

Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee – 7 November 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee** held on **7 November 2006** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr T G Cutmore
Vice-Chairman: Cllr D Merrick

Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr J E Grey
Cllr Mrs J A Mockford

Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr M G B Starke

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs C A Hungate, R A Oatham and J Thomass

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr C I Black

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	-	Chief Executive
R J Honey	-	Corporate Director (Internal Services)
G Woolhouse	-	Corporate Director (External Services)
Y Woodward	-	Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management
T Harper	-	Performance Improvement Officer
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

376 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

377 CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on a new corporate communication strategy.

Responding to questions, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- Whilst local media organisations will always be selective about the articles they choose to publish, the Authority should continue to proactively communicate its work. Investigation had established that the Evening Echo does not have a specific section on Rochford District news on the basis that it does not publish a Rochford edition. It could be interesting to identify overall readership levels relative to readership by District Council residents.

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- Consideration could be given as to whether it is possible/appropriate to change the “caller withheld” feature of the Council’s telephone system.
- It would be appropriate to include the term “– continuous improvement” at the end of the fifth bullet point under the Our Values heading on page 8.4. Page 8.5 could be reviewed so that wording reflects the Council’s proactive approach to communication and there could be an associated review of the wording relating to the Council’s values in next year’s Corporate Plan/Performance Plan documentation.
- The possibility of introducing a high level communications/public relations officer post is something that was considered during last years awayday budget discussions and stands as an item to be brought forward.
- It would be possible to include Member related aspects in the Communications Strategy Action Plan.

It was noted that work on the communications strategy would be ongoing and that Members should feel free to offer contributions following this particular meeting.

In terms of the telephone system, it was observed that some organisations/individuals operate systems that bar callers who withhold their number. It was also observed that potential communication problems could arise if non-answered calls were being returned.

Resolved

That the revised Corporate Communication Strategy, as appended to the report, be adopted subject to:-

- Consideration being given as to whether it is possible/appropriate to change the “caller withheld” feature of the Council’s telephone system.
- The inclusion of the term “- continuous improvement” at the end of the fifth bullet point under the Our Values heading on page 8.4.
- Review of page 8.5 so that wording reflects the Council’s pro-active approach to communication and an associated review of the wording relating to the Council’s values in next year’s Corporate Plan/Performance Plan documentation.
- The inclusion of Member related aspects in the Communication Strategy Action Plan.
- Considerations relating to the introduction of a high-level communications/public relations officer post being included in forthcoming budget awayday discussion. (CE)

378 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on the Members' Performance report for the period July to September 2006.

During discussion it was observed that the waste recycling figures could be seen as disappointing, particularly in the context of work that had been undertaken to increase reach and awareness. It was also observed that some Authorities appeared to include civic amenity collection figures in their statistics for green waste collection, which could skew inter-authority comparison figures, and that it is the relatively low green waste figure that is particularly significant for Rochford. Reference was made to the value of future performance report documentation identifying the abbreviation that is used for the Department of Work and Pensions.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- It is the case that many residents, in what is a predominately rural District, undertake their own garden composting in a way that means the Authority does not attract any credits. The possibility of addressing this aspect will be included when consideration is given to the new waste management contract specification.
- Activities such as increasing the reach of kerbside recycling to flats, the recycling awareness campaign, participation monitoring and the waste composition analysis should all assist in improving recycling figures, but this Council's performance was still likely to be less than others who provide a free kerbside green waste collection.
- Best Value Performance indicators for 2006/07 relate to the period April 2006 to end March 2007. Whilst October saw a total figure of over 16%, it was not yet known whether this level would carry over into November.
- Particular attention could be given to the statistics associated with appeals allowed against the Authority's decisions to refuse planning applications in case any adverse trends develop.

Resolved

That the performance achieved in quarter 2 of 2006/07 be noted subject to:-

- Future performance report documentation identifying the abbreviation that is used for the Department for Work and Pensions.
- Particular attention being given to the statistics associated with appeals allowed against the Authority's decisions to refuse planning applications in case any adverse trends develop. (CE)

379 CAPITAL PROGRAMME – MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management that provided an update on the financial progress in completing the General Fund Capital Programme for 2006/07.

Responding to questions, the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management advised that there would be liaison with the Council's Transportation Manager with a view to ensuring that the parking space markings at the market car park, Rayleigh are set out effectively following the market car park resurfacing work.

Resolved

That the content of the monitoring report on the General Fund Capital Programme for 2006/07 be noted. (HFAPM)

380 BUDGET MONITORING STATEMENT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management on the material items of income and expenditure in the 2006/07 budget for the first half of the year and a number of new items included in the budget for 2006/07.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- The fee income associated with local land charges related to an increase in the volume of searches.
- Under the circumstances, the position with regard to parking fees income would be closely monitored over the December/January period to see if the estimate can be revised upwards.
- The investigation of alternative working patterns for parking attendants is around the possibility of targeting locations where there are known parking problems at particular times. There are indications that forthcoming legislation will increase the Council's traffic enforcement and regulation role. There will be future reports on this aspect as specific information becomes known.
- Information could be provided on the costs associated with the IT contracts of other local authorities.

During discussion reference was made to the key role of information technology in supporting the provision of services. Whilst hardware costs may have reduced over the years, labour costs will not have done. There was no reason to imagine that the costs associated with the Council's IT contract are high compared to the costs faced by other authorities, although it is important to remain alert to achieving value. The performance of the contractor is an important part of an effective contract.

Resolved

That the content of the budget monitoring statement report be noted, subject to the provision of information on the costs associated with the IT contracts of other local authorities. (HFAPM)

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Resolved

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining business on the grounds that exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

381 REPORT OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE – 24 OCTOBER 2006

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Review Committee relating to the window cleaning contract.

The discussion on this matter is set out on the exempt appendix to these minutes.

On a motion, moved by Councillor Mrs J A Mockford and seconded by Councillor M G B Starke it was:-

Resolved

- (1) That SBS Cleaning Services be required to stand by their original four-year fixed price tender of £17,557.48, or £4,389.37 per annum, or withdraw from the contract for window cleaning. Should SBS Cleaning Services decide to withdraw, the contract to be awarded to the next lowest tenderer.
- (2) That future tenders for contracts relating to the cleaning and maintenance of the Council's buildings be dealt with by the Property Services Department. (HAMS)

The meeting closed at 8.56 pm.

Chairman

Date