

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY
PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2012
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 8.29 PM

Members Present:	A Lion (Chairman), Ms S Watson (Vice-Chairman), G Chambers, C Finn, J Hart, D Jacobs, Ms H Kane, H Mann and G Mohindra
Other members present:	C Whitbread, Ms S Stavrou, D Stallan, G Waller and J M Whitehouse
Apologies for Absence:	Mrs R Gadsby
Officers Present	P Maddock (Assistant Director (Accountancy)), D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), A Hall (Director of Housing), P Maginnis (Assistant Director (Human Resources)), N Richardson (Assistant Director (Development Control)), S Tautz (Performance Improvement Manager), J Twinn (Assistant Director (Benefits)) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

25. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

26. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made.

27. MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 September 2012 were agreed subject to noting that the third paragraph of minute item 21 should read the KPI for 2012/13 and not 2011/12.

28. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted that part of their Terms of Reference was to review and monitor progress the implementation of ICT systems and that a new telephone system was being developed for the Civic Offices. They agreed they would like the head of ICT to come to a future meeting and report on this new system.

29. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2012/13 - QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Deputy Chief Executive, Derek Macnab introduced the second quarter performance report for 2012/13 in relation to the Key Performance Indicators adopted for this year. It was noted that this report had been to a recent Management Board meeting who had asked for a more expanded comments section to be added to the report especially in respect of those indicators where it was uncertain whether the target for the year would be achieved. It was suggested that each of these KPIs should also reflect details of the responsible Portfolio Holder in the summary sheet.

The Panel noted that the six-month position with regard to the achievement of target performance for the KPIs for 2012/13 was as follows:

- (a) 16 (59.26%) indicators had achieved the second performance target; and
- (b) 11 (40.74%) indicators had not achieved the second quarter performance target.

The following predicted end of year performance for the KPIs was suggested by service directors:

- (a) 16 (59.26%) indicators were anticipated to achieve the year-end performance target;
- (b) 2 (7.41%) indicators were not anticipated to achieve the year-end performance target; and
- (c) The achievement of the year-end performance target for 9 (33.33%) indicators was uncertain.

KPI 21 – *what % of all household waste was sent to be recycled, reused or composted* – It was noted that the annual target was 60% but fluctuated over the quarters. The final target was still uncertain as indicated. Officers were targeting flats and houses in multiple occupation to boost their totals; they were also reviewing their publicity and information sent out to the public.

KPI 30 – *what % of the invoices we received were paid within 30 days* – Asked what the Council had signed up to for the paying of invoices, officers replied that the business charter said that we paid local suppliers within 20 days and had the same aspiration to pay other suppliers within that time period. We were currently running at about an 82% success rate. It was noted that Housing Services had the most invoices to process but their main priority was to carry out the housing repairs. They have now improved their handling of invoices which would improve their turnaround times.

KPI 32 – *what % of the district's annual business rates were collected* – Councillor Jacobs could not understand why it indicated that the target would not be met as it had met the target for the first two quarters. He was told that officers were concerned because of the expected refund of the Olympic sites. Members indicated that they would like a note put in the comments section of future reports to reflect this.

KPI 34 – *on average, how many days did it take us to process notices of a change in a benefit claimant's circumstances* – members noted that the target was likely to be met by the end of the year but did not meet the target for the first two quarters. Would not an 'uncertain' outcome be more appropriate? Officers replied that they always caught up in the fourth quarter because of the way their IT system worked. Having said that, it was noted that this was not a normal year because of the major welfare reforms in the pipeline. However, officers were still confident that they would reach their target.

KPI 35 – *how many benefit fraud investigations were completed by the Council* – members asked if the investigations unit been transferred as yet to the proposed central body. Officers said that that was not destined to happen until April 2013, but has now been put back to at least April 2014 and maybe 2015. But they had recently recruited two experienced staff members to fill in some of the gaps in the section. Junior staff are also being trained up.

KPI 41 – *on average, how many days did it take us to re-let a Council property* – asked if this indicator included the long term vacant units, officers answered that it

did not. Members then asked if something to this effect could be put in the comments section for future reports, including the time vacant.

KPI 42 – *what % of emergency repairs to council properties were completed within 24 hours* – Members congratulated housing staff on achieving a 100% record.

KPI 44 – *what % of routine repairs to our council properties were completed within six weeks* – Members asked what was the definition of routine, emergency and urgent repairs, and that these definitions be included in future reports. Officers said that a definitive list was in the tenant's handbook. The Portfolio Holder had just signed a decision to provide more challenging targets as they now have a new systems in place. The old KPIs were no longer relevant because of the appointment system now in place. They now have new, more challenging and relevant targets. The Housing Portfolio holder added that they were now cracking down on non-emergency call outs that the tenants had classed as emergencies but were just routine. They would be letting their tenants know exactly what was classed as urgent and what was routine.

KPI 52 – *what % of minor planning applications were processed within 8 weeks (delegated decisions only from 2012/13)* – members wanted more information on this indicator. The Planning Directorate representative replied that they had split this out to improve their targets. But they were two Planning Officers down and they hoped to get extra staff and improve their performance.

KPI 55 – *what % of planning applications, refused by Council Members against the planning officer's recommendation, were granted permission on appeal* – members wanted to know why it had been classed as uncertain when only one quarter had not been met in the last 5 recorded. They were told that this indicator had a tendency to fluctuate quite a lot and so were uncertain of the outcome.

RESOLVED:

That performance for the second quarter of the 2012/13 in relation to the Key Performance Indicators adopted for the year, be noted.

30. VALUE FOR MONEY AND DATA QUALITY STRATEGIES - 2012-13 PROGRESS REPORT

The Performance Improvement Manager, Mr S Tautz, introduced a progress report in respect of the Value for Money (VFM) and Data Quality Strategies for 2010/13. It was noted that the Council was required to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way its functions and services were exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Value for Money). Most of the actions in the plans were weighted towards the first year. The Value for Money Strategy set out the Council's overall approach to ensuring 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.

Both strategies had recently been considered by Management Board.

Councillor Jacobs noted that both strategies needed to be reviewed and updated soon. There was still the problem that they could not compare like with like; what was VFM in a local council context; what or who do we compare ourselves with. The

Deputy Chief Executive agreed but noted that these strategies did give a general direction of travel allowing us to see where we were going.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the progress against the Council's Value for Money and Data Quality Strategies for 2012/13 be noted;
- (2) That the analysis of the Audit Commission's Value for Money profile, detailing the value for money 'performance' of the Council and other benchmarked authorities, be recruited to the Scrutiny Panel as some members seemed not to have received this following the last meeting; and
- (3) That suggestions or proposals for future action, analysis, investigation or report in respect of particular areas of concern in relation to the data presented in the analysis, be made to the Performance Improvement Manager as soon as possible.

31. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Assistant Director of Finance, Peter Maddock, introduced the quarterly financial monitoring report, providing a comparison between the original estimates for the period ended 30 September 2012 and the annual expenditure or income applicable.

The Panel noted that:

- The salaries figure showed an underspend of £265,000 or 2.7% (compared to £413,000 or 4.2% at this time last year);
- Investment interest levels in 2012/13 were below expectation at quarter 2 and significantly below the prior year. there was no obvious signs of rates improving in the longer term;
- The Council had received £1.872m of the original £2.5m investment placed with Heritable Bank so far; bringing the recovery up to 74.5%. Council can still expect to recover between 86 and 90% of the original investment (this estimate was lower last year). The final payment was not due until April 2013;
- Development Control income at Month 6 was £27,000 below expectations;
- Building Control income was down by £56,000. Activity in the building industry was at a low level and fewer applications were coming through. With expenditure also being down, it was hoped to at least break even on the account (though this now looked less certain);
- Hackney Carriage licensing was in line with expectations and other licensing activities were ahead of expectations;
- Income from MOT's carried out by Fleet Operations was below expectations;
- Local Land Charges was below the prior year but above the original estimate which suggested that that income would exceed budget for the year; and
- The Housing Repairs Fund showed an underspend of £894,000. However, a larger than average proportion of the expenditure was seasonal, falling in the winter months.

Councillor Watson wanted to know if salaries were looked at under the Value for Money criteria, such as looking at total planning applications by the number in planning, if not could this be done. She also wanted to know if we could show our longstanding debts. We need to look at the areas where we are billing and our ability to meet targets. There may be good reasons why we were late in paying these bills and it may be easier to change the layout of the budget to cover these anomalies.

Councillor Jacobs wanted the comments in the comments column for Annex 7 (Housing General Fund) to be expanded to include the actual amounts that were late. Councillor Watson would also like information on how big or small they were.

RESOLVED:

That the Revenue and Capital financial monitoring report for the second quarter of 2012/13 be noted.

32. FEES AND CHARGES 2013/14

The Assistant Director of Finance, Peter Maddock, took the Panel through the Fees and Charges Report for 2013/14. There were a number of areas where the Council had discretion on the level of fees and charges that it set. It was noted that any general increase would be based on the September Retail Prices Index increase of 2.6%.

It was noted that:

- Although the Council has held fees where they could and put up others by the minimum they could, they still had to identify £250k of savings for next year;
- Development Control fee levels were controlled by Central Government who have announced that an increase of 15% was proposed in recognition of the inflation experienced since 2008 when fees were last increased. It was not clear when this charge would be implemented;
- A separate report would be put up on car parking fees;
- It was proposed that licensing fees for Hackney Carriages and Vehicle Licences be frozen at current levels;
- Some forms of licensing fees are proscribed by the 2003 Licensing Act while others are under the Council's discretion and these would be increased where appropriate;
- There was a need to set the fee for Zoo Licences as it was anticipated that there may be two premises that may put in an application on this; and
- Although the Council did not pick up trade waste they had to set a fee just in case, and this had been negotiated in conjunction with SITA.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposed increases to fees and charges for 2013/14 were considered and noted; and
- (2) It was noted that the September Retail Prices Index increase of 2.6% had been used as a guide.

33. SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Assistant Director (Human Resources), Paula Maginnis, introduced the sickness absence report for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 for 2012/13. The Council's target for sickness absence under KPI10 for 2012/2013 is an average of 7.5 days per employee. The Council figures for Q1 and Q2 are 1.6 days and 1.78 days against targets of 1.84 days and 1.62 days respectively for these periods. Figures for each Directorate were set out in the report.

During Q1 3.9% of staff met the trigger levels or above, 21.5% had sickness absence but did not meet the triggers and 74.6% had no absence.

During Q2 3.9% of staff met the trigger levels or above, 21.6% had sickness absence but did not meet the triggers and 74.5% had no absence.

The cumulative total for Q1 and Q2 was 3.38 days which was below the target for this period of 3.46 days.

Councillor Chambers was impressed with the low figures and so was Councillor Watson who also queried if such a big, all encompassing report was still needed now that that the figures were going in the right direction. However after a discussion the Panel thought that this report should continue in the same format for the time being as the Council had only recently got its absence under control. The format of the report should be considered again at a future date.

RESOLVED:

That the sickness absence report for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2, 2012/13 be noted.

34. 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.

35. FUTURE MEETINGS

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