

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**NOTES OF A MEETING OF FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY**  
**PANEL**  
**HELD ON THURSDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2010**  
**IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING**  
**AT 7.10 - 9.03 PM**

**Members Present:** G Mohindra (Chairman), R Cohen (Vice-Chairman), Ms R Brookes, D Jacobs, D C Johnson, J Philip, Ms S Watson and J M Whitehouse

**Other members present:** R Bassett, D Stallan and C Whitbread

**Apologies for Absence:** W Breare-Hall, B Judd, W Pryor and Mrs J Sutcliffe

**Officers Present** D Macnab (Acting Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), A Hall (Director of Housing), J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), P Maddock (Assistant Director (Accountancy)), R Pavey (Assistant Director (Revenues)), P Maginnis (Assistant Director (Human Resources)), M Warr (Performance Improvement Officer) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

**15. NOMINATION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

Due to the late arrival of Councillor R Cohen the Vice Chairman, Councillor J Philip was nominated to act as Vice Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

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

The Panel noted that Councillor Jon Whitehouse was substituting for Councillor Mrs Sutcliffe.

**17. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No declarations of interest were made.

**18. MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 10 June 2010 were agreed.

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

The Panel noted their Terms of Reference and Work Programme.

**20. AVOIDABLE CONTACT**

The Assistant Director of Finance, Mr R Pavey introduced the report on the improvement plan on avoidable contact (LPI NI 14). The Panel noted that the focus would be on telephone contact where the majority of avoidable contact lay. It was also anticipated that it could be addressed in a much broader range of services through 2010/11 by gathering data from all channels of contact – face to face, correspondence, e-mail and telephone.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse was glad that this was directed at doing practical things to help the customers and would like to see complex letters etc. simplified. He also noted that there was an 'M3 Logging system' – was this for the Environment Services only? Mr Pavey replied that the different directorates had their own systems in place.

Councillor Bassett noted that officers were trying to simplify English used, was this because of a problem with foreign languages. Mr Pavey said that no problems like that had been reported so far, although the Council has a list of officers who could help in the translations of various languages and also had the use of translation services.

**RESOLVED:**

That the LPI NI 14 (Avoidable Contact) Improvement Plan, the milestones for achievement and the timetable for 2010/11 exercise be noted.

**21. COST AND PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS 2010/11**

The Chairman of the Panel reported on the meeting of the Value for Money Sub-group on cost and performance benchmarking analysis. It was noted that the Audit Commission had changed the way they gave us information and that we were talking to them to clarify this before their imminent demise. The Sub-group was also looking to address the presentation of data and improve it and were looking at areas for further review such as refuse collection and would ask the Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel to look at it. The Sub-group would also like to look at the homelessness prevention work undertaken by the Council.

**22. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2010/11 - QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

The Performance Improvement Officer, Mike Warr, introduced the Quarter 1 performance monitoring report on the Key Performance Indicators for 2010/11. Each KPI was reported on individually and also included was the Key Performance Indicator Improvement Plan for 2010/11 for each of the indicators that was under target for the first three months of the year. Officers had also done away with the confusing arrow indicating the direction of improvement required.

The Panel went through the indicators individually, noting:

**LPI 50:** *Number of elderly people participating in physical activity programmes* - the panel was told that the overall downwards trend was a seasonal variation.

**NI 192:** *% of household waste sent for re-use, recycling and composting* – Mr Gilbert was congratulated on the numbers achieved.

**NI 195a:** *Improved street and Environment cleanliness (Litter)* – this was looking better because officers were now devoting more client officer time to street cleaning generally.

**NI 196:** *Improved street and environmental cleanliness (Fly-Tipping)* – this had dropped down to a grade 3. This was because officers were now recording the data in a different way and had now a solid base to work from.

**Noted that:** Councillor Johnson wanted a report to go to the next Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel on Fly-tipping and what was being done to prosecute offenders.

**LPI 51:** *Environmental & Neighbourhood Teams – Service Standard* – noted that the figure would have been higher and exceeded target if the sickness absence had been less.

**Noted that:** Councillor Johnson wanted to be informed if the data collected was used in real time to alter performance. Mr Gilbert to find out.

**NI 181:** *The time taken to process Housing benefit/Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events* – noted that this was monitored weekly and had reduced the target from 15 to 13 days. The current actual achieved target was 10.01 days.

Councillors wanted to know if this target was subject to seasonal changes could not an average target be used reflecting this seasonal effect. Or ideally changing resources over the year to meet that target rather than change the target. Officers were unsure if the Council had the discretion to change the target in this way, but would find out and report back.

**LPI 14:** *Percentage of Council Tax collected* – noted that 70% of Council Tax was paid by Direct Debit and especially now in the current financial climate each % point paid was valuable for the council's finances.

**LPI 15:** *Percentage of national Non-Domestic Rates collected* – Councillor Stallan praised the professionalism of the bailiffs used by the Council. He had recently been out with them to observe their work. He observed that they needed the facility to take card payments which would prove helpful in taking payments and noted that there was a growth in telephone and internet payments.

**LPI 16:** *Average time for processing new benefit claims* – noted that the trend was going in the right direction.

**NI 156:** *The number of households living in temporary accommodation* – noted that the VFM sub-group wanted to scrutinise this.

**LPI 04:** *Rent collected as a proportion of rents owed on Housing Revenue Account dwellings* – noted that the Quarter 4 figure should read 97.47 and not 98.71.

**LPI 08:** *Urgent repairs undertaken within target times* – the trend in the figures were not encouraging but a new management structure was to be introduced and all vacant post are to be filled within a few weeks; with this in place they hoped to meet the target.

**LPI 53:** *The number of completed fraud investigations carried out by the Benefits Investigation Team* – noted that the target of 500 was unrealistic and officers would like it changed to 300. The new target of 300 was agreed by the Panel but they also asked for a report back on the sections successes incorporating a cost benefit analysis.

**AGREED:** that the target for LPI 53 be reduced to 300.

**NI 157b:** *Processing of planning applications – 'Minor' applications types* – noted that the Planning Scrutiny Panel had set a target of 80% for this indicator.

**LPI 45:** *The number of appeals allowed against refusal of planning applications...* - noted that the target for this had now been set at 28%.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Panel considered and commented upon the Council's performance for the first three months of 2010/11, in relation to the Key Performance Indicators adopted for the year.

**23. SICKNESS ABSENCE**

The Assistant Director of Corporate Support Services (HR), Paula Maginnis, introduced a report on Council's absence figures for 2009/10. This report went to the last JCC meeting and will go on to the next Cabinet meeting. Along with the data given by age and reason, there was also an improvement plan. The meeting noted that in December 2006 the Cabinet reduced the trigger level, for the number of working days to 8 days from 10 days. The trigger level for the number of occasions has remained the same at 5 during a rolling twelve-month period. The outturn figure for 2009/10 was 8.35 days, compared to 10.85 days in 2008/09.

The Panel noted that:

- A high percentage of sick leave was for long term absences. The age profile had a bearing on this and a number of these cases had gone on ill health retirement or had retired.
- It was unfortunate that of the long term absences 12 had been involved in road accidents.
- 40% of staff had taken no sick leave at all.
- The Panel would like to see quarterly sick absence figures.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) The Panel noted the report and agreed the actions set below:
  - (i) Obtain agreement to recruit to Management Information Officer role (completed);
  - (ii) Recruit to Management Information Officer role (advertising vacancy);
  - (iii) Update Management Board on current cases where the triggers levels have been met (reports to be provided with Q2 and Q4 figures);
  - (iv) Provide monthly reports to Directors/Assistant Directors (ongoing);
  - (v) Develop e-learning module to compliment Managing Absence training (to be finalised);
  - (vi) Submit report to Cabinet on 2009/2010 absence figures.
- (2) That sickness absence figures be brought to this Panel on a quarterly basis.

**24. AUDIT COMMISSION BENEFITS INSPECTION**

The Assistant Director of Finance, Peter Maddock, introduced the progress report on the action plan following the Audit Commission inspection of this Authorities' Benefits

Service. Both the Post Inspection Action Plan and the Right Benefit Action Plan was included in the report to the Panel.

The Panel noted that:

- Text messaging had been set up to communicate with clients (emailing had proved to be an unpopular method of communication);
- Liaison meeting with JCP and CAB were being formalised and will have minutes and action points;
- Benefit customers were surveyed on satisfaction with opening hours and were found to be satisfied with them;
- Benefit awareness was important in current climate, schools, the social services, leisure centres and libraries were used to step up awareness of them;
- Housing staff are trained in advising about benefits;
- All performance data collected are used by manager and staff on a weekly basis to identify any needs.

**RESOLVED:**

That the progress made against the Post Inspection Action Plan be noted.

## **25. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING**

The Assistant Director of Finance, Peter Maddock, introduced the quarterly financial monitoring report providing a comparison between the original profiled budgets for the period ended 30 June 2010 and the actual expenditure or income.

The Panel noted that:

- The salaries schedule showed an underspend of £182,000 or 3.6%;
- Building Control is managed under a ringfenced account that over a three year period should break even;
- The Works Unit has been undergoing a process of downsizing to core employees with other work being outsourced;
- The above when taken out of the equation, would take the underspends overall amounts to 2.1%;
- The Council was having some difficulties in finding parties to invest with;
- Recoveries from the Heritable Bank amounted to 34.98% of the loans made, slightly higher than expected;
- Development Control at month 3 was £20,000 below expectations;
- Hackney Carriage licensing income was again above budgeted levels;
- Due to a delay in invoicing the May payment for Waste Management Contractors had not been made by 30 June 2010, this was part of the reason for the underspend on Special Services within the HRA;
- Officers are now starting the 2011/12 budget process and part of this process is to look carefully at the 2009/10 budget;
- Members asked that consistent language be used over the various databases in operation.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Revenue and Capital Financial Monitoring report for the first quarter of 2010/11 be noted.

**26. VALUE FOR MONEY AND DATA QUALITY STRATEGIES 2010-2013**

The Acting Chief Executive, Derek Macnab, introduced the value for Money and Data Quality Strategies 2010-2013. The Council was required under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions and services are exercised, having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The Value for Money strategy set out the Council's overall approach to ensure the provision of value for money services. The Data Quality Strategy set out the Council's management arrangements to secure the quality of the data used to manage its functions and services. The strategies built upon the work done over the last two years and sought to address issues arising from recent Use of Resources judgements and highlight areas of best practice.

A revised Value for Money strategy covering the three year period from 2010/11 to 2012/13 was considered by the Panel along with a revised Data Quality Strategy covering the same period. It was noted that these strategies would go to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee at the end of September.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council's draft Value for Money and Data Quality Strategies for 2010 /11 to 2012/13 be noted and agreed by the Panel.

**27. 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.

**28. FUTURE MEETINGS**

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