

Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 14 October 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **14 October 2003** when there were present:-

Cllr T G Cutmore (Chairman)

Cllr P A Capon
Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn
Cllr C C Langlands

Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Cllr C R Morgan

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs K A Gibbs, T Livings and J Thomass

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr Mrs T J Capon

OFFICERS PRESENT

R J Honey – Corporate Director (Law, Planning and Administration)
R Crofts – Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
S Fowler – Head of Administrative & Member Services
J Bostock – Principal Committee Administrator

Representing Vivista:-

P Jobbins – Head of Managed Services
B Hall – Senior Contract Manager
E Ellis – Contract Manager

458 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 September 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

459 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the schedule relating to progress on decisions.

Finance Best Value Review (Minute 357/03)

It was noted that a significant number of questions were associated with the returns to be made on housing benefits, many requiring a corporate response. The report would now be presented to the December cycle of meetings.

460 IT CONTRACTOR

The Chairman welcomed the representatives from Vivista who were in attendance to provide a presentation on the IT Contract and respond to questions.

The presentation covered the background to formation/nature and financing of Vivista and work undertaken over the last two years (including the day to day activity at the Rochford site and the status of existing IT equipment). Focus for the company at Rochford over the next twelve month period would centre on the complete standardisation of Microsoft Desktop Operating Systems, review of the resilience and rationalisation of the Council's Servers, review of Member access and interconnectivity of Sheltered Housing Schemes and review of the Council's e-government strategy

Responding to Member questions, the Vivista representatives advised that:-

- The last three months had seen Vivista taking stock of its activities at Rochford. It could be recognised that there had perhaps been some weaknesses in terms of the company bringing strategic proposals to the table.
- East Cambridge District Council was reviewing its IT operations and appeared unlikely to renew its contract with Vivista. Whilst the company had not acquired any new contracts since June (or any major contracts over the last 13 months) this should be seen in the context of changes in how local authorities let contracts and a company emphasis on growth through project activity with existing customers.
- There had been no recent changes to the staffing arrangement/policy at the Rochford site. The staffing resource was supplemented by personnel from other sites as necessary. The company experienced staff attrition rates at the industry standard. All personnel were asked security questions at interview, with additional security checks made in respect of security sensitive sites.
- Vivista produced monthly reports that included detail on calls logged. The Service Level Agreement provided for areas such as the time taken to respond to customer calls. The company considered that, generally speaking, performance in the context of the Service Level Agreement was acceptable.
- Training packages were often included by suppliers as part of the software acquisition process. There was no rigid programme of training, needs being assessed on a case by case basis.
- From its own indicators, the company believed it was financially stable with a long term future.

- When assessing technological changes, the company placed an emphasis on durability and resilience rather than being at the “cutting edge” (with all the associated reliability issues). Cost/benefit analysis could be associated with decisions on next stage technology.

During debate, reference was made to the many IT achievements of the Council against limited resources. Key to the Council’s approach was innovative thinking and joint working with other Authorities/organisations.

The Committee concurred with the view of the Chairman that it would be appropriate to invite Vivista to report further in approximately six months time with a view to identifying progress in a number of areas. The Vivista representatives confirmed that they would envisage having made significant in-roads within this timeframe.

Resolved

That Vivista report to the meeting scheduled for 24 March 2004 at which point the Committee would be looking for evidence of:-

- Developed communications between Vivista/Officers.
- A developed understanding of the Council’s strategic aims and ambitions.
- Maximum use being made of minimum resources.
- A pro-active approach from Vivista.
- Objectives over a three to five year period which fitted the strategic aims of the Council.
- a follow up customer perception survey being undertaken in 6 months.

461 COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT – DRAFT SELF ASSESSMENT

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which introduced an initial draft of the Council’s self-assessment for consideration and comment.

It was noted that officers would be further reviewing grammatical/length aspects. Members should provide officers with individual comments at any stage in the draft process.

The Committee undertook page by page review of the summary assessment based on the key lines of enquiry and the self assessment and made a number of specific suggestions on content.

Key Lines of Enquiry

With regard to partnerships, it was recognised that these were continually evolving throughout the County. Based on feedback from the external auditors/customer surveying, the Authority had good reason to retain services associated with planning and housing/revenue management in-house.

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Specific mention was made of the satisfaction rates associated with the Council's Taxi Voucher Scheme and how the Scheme could be highlighted as a key strength.

Draft Self-Assessment

It was felt that it would be of value to be specific about the percentage of green belt and to include references to coastal/flood areas. During debate on the identification of areas of deprivation, it was noted that the condition of the Council's housing stock would be identified via the production of the decent homes diagnostic. It was also noted that the revenue budget table would need review to identify resource allocations and that any best value indicators associated with leisure would be included.

It was agreed that aspects of the wording relating to elections could be adjusted and that the Council's proposals for Cherry Orchard and the associated Woodlands Plan could be seen in a strategic context. Reference was made to the potential value of including work associated with the monitoring of town centre schemes in references to Overview & Scrutiny activity and to the inclusion of training offered to the Parish/Town Councils and Parish and Independent Members on the Standards Committee. It was felt that the fact that Rochford came out highest in Essex in the statutory general satisfaction survey and received the lowest grant of all Essex Authorities should be highlighted. Reference should also be made to the pioneering nature of the Council's work in introducing CCTV. Aspects of activity at the Rayleigh Windmill site could be included.

With regard to community engagement, there could be merit in including reference to the Council's web site. Effective asset management developed the Council's capacity for improvement.

Resolved

That the comments outlined be considered as the Self-Assessment and supporting documentation is prepared for consideration by Council at the end of October. (CE)

The meeting closed at 10.02pm

Chairman

Date