

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
 PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
 COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
 CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
ON TUESDAY 1 JUNE 2004 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D L E Hollebbon (Chairman).
 Councillors P R Ballam, E J Cain, R Gilbert, A M Graham,
 D E Mayes, J O Ranger.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Miranda Steward	- Executive Director
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Neal Hodgson	- Assistant Director (Regulatory Services)
Mary Orton	- Assistant Director (Policy and Performance)
Ceridwen Pettit	- Head of Performance

58 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of
 Councillors S A Bull, N Burdett, A D Dodd, S Newton,
 L Pinnell and J Warren.

59 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman commented that following Annual Council,
 there had been two changes to the Membership of
 Performance Scrutiny. Although not in attendance, the
 Chairman extended a welcome to Councillors D Richards
 and N Burdett.

The Chairman commented on the establishment of the
 Safety Advisory Team and sought nominations from
 Members to steer the working group. It was noted that so
 far, only one Member, Councillor Warren had expressed an
 interest in the SAT. Following consideration of the matter,
 Councillors Mrs Ballam and Cain expressed an interest

and put their names forward.

RESOLVED ITEMS

ACTION

60 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 May 2004 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

61 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - QUARTERLY MONITORING

The Head of Performance submitted a report which presented performance statistics for January, February and March 2004 for the Council's national and local Best Value Performance Indicators.

It was noted that of the 26 Indicators reported on a monthly basis:

- 16 (62%) - were on or above target
- 5 (19%) - were under performing
- 5 (19%) - were significantly under performing

Those which were significantly under performing were:

- BV 78c - percentage of renewal claims processed on time
- LPI 3 - Building sites re-inspected in less than 3 months
- BV109 - Percentage of applications determined
- LPI 61 - Percentage of planning applications from householders dealt within 8 weeks
- BV 12 - The number of working days/shifts per employee lost due to sickness absence

The reasons for this under performance were detailed in the report.

A Member drew attention to BV109 and commented that given the cumulative improvement, this should be reflected as "under performing" rather than "significantly under performing". It was acknowledged that Development

ACTION

Control was undergoing a review.

The issue of sickness raised concerns by Members and it was suggested that this issue should be investigated further in an effort to identify sickness patterns and trends

AD(HR)

Further clarification was sought on the issue of BV82a and BV82b. The Head of Performance undertook to write to all Members.

RESOLVED - that (A) the report be received, and

(B) a further report be presented to Performance Scrutiny on the issue of long term sickness, trends and patterns and what methods could be employed to keep employees healthy.

62 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2004

The Head of Performance submitted a report concerning the production and publication of a Best Value Performance Plan which was required by law to be published by the end of June each year. The report, incorporating Members' comments, would be presented to Council on 16 June 2004.

It was noted that the Government had reduced its Performance Plan requirements if an authority's CPA categorisation was either "excellent" or "good" and would accept the Council's annual corporate plan as meeting the statutory requirement, providing that it was identified as a Performance Plan and contained certain information.

The Best Value Performance Plan would be published as an A4 booklet, (without jargon) and on the internet and issued to Members. National and local performance indicators would be produced on a wall chart which would allow all information on an indicator to be read across and showing past and targeted future performance. Some fine tuning of the outturn performance figures would be carried out prior to the Plan's publication and it was suggested that

ACTION

Executive Director (Rachel Stopard) be authorised to publish the BVPP by the Government deadline of 30 June 2004 and to make any last minute changes to the document.

Clarification was sought on the rationale behind the establishment of the corporate target percentages. Members made a number of suggestions in terms of re-phrasing and highlighted a few typographical errors.

The Local and Best Value Performance indicators were reviewed and clarification sought on the issue of reporting racial incidents and homelessness applications.

Members requested that the BVPP should be inserted into existing folders, rather than incur additional expenditure for new wallets.

Members thanked the Head of Performance and all officers for all the hard work done in producing the document.

RESOLVED - that (A) the report be received as amended, and

(B) the Executive Director be authorised to publish the Best Value Performance Plan and to make any changes to the text of the report to satisfy Government and audit requirements.

63 BEST VALUE REVIEW ACTION PLANS: PROGRESS REPORTS

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) submitted a report detailing the progress made in implementing the Action Plans following Best Value Reviews on a range of services and the rationale behind those reviews.

Members' attention was drawn to an appendix in relation to Front Line Customer Contact (Customer Relations) which had been omitted with the original agenda papers.

ACTION

It was noted that plans from 1 April 2004 to 30 September 2004 would be reported to Performance Scrutiny in December 2004 and where actions were outstanding, it was suggested that these could be absorbed into relevant service plans.

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) assured Members that the main aims of the review had been met and that a monitoring system was in place.

Clarification was sought on a number of issues including:

- the future of affordable housing
- street cleansing and measures of satisfaction
- fly-tipping - the Council's proposals for dealing with this

The Executive Director commented that reports of fly-tipping were dealt with within 36 hours at the most. She commented that early reporting was a necessity in order to prevent it attracting more rubbish. The use of cameras had not been as successful as earlier hoped.

Members commented on consultation with "hard to reach" groups and sought clarification on the role of Members in furthering the Council's Diversity Policy.

RESOLVED - that (A) the good progress against Best Value Reviews Action Plans be noted,

(B) that action plans for the eighteen reviews detailed in the report be no longer separately reported, and

(C) that outstanding actions be included in the relevant Service Plans.

64 CPA IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Head of Performance submitted a report setting out a revised Comprehensive Performance Assessment

ACTION

Improvement Plan which had been developed following discussions with East Herts Audit Commission's Relationship Manager and the External Auditor (PKF).

The Council has a duty to make arrangements following a CPA inspection to secure continuous improvement.

It was noted that the revised improvement plan took account of the changes recommended at a meeting with the Audit Commission's Relationship Manager and the External Auditor and also included actions contained in the Peer Review Action Plan produced by I&DeA. Interim Monitoring of the Plan would take place on a quarterly basis.

Members commented that the CPA Improvement Plan could be more informative if this was cross referenced with the summary sheet produced by the CPA. This document highlighted the perceived 25 strengths and weaknesses of the Council.

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) assured Members that the improvement plan addressed those weaknesses highlighted in the CPA process. Having said that, it was acknowledged that there were issues where the Council and the CPA Inspectors were in disagreement.

RESOLVED - that (A) the CPA Improvement Plan, be received, and

(B) a further report showing where recommendations from the CPA inspection had been inserted be submitted to Performance Scrutiny.

65 DEVELOPMENT CONTROL REVIEW - PROGRESS REPORT

The Executive Director submitted a report updating Members on the action taken since January 2004 to address service problems in the Council's Development

ACTION

Control section. Appendices detailing more up to date information in relation to the Action Plan and Cumulative Decisions from 1 October 2003 to 30 April 2004 were circulated.

The Executive Director commented that it was important to define that the Council was failing to make timely decisions and was not failing in the quality of the decisions taken.

Although performance had hit a low point towards the end of 2003, there had been significant improvement from the beginning of 2004 and this was continuing. The Executive Director explained that at a recent meeting with Government representatives, it had been made clear that the Government would intervene, if the service did not continue to improve.

It was noted that the urgent review of the service in January 2004 by the Assistant Directors of Policy and Performance and Regulatory Services revealed that, in addition to staff and IT issues, there were a number of structural problems which impeded the DC section's ability to function effectively. These could be broken down into specific categories.

- service management issues
- work flow and organisational issues
- application of technological issues

A skills audit was currently being carried out to match skills to tasks.

Staff morale had stabilised and it was noted that staff were committed to improving the service.

Members sought feedback on:

- the issue of planning enforcement functions and the public's perception of "lack of action" as a result of its inherently lengthy process.

ACTION

- training opportunities for staff
- the structure of the Council's policies and their application in the planning process
- Whether there was any merit in having a smaller Development Control Committee.
- The use of Section 106 agreements, monitoring arrangements, Member involvement and how this linked with Capital Strategy planning and the Local Plan.

Members congratulated officers for their efforts thus far in improving the Development Control section.

RESOLVED - that (A) the report be received, and

(B) that the Assistant Director (Law and Control) in consultation with the Assistant Director (Development Control) be requested to produce regular progress reports to Development Control Committee on enforcement cases.

66 FORWARD PLAN

Members considered the Forward Plan for Performance Scrutiny for the forthcoming municipal year which was amended by Members, with the inclusion of the following reports:

- Sickness trends and patterns
- Equal Pay Audit
- CPA - Improvement Plan and summary
- Fly-tipping

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm.