

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
WAYTEMORE ROOM, THE
CAUSEWAY, BISHOP'S STORTFORD
ON TUESDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2004 AT
7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D L E Hollebon (Chairman).
Councillors P R Ballam, S A Bull, N Burdett,
A M Graham, J Hedley, G McAndrew, L R Pinnell,
D Richards, J O Ranger, J P Warren.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Miranda Steward	- Executive Director
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Alaine Clark	- Research and Information Officer
Dave Cooper	- Performance Officer
Tracy Ferguson	- Head of Environmental Health
Mary Orton	- Assistant Director (Policy and Performance)
Jan Spong	- Environmental Health Manager - Commercial

230 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of
Councillors A D Dodd, R Gilbert, D E Mayes and
S Newton.

231 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor L R Pinnell declared a personal interest in the
matter referred to at Minute 237 – Food Safety Service
Plan by virtue of his employment at Business Link.

232 COVALENT (PRESENTATION OF NEW PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE)

Alaine Clark gave a presentation of Covalent, new management software, which provided a manageable means of monitoring performance indicators including those for Best Value (BVPs) local, monthly, corporate performance indicators, by portfolio and sectionally. The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) explained that BV targets were set by the Government. Eventually, major strategic action plans would be included on the monitoring system.

Members were provided with an example of how reports could be produced and were shown how to extricate information on specific performance indicators from the system. A hand-out was provided to aid the process. Assurances were given that further training on Covalent, would be made available to Members.

Members were of the view that the system would be of extensive benefit to the Council and thanked the officers for their hard work in progressing the issue.

RESOLVED ITEMS

ACTION

233 MINUTES

A Member referred to a £2m grant for Youth Shelter Projects and asked for an update at the next meeting of Performance Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2004 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

234 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTERLY MONITORING (APRIL – JUNE 2004)

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) submitted a report presenting performance statistics for April, May

and June in relation to the Council's local and national Best Value Performance Indicators.

Performance was specifically under-target in several areas. These were:

BV 8 – invoices paid within 30 days

LPI1 – building regulations - plans vetted

LPI 4 – building regulations – plan check turn around time

LPI 3 – building sites re-inspected in less than 3 months

BV 10 – collection of non-domestic rates

LPI 41a – food inspections of high risk premises

LPI 41b – food inspections of other premises

LPI 42 - health and safety inspections

Building Control:

Members raised a number of queries in relation to building control specifically; officers' localised areas of responsibility, re-inspections and a drop in target and whether quality was being compromised to reach specific targets; ensuring that what had been agreed from a planning viewpoint was the same when reviewed by building inspectors; recruitment of a full complement of staff; new regulations relating to electrical safety and the impact this might have on building control staff; current management arrangements of the development control section; and, enforcement from a signage perspective and the need to create a Performance Indicator for this.

Premises Inspections:

Members queried whether the targets were too high and questioned the use of consultants; shortage of qualified staff

and the impact this had on meeting realistic targets.

Benefits:

Concern was expressed that targets were not being met and the possible impact this might have to the applicant from a hardship viewpoint.

Appeals:

A member questioned the increase in the number of planning appeals being lodged against officers' recommendations which were then lost.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and Members' comments and concerns be noted.

235 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATOR (BVPI)
GENERAL SURVEY

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) submitted a report on the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) General Survey undertaken by Mori during September-November, 2003 compared to 2000/01 BVPI General Survey, the 2003 Residents' Survey and neighbouring district authorities. The General Survey had been posted to 3,200 randomly selected addresses in East Herts.

It was noted that performance had fallen for six of the ten indicators.

- Overall satisfaction –11%
- Satisfaction with complaint handling –15%
- Satisfaction with cleanliness –8%
- Satisfaction with sports/leisure –7%
- Satisfaction with theatres/concert halls – 3%
- Satisfaction with the planning service – 5%

Performance had improved with regard to:

- Waste collection +4%
- Satisfaction with waste recycling +10%
- Satisfaction with parks/open spaces +7%
- Satisfaction with the benefits service +5%

Generally, East Herts performed well overall and for environmental services, but less well for cultural services.

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) commented that although the Council was doing well in comparison with other Councils, Officers would be looking at Councils whose BVPI's had not declined, to establish why.

Members expressed concern on the perceptions and expectations of the public and perceived weaknesses in the provision of some Council services specifically, sports and leisure facilities, including access to nature and also the shortage of theatres, and arts provision.

Officers assured Members that East Herts offered the public many recreational activities. The issue of access to nature would be addressed in the Best Value Review on Stewardship.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and that a further report be submitted outlining the strategies in place to improve on the weaknesses mentioned.

APP

236 CPA IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Executive Director (Head of Paid Service) submitted a report where “perceived weaknesses” of the CPA Team had been acknowledged in the Improvement Plan. It was noted that there were some “weaknesses” that the Council and the CPA Inspectors were not in agreement. These therefore, had not been included in the CPA Improvement Plan and related to:-

- The Council's economic development strategy - is not being outcome focused (Theme – Ambition)
- Vulnerability of the Local Plan position (Theme – Future Plans)

The other three “weaknesses” were addressed in the report which explained the reasons for their non-inclusion in the CPA Improvement Plan.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

237 FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN FOR 2003/04: REVIEW OF FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN FOR 2004/05

The Executive Member for Corporate Facilities submitted a report which detailed each of the food service activities undertaken in 2003/04. The Plan for 2004/05 attached to the report detailed food safety activities for the coming year.

The Head of Environmental Health explained that officers provided all aspects of Environmental Health and despite staff shortages, the actions specified within the Food Safety Service Plan for 2003/04 had been achieved; including achieving 96% of high risk food premises inspections (with a PI target of 95%) and 87% for other lower risk food premises inspections (PI target of 84%). It was noted that the Food Safety Service had been well managed and therefore, no action plan was required. Despite a shortfall of 0.58FTE and two vacant posts proving difficult to fill, the Food Safety Service Plan 2004/05 was anticipated to be achieved by directing resources at areas at most risk, if needed.

Members requested further information on how Officers risk rated food and health & safety premises. The Head of Environmental Health undertook to provide this.

Head of
Environmental
Health

The Head of Environmental Health explained that Officers had developed a “Business Guide to Law and Practice” which had been well received by local businesses and

much sought after by neighbouring authorities. Further promotion of food and hygiene had been undertaken via “Captain Cholesterol and the Grannies from Mars event” and a team of drama students to various schools throughout the District.

It was suggested that officers contact Business Link, as a means of promoting the new literature, and it was noted that this was being progressed.

Members’ expressed concern in relation to the level of staffing resources. Whilst it was acknowledged that the service was meeting its performance targets, the fact that two posts remained unfilled suggested that targets could not be sustained as a result of a lack of resources. The Head of Environmental Health assured Members that staff requirements were estimated based on last year’s figures. She commented that staff were committed to their roles and would ensure that high risk food premises remained a priority in terms of inspections.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, thanked the officers for the work undertaken and in aiming to achieve targets, despite a shortfall in staff.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and that the Executive be advised that, in relation to Appendix A8 on page 8.43 the first paragraph of the conclusion should state that:-

ARS/ALC

“ the estimate and resources required for the Food Safety Service are the worst case scenario. If this is realised, a number of low risk activities will not be undertaken, such as low risk food premises inspections and some promotional/liaison activities such as the Business Customer Consultation Panel”.

Further, that if Members wish Officers to guarantee all these activities to be achieved, then a further half post will be required.

238 HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICE PLAN FOR 2003/04:
REVIEW OF HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICE PLAN
FOR 2004/05

The Executive Member for Corporate Facilities submitted a report which detailed the Council's Health and Safety Service Plan for 2003/04. The Health and Safety Service Plan 2004/05 detailed health and safety activities for the coming year.

It was noted that the Health and Safety Service had been well managed during the 2003/04 period, and that resources were directed towards areas of most risk which afforded maximum public protection. As a result of this, no action plan was needed. The Health and Safety Service Plan for 2004/05 detailed all the activities planned for 2004/05 and had been drawn up in accordance with the requirements of the Health and Safety Commission and in conjunction with other Councils in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

It was noted that a "Stress Pack" had been produced by Officers and had proved to be a successful tool in promoting Health and Safety awareness to employers and employees.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, thanked Officers for their hard work and commitment to the work of the service.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

239 FORWARD PLAN

A Member raised the issue of waste management and fly-tipping on the public highway and that notifications should be distributed to householders, particularly in respect of new build highlighting the need to manage waste properly.

The Executive Director (Returning Officer) agreed to address this issue by writing to new build developers,

stressing their responsibility to handle waste responsibly, and the consequences of not adhering to these requirements.

The Chairman announced that two additional meetings would be convened in order to accommodate further business and that these would be held on:

16 December 2004

8 March 2005

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm

Chairman
Date