

## **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee – 17 October 2006**

---

Minutes of the meeting of the **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee** held on **17 October 2006** when there were present:-

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

Cllr J E Grey  
Cllr Mrs J A Mockford  
Cllr R A Oatham

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

### **VISITING MEMBER**

Cllr P R Robinson

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren	- Chief Executive
R J Honey	- Corporate Director (Internal Services)
G Woolhouse	- Corporate Director (External Services)
S Fowler	- Head of Administrative and Member Services
Y Woodward	- Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management
S Logan	- Revenue and Benefits Manager
C McClellan	- Human Resources Manager
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

### **ALSO PRESENT**

S Paton, Head of Operations, Sungard Vivista

### **343 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **344 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllrs J E Grey, Mrs J A Mockford and R A Oatham each declared a personal interest in item 9 of the agenda, in relation to the Dutch Cottage, by virtue of membership of Rayleigh Town Council.

### **345 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS**

The Committee reviewed the progress on decisions schedule.

#### **Further Development of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park**

The recent Evening Echo article on the Country Park had been pleasing, with some good photographs, although it was noted that some details in the article had not been fully accurate.

**Commercial Premises – 124, 126 and 128 High Street, Great Wakering**

It was noted that officers would provide Members with an update on the tenancy situation at 124 High Street, Great Wakering.

**Land Adjoining 130 High Street, Great Wakering**

Officers would confirm to Members in writing whether the reported figure of £8,500 was accurate.

**Evaluation of CCTV Provision**

It was noted that Southend Police Division, covering Southend, Rochford and Castle Point, already had a number of covert cameras. As outlined in the progress update, a report would be submitted to this Committee in December which would incorporate a final Police view on CCTV provision and outline the way forward.

**346 SUNGARD VIVISTA UPDATE REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services introducing the six-monthly progress report from the Council's IT contractor, Sungard Vivista.

The Committee welcomed Mr Paton, Head of Operations for Sungard Vivista, to the meeting. Mr Paton was in attendance to answer any Member questions on the Sungard Vivista report.

In respect of progress made since Sungard Vivista had last reported in to Committee, Mr Paton advised that:-

- Call stack levels continued to decrease; the number of calls logged was around 300 calls per month.
- Significant changes had been made to the on site support team. A part time post has been converted to full-time, which had resulted in increased office cover.
- A new Customer Relationship Manager had been appointed, whose role was to work with the Sungard Vivista Contract Manager to improve service to the Council.
- Phase one of the Thin Client refresh project had been completed; phase two had now started, with approximately 30 PCs upgraded.
- The number of PCs within the Council had reduced, which reflected an increase in the number of Thin Client terminals.

## **Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee**

### **– 17 October 2006**

---

- The Microsoft NT 4 servers were in the process of being replaced; four had already been de-commissioned, with the remaining servers due to be de-commissioned by the end of this year.
- The e-mail servers had been upgraded and a new Revenues and Benefits server had now replaced an outdated server.
- A new dedicated Essextranet firewall had been installed.
- A number of officers in Acacia House had been provided with wireless network access.
- The Council was now benefiting from a County Council initiative, which saw the establishment of a business to business relationship with Hewlett Packard; this had resulted in a significant reduction in costs for Hewlett Packard products.

In response to a Member enquiry relating to improved call handling, Mr Paton confirmed that 95% of calls received at the call centre were answered within 5 rings, with callers transferred to a member of staff. There was no automated call pick up or automated music.

Responding to a Member query relating to the cost implications associated with checking for fraudulent on line benefits claims, Mr Paton advised that he would investigate this further and would provide Members with an update in writing. The costs within the contract covered the costs of running the Council's current IT environment; any enhancements to the contract would usually result in additional costs.

Officers confirmed, in response to a Member question about the annual cost of the IT contract, that £760,000 had been allocated in this year's budget for the contract which would be used, in part, towards the costs of annual maintenance fees to various software suppliers and for maintaining the Council's IT hardware.

Responding to Member concern about large staff turnover, Mr Paton advised that new staff often brought in new expertise, which could have a positive impact on service provision.

In response to a Member concern relating to the de-commissioning of Windows 98 on PCs, Mr Paton confirmed that Windows 98 would be de-commissioned completely by the end of October.

Members stressed the need for the Council to gain best value from the contract, which would run until 2011, and continuity of service and noted that Sungard Vivista would shortly be undertaking a customer survey of all Council staff.

In concluding the debate, Members concurred that there would be merit in

receiving a further update report from the contractor in 6 months' time.

**Resolved**

That the contents of the Sungard Vivista progress report in relation to the IT contract be noted and that a further report be made to the Committee in six months' time. (HAMS)

**347 PROGRESS REPORT – INTRODUCTION OF A REVISED PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive on implementation of a revised performance management system. It was noted that significant progress had been made in developing a comprehensive performance management system for the Council.

During debate there was a general consensus that there would be merit in asking the Review Committee to explore whether there should be a Member Champion for performance management, and to look in detail at the specific role of Member Champions.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the progress made in implementing a revised performance management system be noted.
- (2) That the Review Committee be asked to examine whether there is the need for a performance management Champion, and to examine the overall role of Member Champions, as part of its review of Committee processes. (CE)

**348 REVENUES AND BENEFITS – POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND ACTION PLANS**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on the current progress of the twelve improvement plans for revenues and benefits included in the Division's operational plan.

It was noted that all the newly agreed set of policies for the Unit were now in place and would be made available on the Council's website and to stakeholders.

In respect of progress made on the twelve improvement plans, the following was noted:-

- new claims were currently being processed within 26 days and the Council was on target for reducing this to 24 days within 2006/07.

- The Authority continued to achieve high accuracy levels of between 98% and 99% in respect of benefits processing.
- The Council was investigating the requirements for achieving Charter Mark for Revenues and Benefits.
- At the end of the first quarter of 2006/07, direct debit take up for Council Tax was 75%, well above the national average.

In response to a Member enquiry relating to the 24-days target for processing new claims, officers advised that they had written to the Department of Works and Pensions highlighting problems that were resulting in an average 2-day delay. The Council was, however, still on target to meet the 24 days' processing time.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to the Charter Mark, officers advised that they were in the process of choosing assessment centres for pre-assessment and had completed a self assessment. The process could take between 3 and 12 months but was not impinging on the unit achieving its overall targets.

**Resolved**

That the updated policies and procedures portfolio be endorsed. (CD(ES))

**349 PROCUREMENT STRATEGY – SIX MONTH REVIEW**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (External Services) on the work carried out in implementing the procurement strategy.

It was noted that this would be the last report on the current procurement action plan, as a new procurement strategy was currently being drafted by officers, which would be reported to Committee in the New Year.

**Resolved**

That progress on implementation of the current procurement strategy be noted and that a new strategy be proposed to the Committee in early 2007. (CD(ES))

**350 RISK MANAGEMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management detailing the latest corporate risk register and providing an update of progress in embedding risk management throughout the Authority.

It was noted that the latest register incorporated risks associated with the housing transfer process and with the access to services best value review.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted and that the current corporate risk register be agreed.
- (2) That the annual review of the corporate risk register be reported to the Committee in 12 months' time. (HFAPM)

**351 COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT AND BEST VALUE**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive seeking endorsement of the establishment of a Sub-Committee to oversee and contribute to the work now required in respect of an access to services best value assessment and the direction of travel assessment.

Officers advised that the access to services best value assessment would be based on new methodology produced by the Audit Commission. This Council would be the first Authority in the country to be assessed using this methodology.

It was anticipated that, during the course of the inspection, the inspection team would wish to meet the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and also the Chairmen of the main Policy Committees.

Members concurred that there would be merit in establishing a Sub-Committee that would be able to respond quickly to produce any requested written information and that would be able to examine outcomes from the inspection process.

**Resolved**

That a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Sub-Committee be established, under the auspices of the Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee, to oversee and input into both the access to services and direction of travel assessments. (CE)

**EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved**

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

**352 WINDOW CLEANING CONTRACT – REVISED COSTS**

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Administrative and Member Services on a request to amend an agreed contract price.

Although Members were disappointed by this request, given that SBS had been warned on more than one occasion by Council officers that the figures did not appear to tally, Members nevertheless considered that SBS's request should be accepted as it was still within budget.

Members all concurred that all future contracts should be examined very closely to ensure that there was no similar reoccurrence.

**Resolved**

That the tender from SBS Cleaning Services for cleaning office windows be accepted at the revised four year fixed price sum of £19,429.48, or £4,857.37 per annum. (HAMS)

**353 STAFFING MATTERS**

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Chief Executive on vacancies, long term sickness absence and maternity absence within the Authority.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to staff turnover, officers confirmed that the Council was within its performance targets in this area.

Officers advised, in response to a Member query about changes in the Revenues and Benefits and Housing areas, that the changes had had no appreciable impact on staffing levels. The Council did conduct regular staff surveys, and was awaiting the results of the latest, which had just been completed.

In response to a further Member enquiry relating to recruitment, officers advised that, generally, response to job advertisements was good, although there were some specialised posts that were nationally recognised as being difficult to fill.

**Resolved**

That the current level of vacancies, long-term sickness and maternity absence be noted. (CE)

**354 STAFFING MATTER**

(Note: Mr P Warren, Mr R J Honey and Mr G Woolhouse each declared a prejudicial interest in this item and left the Chamber. All other officers, with the exception of the Human Resources Manager and the Committee Administrator, also left the Chamber for this item.)

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Human Resources Manager seeking views on the way forward with regard to a staffing matter that had arisen.

There was a detailed discussion of the specific situation. The detailed discussion is set out in the exempt appendix to these Minutes.

On a Motion, moved by Cllr M G B Starke and seconded by Cllr J E Grey, it was:-

**Resolved**

That, in the event of the individual electing to pursue this matter with an Employment Tribunal, the Council should strongly defend its position. (CE)

**355 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S APPRAISAL**

The Committee received the exempt note of the Chief Executive's appraisal.

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....