

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY
PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 20 MARCH 2012
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 9.25 PM

Members Present:	D Jacobs (Chairman), G Waller (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens (Chairman of Council), R Bassett, K Chana (Deputy Portfolio Holder (Safer and Greener)), R Cohen and P Keska
Other members present:	Mrs D Collins, Mrs M McEwen, G Mohindra, J Philip, D Stallan and C Whitbread
Apologies for Absence:	J Hart
Officers Present	D Macnab (Acting Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), A Hall (Director of Housing), P Maddock (Assistant Director (Accountancy)), P Maginnis (Assistant Director (Human Resources)), D Newton (Assistant Director (ICT)), N Richardson (Assistant Director (Development Control)), S Tautz (Performance Improvement Manager), J Lewis (Benefits Manager) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

45. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

46. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Pursuant to the Council Code for Members Conduct, Councillor Richard Bassett declared a personal interest in agenda item 8, Epping Forest District Council Website, by virtue of working for Hewlett Packard. He declared that his interests were not prejudicial and that he would remain for the discussion and consideration of the item.

47. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 November 2011 were agreed.

48. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted their Terms of Reference and Work Programme.

49. SICKNESS ABSENCES

The Panel received the absence figures for the third quarter in 2011/12. The figures were arranged by directorate and by the number who had met the trigger level and those who had more than 4 weeks' absences. As it covered the winter period there was a slight increase in colds and flu absences. It was noted that two thirds of the staff had not had any sickness absences in this period.

The Panel asked if they could have benchmark figures for other comparable local authorities so that they could compare the figures.

Councillor Angold-Stephens asked if any of the musculo-skeletal problems had anything to do with work. The Assistant Director of Corporate Support Services (HR), Paula Maginnis, said that she would look into it. These could be compared with reports on accidents at work.

The Panel noted that:

- Flu vaccinations are offered to the staff and about 150 people had taken up the offer;
- Also that the figures for stress were split into home and work categories;
- Accidents were also split that way; and
- That the attached tables and graphs were difficult to read when printed in black and white and consideration should be given for presenting them in some other form.

RESOLVED:

That the latest report on sick absences was noted.

50. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING

This report provided a comparison between the original estimate (for the period ending 31 December 2011) and the actual expenditure or income as applicable. This was the third quarter report for 2011/12 and covered the period 1 April 2011 to 31 December 2011.

The Original Estimate expected £171,000 to be taken from General Fund balances to balance the budget however the probable outturn was expected to add £69,000 to General Fund balances this is a movement of £240,000.

The Panel noted that:

- The salaries schedule showed an underspend of £110,000 or 0.8%. this compared to 2.0% at this time last year;
- Expenditure on salaries at month 9 was £259,000, lower than at this point in 2010/11;
- Whilst investment income to date was in line it looked as if the final figure could now fall short of the updated budget by as much as £30,000 (due to the low interest rates);
- The Heritable Bank - Current indications were still that the Council would receive between 86 and 90% of the original investment back however the final amounts will not be received until toward the end of 2012/13 at the earliest;
- Building Control Income was generally on track when compared to the budget but was slightly down on the previous year;
- Development Control income - In order to reach the target income around £70,000 would be required in March. This did not look at all likely and a figure of nearer £30,000 was expected, meaning a shortfall of around £40,000;
- Hackney Carriage licensing income was slightly above expectations but down slightly on last years actual to date;
- Income from MoT's carried out by Fleet Operations had been revised downwards due to the withdrawal of a local dealer;
- Introduction of the Local Land Charges (Amendment) Rules 2010, had led to

a reduction in income levels compared to previous years and there was currently uncertainty regarding the ability to charge for certain types of land searches;

- The Housing Repairs Fund showed an underspend of £355,000. Expenditure tended to be higher in the final quarter, but even taking that into account, an underspend looked likely.

Councillor Bassett asked why the expenditure for Building Maintenance had 54% of expenditure occurring in the final quarter. He was told that this was a reoccurring theme across the Council, although 54% was quite high; last year there were also a lot of late expenditures.

In regard to the fall in MoT's, it was noted that Corporation of London work had fallen off. The Council charges just under the market rate for the MoT's in line with other services.

It was noted that the our council's contract with the museum at Broxbourne would earn us in the region of £10,000.

A large increase in expenditure was noted for the Highways General Fund figures; Mr Maddock said he would investigate the reason for this.

The Panel noted that there was an underspend under Special Services of the Housing Revenue Account. They were told that this was due to the difficulty of setting charges at the beginning of the year.

An amendment was made to the comments on ICT projects. The last sentence should not read "that there will be a slippage of approximately £50,000" but should read "that there will be a carry forward of approximately £50,000".

It was noted that generally the Disabled Facilities Grants from the ECC were lower.

Under the Housing Revenue Account, other capital works, Councillor Bassett was concerned that the £4million in the other category should be broken down to better list the expenditures. Mr Maddock said he would look at it and break it down for the next report.

As a general comment, Councillor Bassett said that they saw a lot of items carried forward, some from last year. It would be interesting to see how it affected the budgets and projects. More accurate forecasting was called for.

RESOLVED:

That the Revenue and Capital financial monitoring report for the third quarter of 2011/12 be noted.

51. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

The Assistant Director of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), David Newton introduced the report updating the Panel on ICT issues for the council.

Having again taken part in the UK SOCITM benchmarking exercise, it was discovered that this year there were 10 less local authorities taking part than last year. Only 2 other District Councils took part in this year's survey and, although the

Council did well against other larger authorities, it was debatable whether it was a meaningful comparison. This exercise had cost the council about £4,200, which had been good value historically but now with 10 other District Councils having dropped out it did seem pointless with only 2 other District Councils to do this. Officers could continue to use methodology and measure their performance for their year on year improvement. They were not aware of any other organisation that carried out this benchmarking exercise.

Councillor Bassett said they could ask other Council IT departments to look at our system and we could look at theirs as a comparison. Consultants could also be used, but they were expensive.

Our performance was rated very high with internet and website availability rated at 100%. We had good procurement practices, with EFDC having the cheapest hardware costs, despite no longer being a member of the Essex on Line Partnership.

The costs of telephone calls was again identified as high, a new contract with BT would reduce future costs. There was also the high maintenance charge for the old telephony equipment currently in place. A project to replace this obsolete switch with a digital Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) was still on-going. There were still a lot of printers compared to the number of staff, but the introduction of Multi Function Devices (printer, scanners and photocopier in one) would reduce the number of printers in time.

The action plan for 2011/12 was reviewed and it was noted that a number of projects were now completed.

The work on the disaster recovery project was ongoing. This would improve the ability of the Council to recover from a major disaster by storing data at a remote site and enabling decommissioning of the old computer suite and removing associated overheads.

The new intranet/internet websites was now live and being tested. It was based on low cost open source software. The new website had been demonstrated to members and was expected to go live in July 2012.

The Council was currently using the 2003 version of Microsoft Office; the licence to upgrade to Office 2010 had already been purchased but it had not been possible to rollout and will be scheduled for the coming year.

Councillor Bassett supported getting the telephone system upgraded and asked how much it would cost and was told it was in the region of between £200k and £250K.

RESOLVED:

That the findings of the recent Society of Information Technology Management (SOCTIM) benchmarking report for 2010/11 and the progress made on the ICT projects be noted.

52. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2011/12 -QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Performance Improvement Manager, Mr S Tautz, introduced the report on the Council's performance against its adopted Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the third quarter of 2011/12. Members were reminded that a target had been set for at least 70% of the KPIs to achieve target performance by the end of the year. The report now had the improvement plans immediately following on to each KPI.

The Panel noted that 16 (59.26%) of the KPIs had achieved their third quarter performance target and that 11 (40.74%) of the indicators had not achieved the third quarter performance target.

KPI 30: *% of invoices received paid within 30 days* - it was noted that last year at quarter 3 it was up to 98% but this year it had dropped to 90%. Were there more problems this year? Officers were playing catch up all year; it was currently up to 93% and would get to 94%. These difficulties reflected the difficulties at the beginning of the year.

KPI 33: *average days to process new benefit claims* - the case load remained high and were at just below 27 days and would probably not reach the 23 day target. New claims were taking longer to process, although 4 years ago they took about 34 days, so a 26/27 day period was a considerable improvement. The introduction of universal credit and staff shortages had not helped.

KPI 34: *average days to process notices of a change in benefits claimants* - this target will be met, as it was last year.

KPI 35: *number of benefit fraud investigations completed by the Council* - noted that the target would be met. Asked if we were geared up to meet new Council Tax Benefit system coming our way Mr Lewis (Benefits Manager) said that they were looking at an Essex Wide Scheme and to our software suppliers. It was noted that the Essex Finance Officers Group was working hard on this and a report would be going to Cabinet soon.

The Panel also noted that there had been 7 successful prosecutions and 9 cases where fines were imposed. Also 5 formal cautions were administered.

KPI 41: *average days it takes to re-let a council property* - it was noted that the Council were unlikely to meet the target for this indicator. Officers were piloting a number of approaches to void properties. They were currently only 2 days over target.

KPI 42: *% of emergency repairs to council properties completed within 24 hours* – the Mears IT system was now up and running so figures for quarter 4 would be substantially better.

KPI 43: *% of urgent repairs to council properties completed within 5 working days* – this was down to 86% from 91%. This was because officers were trying to shift the percentage of jobs done as an emergency as it was more effective to carry out planned repairs.

KPI 46: *number of affordable homes built* – there was slippage in this as the large developments were outside the Council's control. There was a long lead in time for these schemes and the targets for completions are based on what schemes officers know are coming up.

KPI 52: *% of minor planning applications processed within 8 weeks* – noted that it was hard to achieve this target on a four week planning sub-committee meeting cycle. Planning section will also be 25% down next year as they will be losing two planning officers.

KPI 53: *% of other planning applications processed within 8 weeks* – noted that the target would not be met this year.

The Panel then went on to review the proposed targets for 2012/13 and altered the following:

KPI 10: *working days lost due to sickness absences* – the Panel agreed that the target should be reduced from 7.75 days to 7.5 days for 2012/13.

KPI 20: *how much recycled waste collected per household* – the Panel agreed that the target should be reduced to 395kg for 2012/13.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the third quarter performance in relation to the quarterly monitored Key Performance Indicators for 2011/12 be noted; and
- (2) Subject to the concurrence of the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee the proposed targets for KPI 10 and KPI 20 for 2012/13 be revised, as recommended by this Panel.

53. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Panel noted the successful completion of their work programme for the year.