

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
 PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
 COMMITTEE HELD IN THE
 WAYTEMORE ROOM, BISHOP'S
 STORTFORD ON WEDNESDAY, 1 JUNE
 2005 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D L E Hollebon (Chairman),
 Councillors S A Bull, A D Dodd, R Gilbert,
 J O Ranger, J D Thornton.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors R L Parker, P A Ruffles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Miranda Steward	- Executive Director (Returning Officer)
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Dave Cooper	- Performance Officer
Simon Hawkins	- Performance Officer
Mary Orton	- Director of Policy and Performance
Ceridwen Pettit	- Head of Performance

86 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors
 P R Ballam, H G S Banks, A M Graham, D E Mayes,
 Mrs S Newton, H Penson, L R Pinnell and J P Warren.

87 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman commented that, in the light of Members
 wishing to receive a revised strategic overview in relation
 to Leisure and Recreation Services before the matter was
 presented to the Executive later this month, she had
 agreed to consider this issue further as an urgent item of
 business.

88 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S A Bull declared a personal interest in minute 89 Best Value Action Plan Progress Reports in that his wife has responsibility for administering the Meals on Wheels Service.

RESOLVED ITEMS

ACTION

89 BEST VALUE REVIEW ACTION PLANS: PROGRESS REPORTS

The Director of Policy and Performance submitted a progress report in relation to five Best Value Reviews detailing the progress made by 31 March 2005.

The report now submitted, contained the actions plans from the Best Value Reviews of Legal Services, Corporate Procurement, Customer Relations, Organisational Development and Environmental Stewardship.

It was noted that as the Best Value Reviews of Development Control and Health and Living Support were completed, implementation of the action plans would be reported to a future meeting of Performance Scrutiny.

The Director of Policy and Performance commented that the actions from the Best Value Review of Legal Services had now been completed. The Best Value Review of Corporate Procurement had three actions outstanding, which would be monitored by the Performance Team.

A Member sought clarification on the subject of options appraisals for major procurement initiatives. The Director of Policy and Performance, by example, explained how Members had been involved in recent procurement decisions eg swimming pools, and car parking.

It was acknowledged that Members were expected to read a vast amount of paperwork in order to keep up to date with Council developments. It was suggested that thought

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ACTION

should be given to the introduction of a system which would provide an audit trail of information and which could update Members on any issue at any point in time.

A Member commented on the closure of the Cash Office at Buntingford, and the fact that Town Council staff still provided the public with general advice. He queried whether an approach could be made for grant funding.

A Member commented on substandard levels of cleanliness in Bell Street, Sawbridgeworth. It was noted that many problems in the District were attributable to fast food outlets and a general apathy amongst the public, in disposing of their litter properly.

ED (HPS)

Members complimented Officers on the work carried out in relation to the Competency Framework which would be incorporated into the PDRS Interview process to be rolled out next year.

RESOLVED - that (A) the progress against Best Value Review Action Plans be noted; and

(B) the action plans for Legal Services and Corporate Procurement be no longer reported to Performance Scrutiny Committee.

90 CPA IMPROVEMENT PLAN: PROGRESS REPORTS

The Head of Performance submitted a six-monthly progress report on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Improvement Plan. The report also sought agreement to revisions in the Improvement Plan (detailed in italics in the report now submitted), which had come about following further discussions with the Audit Commission and the Council's External Auditors.

It was noted that the CPA Improvement Plan should be viewed as an "evolving" document based on the need for continuous improvement. As such, it would be constantly

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updated and refined as new initiatives were introduced.

The Head of Performance commented that of the 85 actions, 78% (updated from 76%) had been achieved; 1% were off target in relation to the top quartile. The Head of Performance referred to the difficulties encountered in relation to data timetabling and slippages. This difficulty had been acknowledged by the Audit Commission and the External Auditors, who were more concerned with targets being achieved and the direction of improvement.

It was noted that there were three actions where slippage had occurred. These were explained to Members. The Head of Performance explained the need in some instances, to revise target dates.

Members commented on the Council's vision of becoming an "excellent" Council following the next round of CPA Inspections. In this connection, Members expressed concern that the Council's top quartile Performance Indicators might not be sufficiently challenging to achieve the "excellent" rating sought. The Executive Director (Returning Officer) was confident however, that the Council was improving and within the top quartile. She gave an assurance that the Council would review the need to achieve continuous improvement, which may require a need to redirect resources.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, thanked the officers for their efforts in producing such an informative document.

RESOLVED - that the revised Comprehensive Improvement Plan (CPA) be supported.

91 2004/05 ANNUAL REPORT ON PERFORMANCE
SCRUTINY

The Chairman submitted a report summarising the work undertaken by Performance Scrutiny Committee during the municipal year.

ACTION

During the past year, Performance Scrutiny Committee had reviewed various areas of Council Business and made comments and recommendations to the Executive.

The report now submitted, provided an overview of the areas scrutinised and these included Best Value Reviews of :

- Health and Living Support
- Development Control
- Environmental Stewardship
- Organisational Development

Other reports to Performance Scrutiny Committee included:

- Empty Homes in East Herts
- The role of the Safety Advisory Team
- The role of the Animal Warden
- Fly Tipping
- Highways Maintenance Service
- Council's CPA Improvement Plan
- Food Service Activities
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- The Equal Pay Audit and Local Labour Market Review and Sickness Absence
- Management Review/Staff Restructuring and Redundancies in 2002

Members praised the range and scope of the work undertaken during the last year. It was suggested however, that there was an opportunity to follow through on some issues, in that some recommendations may require further follow up work. It was suggested that this follow up work could be undertaken by the Scrutiny Officer when in post.

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It was suggested that some of the outcomes detailed in the Annual Review could be reported jointly with the Annual Review of Policy Development Scrutiny Committee and published using Link. The Director of Policy and Performance undertook to explore this further.

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RESOLVED - that (A) Annual Report of Performance Scrutiny be noted; and

(B) the Director of Policy and Performance explore the possibility of publishing the work of both Performance Scrutiny Committee and Policy Development Scrutiny Committee using Link.

92 FORWARD PLAN 2005-2006

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

The Head of Performance commented that one further name was still being sought to set up a joint working group to review where efficiency savings might be achieved in relation to refuse and waste collection, street cleansing and grounds maintenance. The Chairman asked that the Head of Performance be e-mailed direct.

RESOLVED - that the report be noted.

93 URGENT BUSINESS - STRATEGIC OVERVIEW OF LEISURE AND RECREATION SERVICES

The Director of Policy and Performance referred to the Leisure and Recreation Action Plan Strategy considered at the meeting of Performance Scrutiny Committee on 24 May 2005. At that meeting, Members expressed concern that the Strategy submitted, needed a preamble to clarify the Council's position in relation to Leisure and Recreation in the context that it was not a corporate priority.

ACTION

The Director of Policy and Performance felt that the strategy now submitted, clarified the Council's position and addressed Members' initial concerns.

The Executive Director (Returning Officer) commented that the document now made it clear that the Council had a Leisure and Recreation Strategy and would provide an "enabling" role. It was noted that the report would be presented initially to the Executive Board prior to consideration by the Executive. By the end of the year, it was anticipated that a Sub Group would be established to consider various proposals including those in relation to Castle Hall and its redevelopment.

ED (HPS)

Councillor Parker, Executive Member was in attendance in order to clarify issues of concern in relation to the Leisure and Recreation Strategy. He reiterated that leisure and recreation provision was not considered a corporate priority and referred to the progress made since the Audit Commission's initial inspection.

It was noted that whilst some Members were keen to promote Castle Hall as a venue, such proposals had to be viewed in the context that there were other large towns in the District with a number of large halls. It was suggested that at some point, consideration could be given to controlling what type of performances could take place at specific venues.

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Councillor Parker referred to the considerable sums of money spent in subsidising Castle Hall over the last 30 years. He commented that the seating arrangements and physical dimensions of Castle Hall would continue to restrict what the venue could be used for. Additionally it was noted that the Council had spent a considerable amount of money over the years providing grants for various facilities throughout the district. Regrettably, this positive information had not been published nor communicated to the general public.

ACTION

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Members welcomed the revised overarching strategy and felt that the document went some way to addressing the Council's medium term view of leisure provision and its enabling role. Reservations were however expressed on the format of the strategy in terms of communicating the information to the public.

The Executive Director (Returning Officer) gave assurances that the longer term view of leisure and recreation would also be picked up from various methods eg PPG17 Review. She stressed that there were many opportunities, yet unexplored which could turn Castle Hall into a vibrant centre.

Councillor Ruffles was encouraged by the level of debate in relation to Castle Hall but expressed concern that he had received no prior notification of its consideration, this evening.

The Chairman explained that the item had been initially considered at the meeting on 24 May 2005 when Members asked that further thought be given to the strategy. Members stressed that a revised strategy be presented to them prior to the issue being considered by the Executive. As the agenda for the meeting on 1 June 2005 had already been published the Leisure and Recreation Strategy could not be included on the agenda. However in order to comply with Members' wishes, it was agreed that the item could be considered as an Urgent Item of Business.

Members were of the view that the Leisure and Recreation Strategy now submitted, provided a clear statement of the Council's vision as a medium term document and its "enabling" role.

RESOLVED - that Members support the revised Leisure and Recreation Strategy now submitted, as a medium term document.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.

ACTION

Chairman
Date