

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
 PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
 COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
 WAYTEMORE ROOM, BISHOP'S
 STORTFORD ON TUESDAY 8 MARCH
 2005 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D L E Hollebon (Chairman),
 Councillors S A Bull, E J Cain, R Gilbert, D E Mayès,
 L R Pinnell, J O Ranger.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor M R Alexander.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Miranda Steward	- Executive Director (Returning Officer)
Peter Biggs	- Development Control Manager
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Alaine Clarke	- Research and Information Officer
Dave Cooper	- Performance Officer
Andrea Gilmour	- Development Control Manager
Neal Hodgson	- Assistant Director (Regulatory Services)
Mary Orton	- Assistant Director (Policy and Performance)
Jean Petrie	- Administrative Manager
Ceridwen Pettit	- Head of Performance
Alison Young	- Planning Enforcement Manager

647 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from
 Councillor P R Ballam, J Hedley, G McAndrew,
 Mrs S Newton, D Richards and J P Warren.

ACTION648 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

RESOLVED ITEMS649 BEST VALUE REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

The Executive Director (Returning Officer) submitted a final report and supporting action plan in relation to the Best Value Review of Development Control.

The background leading up to the report being submitted was explained.

It was noted that in the last three years, Development Control had been working with less than 50% of professional staff and had experienced a 24% increase in planning applications. This situation, together with staff turnover, had had a negative impact on the Council's ability to meeting performance indicators.

Following a review of the service, a progress report in June 2004 revealed that key features of the service needed review. These were:-

- Enforcement
- Public perception of Development Control
- Inter-relationship between Development Control and other departments within East Herts Council
- The role and effectiveness of Development Control Committee

ACTION

These areas formed the basis of the Best Value Review of the service with due regard to the principles of best practice.

The Assistant Director (Regulatory Services) explained that the operation of the service was reviewed in the context of staffing issues and IT problems. It was subsequently found that a number of structural problems impeded on the service's ability to function effectively.

These were-

- Service management issues
- Work flow and organisational issues
- Application of technology issues

The Planning Enforcement Manager explained her role in reviewing the enforcement process and the key conclusions resulting. Primarily, there was a need to increase staffing resources and a need to increase delegation to officers within a clear policy framework.

The Development Control Managers and Administrative Manager explained the actions, which could be initiated in relation to regular liaison, including the establishment of a Continuous Improvement Team (CIT), engaging regular liaison with stakeholders and establishing development teams for major developments. Other initiatives included the publication of design guides, case management, introducing protocols and monitoring information, eg Section 106 Agreements. In essence, a more "joined up" approach was needed and a more corporate approach to Section 106 agreements.

The recent CPA Inspection recognised that Development Control was making good progress in some areas, but that the service was experiencing problems in recruitment and retaining staff and the determination process.

ACTION

It was noted that the service had improved in terms of capacity and performance in that:

- An interim Assistant Director (Development Control) had been appointed;
- A new system “team approach” in terms of allocating staff to particular application types had been introduced; and
- 2004/05 targets for major (55%), minor (60%) and other (75%) applications had been exceeded as at September 2004.

The Executive Member for Corporate Facilities commented on the visits undertaken during the course of the review and the key recommendations for improvement, the detail of which was set out in the report.

The Action Plan attached to the report now submitted, detailed other aspects, which highlighted areas for improvement.

A Member expressed concern in relation to a proposal to allow public participation.

The size of the Development Control Committee was discussed in that Members felt frustrated because of legislative requirements. However, it was felt that any proposal to reduce the size of the Committee should be reviewed at some later date.

Members supported the need for additional resources to support the Enforcement Role in Development Control. It was noted that enforcement action was sometimes linked to retrospective planning applications and Members sought assurance on the provision of a clear policy framework for a scheme of delegation to officers in relation to enforcement makers.

ACTION

Twin tracking of Section 106 agreements and the publication of planning booklets was welcomed.

The Executive Director commented on the significant progress which made in the Development Control division. This progress had been reflected in the Council being shortlisted for "most improved Council" in the Local Government Chronicle awards. She thanked staff in the division for their professional approach.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members thanked all Officers for their participation in the review and for their efforts in turning the Division around.

The Committee agreed that its comments, as now detailed, be referred to the Executive.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that:-

(A) Performance Scrutiny Committee support the Action Plan now submitted, including additional resources for enforcement staff;

(B) a scheme of enforcement delegation be developed with a clear policy framework; and ARS

(C) the Assistant Director (Regulatory Services) submit a progress report in six months time, following the "bedding down" of planning legislation. ARS

650 2004/05 ESTIMATES AND THREE YEAR TARGETS FOR BEST VALUE AND LOCAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) submitted a report detailing performance for 2004/05 compared with the 2004/05 targets; the 2003/04 quartile data; the 2003/04 outturn, and, to proposing targets for the next three years.

It was noted that all Councils were required to monitor the performance of their services against national performance

ACTION

indicators (BVPIs) set by the Government and via Local Performance Indicators (LPIs).

A list of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) and Local Performance Indicators (LPIs) were set out in the report now submitted, together with an explanation on performance.

In terms of National Performance Indicators (BVPIs)

- 67% were on or above target
- 36% had achieved the top quartile
- 45% were likely to improve on last year

In terms of Local Performance Indicators (LPIs)

64% were on or above target

46% had improved.

Target performance was compared with 2003/04 from the perspective of quartile performance and corporate improvement.

Clarification was sought from Members in relation to a number of issues

BV82a - Waste collection from Brown Bins

BV108a – measure of units used

BV17b – ethnicity figures and their bases

LPI 100 - staff turnover

LPI 108 – number of affordable housing units

LPI 14 – % of Council Tax customers paying by DD

ACTION

LPI 39 – affordable housing targets – the need to revise this to 32% being more achievable.

Members commented on the efficiency problems in relation to the boiler at The Causeway Offices, Bishop's Stortford.

Members comments that a new LPI needed to be created to monitor abandoned vehicles.

RESOLVED - that (A) a new Local Performance Indicator be created for Abandoned Vehicles and

APP

(B) that LPI 39 be reduced to 32%.

651 WORKING GROUP – CHALLENGING THE ROLE OF THE SAFETY ADVISORY TEAM (SAT)

Performance Scrutiny Committee received a report submitted by the Working Group established to challenge the role of the Safety Advisory Team (SAT).

It was noted that the Working Group considered the main advantage of the SAT (which provided advice and guidance to unregulated events and was a discretionary service), was the production of the "Guide to Safe and Successful Events" which benefited new event organisers.

The issue of road closures was of concern to the Working Group.

Following a Workshop on 8 December 2004, the general view was that the SAT was frustrating and unhelpful. Two options were put forward by the Working Group, to either disband the service or that it remain and re-market itself.

Members commented that it would have been helpful if the Working Group had obtained information from other Councils who provided such a service, such as North Herts Council. Liaison with the Police and perhaps with the Council's own

ACTION

Local Area Partnership, would also have been useful.

RESOLVED - that (A) Officers develop a way of re-marketing the Safety Advisory Team;

ED(RO)

(B) the Safety Advisory Team undertake further investigations, including the Police, the Local Area Partnership and with other Councils in terms of seeing how a comparable service was provided and co-ordinated, and to report back to Performance Scrutiny Committee.

ED(RO)

652 FORWARD PLAN: MARCH 2005 – MAY 2005

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) submitted a report detailing the business to be determined by the Performance Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.40 pm