

Executive Board – 11 December 2007

Minutes of the meeting of the **Executive Board** held on **11 December 2007** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr T G Cutmore

Cllr J M Pullen
Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr D G Stansby

Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr P F A Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr K H Hudson

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren - Chief Executive
R J Honey - Corporate Director (Internal Services)
G Woolhouse - Corporate Director (External Services)
S Fowler - Head of Information and Customer Services
J Bostock - Committee Services Manager

420 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 27 November and 29 November 2007 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

421 TWO TIER WORKING IN ESSEX

The Board considered the report of the Chief Executive which introduced Neil Kinghan's Paper on two tier working in Essex and sought comments on its content.

It was noted that officers had already addressed some inaccurate statements within the Paper, such as the fact that there is already County Council representation on the District Council's Area Committees.

Having discussed the paper in detail it was:-

Resolved

That the following observations be made on the Neil Kinghan Paper:-

- Whilst there can no doubt be a number of positive outcomes from two tier working, such as economies of scale, it is important to remain mindful of the sovereignty and individual accountability of each Authority.

- Notwithstanding that there are some interesting inter-authority initiatives coming forward, such as those between Braintree and Colchester, it should not be the case that initiatives are introduced which do not have the support of an Authority that is expected to participate.
- Effective partnership working on aspects such as Local Area Agreements is of particular importance. In Rochford District Council's experience, more effective County Council involvement in the Local Strategic Partnership would be welcomed.
- It is important to be mindful of the need to deliver effective local government services to the public. In considering a service, the public will not necessarily differentiate between types of authority and all services should be challenged to deliver to their optimum in the public interest.
- There is some concern at an indication within the Paper that the County Council does not have procedures for notifying its own Members of decisions and County events affecting their areas.
- Any arrangements relating to developed communication should not lose sight of the valuable role that can and should be played by County Members whose divisions fall within the respective Boroughs/Districts.
- Notwithstanding the potential value of the County Council establishing an electronic notice board on its website, it is important to be mindful of the fact that not all members of the public have electronic access. (CE)

422 PEER REVIEW ACTION PLAN

The Board considered the report of the Chief Executive on the Peer Review Action Plan.

It was recognised that, given that Area Committees were at an early stage, further actions were likely to emanate from the key action of developing the role of Area Committees as a community forum.

Resolved

That, subject to recognising that further actions could emanate from developing the role of Area Committees, the Action Plan as appended to the report be agreed. (CE)

423 ACCESS TO SERVICES STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The Board considered the report of the Head of Information and Customer Services on the Council's Access to Services Strategy and Action Plan.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- There is now a public expectation that a number of issues can be dealt with by the first point of telephone contact. A standard telephone switchboard service does not provide the best fit for such expectation.
- Whilst the loss of around 12% of telephone calls compares favourably to the experience of many authorities, it would be appropriate to look to achieve a lower figure. The statistic included incoming “wrong numbers” and situations where the number has been dialled but the caller has decided they need to cancel before speaking with a switchboard operator.
- Funding for SMS test pilots had been included within the IT strategy.
- It was anticipated that the expansion of customer services at Rayleigh could be achieved through the development of skills within the existing resource. Further work on the possibilities would be required prior to any publicity.
- An action plan with timescales should be available by March 2008.
- Whilst some of the proposals within the Strategy were quite radical and would have resource implications, this should be seen in the context of overall savings and service improvements.
- Given customer preference, a review of opening hours for face-to-face services aiming to extend the hours would be an appropriate aspiration.

During discussion reference was made to the value of being able to phone an organisation and speak with an individual rather than going through an automated call response system. Reference was also made to the positive image presented by the Council’s reception staff.

The Board endorsed the observation of the Chairman that the Access to Services Strategy documentation was very useful.

Resolved

- (1) That the overall direction of the Access to Services Strategy be agreed, subject to the production of a detailed business case for the centralisation of the management of the frontline customer service and to recognition that, in view of customer preference, a review of opening hours for face to face services aiming to extend the hours would be an appropriate aspiration.
- (2) That the following ‘quick wins’ be implemented:-

- Content for the intranet on customer insight (to share knowledge and understanding amongst staff of our communities and their specific needs and preferences).
 - SMS text pilots (for young people, people with hearing impairments, antisocial behaviour hotline and feasibility on parking fine payments).
 - Feasibility studies of working with partners to develop services in Hullbridge, Great Wakering and Hockley.
 - Expansion of customer services at Rayleigh.
 - Early business process re-engineering to optimise the frontline customer service for the new refuse and recycling contracts.
 - Development of the business case to separate the switchboard function from the reception function to improve customer service at the Rochford offices.
- (3) That a detailed action plan be submitted to a future meeting of the Executive Board. (HICS)

424 ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING SOUTH ESSEX GOVERNING BODY – APPOINTEE

The Board considered the report of the Head of Information and Customer Services on the appointment of an officer to the Adult Community Learning South Essex Governing Body.

Resolved

That an officer nominee (to be confirmed) be appointed to serve on the Adult Community Learning South Essex Governing Body. (HICS)

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.

425 REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The Board considered the exempt report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on Revenues and Benefits shared services working.

Resolved

- (1) That the sharing proposal from another Authority be declined for the reasons outlined in the exempt report.
- (2) That the Authority identified in the exempt report be advised that the Council does not consider that further development of shared working is appropriate given the organisational and location factors identified in the exempt report. (CD(ES))

The meeting closed at 8.59 pm.

Chairman

Date

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