very good outcome. The Assistant Head of Finance, Mr R Pavey replied that the majority paid by direct debit. They are also working with the CAB who are encouraging them to talk to us and negotiate long term repayment deals. Councillor Jacobs asked if the target figure should be adjusted down. He was told it was a government target; it would take some time for them to bring the targets down.

LPI 16 – *Average time (days) for processing new benefits claims.* The Chairman asked if the meeting could have an update on this. The Assistant Director Accountancy, Mr Maddock said that contractors were still working on updating the IT system. There was a backlog and a big increase in caseloads, but performance has improved in the first two months of this financial year. Efficiency had gone up but so had the claims. Councillor Whitbread added that the hit squad had worked well, although the workload had doubled and the section had to weather four resignations.

LPI 17 – *Average time (days) for processing notification of change of circumstances for benefit claims.* Asked why the fourth quarter figure had halved, Mr Maddock said it was due to a change in the definition of this indicator.

LPI 28 – *Number of working days lost due to sickness absence.* The Assistant Director of Human Resources, Paula Maginnis said it was a disappointing year as they lost their dedicated officer dealing with sickness. They had appointed a temporary member of staff and are holding training sessions for managers. There had been a drop in short term absences so far this year and were hoping it would improve. Councillor Mrs Wagland said that three sets of statistics tended to come together, sickness, recruitment and retention. There was a need to look at the place of work and the organisation to see if they needed to be improved. There was a need to look at this in a broader way. Ms Maginnis said they were going to do another staff survey to see where they could improve. Mr Macnab commented that 47% of the workforce did not have a single day off sick last year and that 80% of absences were attributable to 20% of the workforce. Councillor Mrs Wagland replied that the Council needed to do some joined up thinking. The council can't recruit to vacancies and this causes problems. The Council should look at how it tackles the recruitment shortfall. Comparisons with other local authorities would be useful. She would like to know why we were putting people off coming to us. Councillor Whitbread said that a few people were responsible for the sickness figures and they were improving on recruitment. Ms Maginnis replied that they were working a recruitment agency, although Local Authority recruitment was a very specialised labour market.

RESOLVED:

That the Council's performance for 2008/09 in relation to the Key Performance Indicators adopted by the Cabinet for the year, be noted.

9. COUNCIL PLAN 2006-2010 - ANNUAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2008/09

The Performance Improvement Manager, Mr S Tautz, introduced the report on the Council Plan for 2006 to 2010 for the period to 31 March 2009. This is the authority's key strategic 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. This was the monitoring report for the third year of a four year monitoring plan. The Panel noted that the figures were in draft and that the figures in the progress report for 31 March 2009, on IP5 (page 123 of the agenda) were out of date. Up to date figures were to be found in paragraph 11 of page 49 of the agenda.

The Panel noted that:

- the progress report for HN5, for 31 March 2009 should say 28 weeks and not 17 weeks.
- HN6, progress report for March 2009 said that a review on street cleansing was currently underway, looking for better Value for Money and better performance.

- there was an article in the Members Bulletin associated with HN7 (problems associated with vehicle parking) saying the Epping review was starting, with a view to implementation towards the end of the year. Councillor Mrs Wagland asked if this meant that people would get the consultation papers while on holiday. She was told that this may be but it had to be done as it had been delayed. It was agreed that the consultation period would be extended from 21 days to 28 days.
- under SC2 'overall level of recorded crime in the district', the Neighbourhood Action Panels in the district were of varying effectiveness.
- on FL1 'leisure management contract', that SLM continued to be pressed for information. Noted it was a national problem with SLM who were overextended with contracts.
- the local plan was getting further out of date, but officers were working on this.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That performance against the objectives, targets and actions contained in the Council Plan for 2006 to 2010, for the period to 31 March 2009 be noted; and
- (2) that the consultation period for HN7 be extended from 21 days to 28 days.

10. 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.

11. FUTURE MEETINGS

The schedule for future meetings were noted.