

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

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D L E Hollebon (Chairman),  
 Councillors, H G S Banks, A D Dodd, R Gilbert,  
 A M Graham, L R Pinnell, J O Ranger,  
 D Richards, J D Thornton

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Cliff Cardoza	- Head of Contract Services
Paul Harris	- Head of Direct Services
Simon Hawkins	- Performance Officer
Ceridwen Pettit	- Head of Performance
Jackie Sayers	- Scrutiny Officer
Trevor Watkins	- Waste Services Manager

337 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors  
 P R Ballam and J P Warren.

338 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Jackie Sayers the new Scrutiny  
 Officer to the Council.

The Chairman commented that item 5 on the agenda  
 "Performance Monitoring of Leisure Contract", had been  
 withdrawn as the officer presenting the report had been  
 called away at short notice. The report would therefore be  
 included on the agenda at the next meeting of Performance  
 Scrutiny Committee on 19 October, 2005 (not 1 November

as some Members believed).

The Chairman commented that following a recent decision to hold Executive meetings on an evening, it was necessary to change the date of the December meeting of Performance Scrutiny Committee which was scheduled for 6 December, 2005. The meeting would now take place on 8 December, 2005.

### RESOLVED ITEMS

#### 339 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 340 CONTRACT EFFICIENCY GROUP – FINAL REPORT

The Executive Director (Returning Officer) submitted a report outlining the potential efficiency savings which could be achieved from Direct and Contract Services Contracts. The purpose of the report was to obtain Members' views which would feed into the Base Budget Process.

It was noted that the Council was required to achieve a specific target of 2.5% efficiency savings per year. Further, a review undertaken by Sir Peter Gershon highlighted the need to achieve a 7.5% efficiency target over the next three years – not necessarily monetarily, but by efficiency gains (ie in raising productivity and enhancing value for money). The Council's Base Budget had been run along the Gerson lines of identifying efficiencies in the Council's larger contracts.

An Officer and Member Project Team had been set up to undertake an investigation into potential future efficiency savings from Direct and Contract Services Contracts.

The report detailed what efficiency gains might be achieved if the recommendations identified in the appendix, now submitted, were explored. Ideas which had been

ACTION

considered but rejected were also appended to the report. The methodology of the exercise was explained. Members involved in the project, were keen to use the same method of working for future years.

Clarification was sought on the issue of “cashable” and “non-cashable” gains.

Members involved on the project thanked the officers for their hard work which they felt had been an educational exercise.

Members of Performance Scrutiny Committee were guided through the recommendations identifying efficiencies which might be explored as follows:

- (1) & (2) Grounds maintenance and street cleansing – the wider implications of joint working. Supported.
- (3) Grounds Maintenance shortfalls and review of GIS Maps. Supported.
- (4) Graffiti removal – statutory and other obligations; its speedy removal and the use of graffiti “barriers”. This was supported.
- (5) Wider uses of Parking Attendants. Supported.
- (6) Redirection of possible surplus income to additional sweeping and highways maintenance. Supported.
- (7) DEFRA Grant for Trash Grilles Maintenance. Supported.
- (8) Extension of recycling service provision. The Head of Contract Services explained that an investment would enable a saving (not yet quantifiable) of one waste collection round.

ACTION

Members commented on the need to address card and plastics collections. It was recognised that the Council was in the process of introducing plastic banks. This initiative was supported. It was also suggested that this be promoted to the public.

- (9) Improving parks. Members felt that continual improvement in this area should be supported. It was noted that in Sawbridgeworth the site of a former tip could be turned into open space. An area along the River Stort was suggested as being used as a park area.
- (10) Public Conveniences. It was noted that a Council decision to remove a public convenience in the Town Centre had already been made. It was felt however, that the issue should be reviewed in six months time.
- (11) Tree sponsoring. Members commented on the problems with trees along roads and the difficulties in getting co-operation from Hertfordshire County Council. It was noted that any concerns should be addressed to the Highways Joint Member Panel. Members felt that this initiative should not be supported.
- (12) Review of recycling facilities. Ideas where savings could be achieved were highlighted. Members supported this initiative.
- (13) Joint commissioning of consultant to review refuse and recycling. Supported.
- (14) Street cleansing especially at boundary areas supported.
- (15) Joint working to make savings on grounds maintenance. Supported.

ACTION

- (16) Joint working to make savings on street cleansing. Supported.
- (17) Client Central Establishment Charges for pools and gym. Supported,

**Efficiencies for 2008/09 “Same for Less”**

- (20) Combine refuse/recycling/street cleansing into one contract. Potential risks were identified but in the main this initiative was supported.
- (21) Joint tendering with a neighbouring district on the costs of consultants for refuse and recycling contract. Supported.
- (22) Joint working to rationalise refuse and recycling rounds. Supported.
- (23) Letting the grounds maintenance contract as separate elements or zones.
- (24) Joint contracts with some local councils in relation to grass cutting/parks gang working. Supported.
- (25) Review of bring site bank collections and (26) alternate weekly collections. The Head of Contract Services outlined how savings could be achieved. Members asked for further clarification in relation to black bin and proposals for kitchen waste. The issue of card recycling was raised. The proposed efficiency initiatives were both supported.
- (27) Increased usage of Buntingford Service Centre. It was also suggested that the centre could be used for recycling “bulking up” purposes. The proposed efficiency initiative was supported.

ACTION

- (28) Parking enforcement: joint working with neighbouring councils. It was noted that this was already being done. The initiative was supported.
- (29) Establishing Council's own monitoring unit and offering this to other Councils; developing linkages for parking enforcement and anti social behaviour. This initiative was supported.

General longer term efficiencies under "More for the same" were considered. These included:

- (30) Renegotiation in relation to public swimming vs swimming lessons. Supported.
- (31) Assisting the contractor in the matter of promoting their business and services to maximise revenue. Supported.

Of particular concern was the issue of mobile advertising. The Head of Contract Services undertook to provide a written response to Councillor Gilbert.

Members were, in the main, supportive of the efficiency initiatives submitted in the appendix now submitted and expressed a wish that the Member and Officer Group continue to monitor the process.

It was noted that a number of Joint Officer/Member Panels would be taking place during October, 2005. The outcome of the Panel meetings would be reported to the Budget Scrutiny Panel/Policy Development Committee over the course of the budget setting process.

RESOLVED – that the efficiency initiatives identified in the report now submitted, and Members' comments be taken into account during the Base Budget process.

ACTION341 CONTRACT PERFORMANCE

The Head of Contract Services submitted a report concerning the annual performance on four main contracts: refuse and recycling, street cleansing, grounds maintenance and parking enforcement.

*Refuse and Recycling*

It was noted that refuse and recycling continued to improve in the following areas:

- The expansion of kerbside recycling services;
- Paper collections now extended to cover rural areas (ie an additional 10,000 properties);
- Garden waste collections increased from 12,000 to 34,000;
- Glass collection pilot scheme introduced to 5,000 properties;
- New kerb-side vehicles to process more materials.

Recycling had increased from 7% to 18% and was expected to reach 22% exceeding the Council's statutory target of 18% by 2005/06.

It was noted that the number of "missed bins" had declined to an average of 72 against a figure last year of 50. This was however, considered to be a temporary phenomenon brought about by expansion into two new areas.

The Head of Contract Services commented on operational use of Buntingford Service Centre which would be used to "bulk up" materials for recycling.

ACTION*Street cleansing*

The Head of Contract Services commented that there had been significant improvements in street cleansing but there were opportunities to do even better. He explained the statutory and other specific criteria by which performance was measured.

It was noted that the levels of litter and detritus had declined slightly from 8% to 11% in 2004/05. It was stressed that this was as a result of the Government's recalculation of evaluation methods. The Council remained in the top 25% of all authorities.

The Head of Contract Services reported that there had been an increase in the percentage of streets meeting a "high or acceptable" standard from 84% to 91%. Street cleansing service complaints had also fallen by 15% in the first five months of this financial year. The Head of Contract Services was confident that the performance increases had come about as a result of Client and Monitoring teams being fully staffed and the improvement of contract inspections and management.

The improvements implemented were detailed in the report.

Concern was expressed by Members in relation to weeds in gutters and spraying which was hampered by parked cars. It was suggested that shovels and brooms and increased "visibility" would be the best way of keeping the gutters clean and minimising complaints.

Some Members commented on the cleanliness of some areas within the district which were of specific concern.

*Grounds Maintenance*

The Head of Contract Services outlined the measures implemented to address problems in relation to grass

ACTION

cutting including the Council's agreement to commit a further £108,000 to improve control and management of the contract. This had resulted in a significant increase in performance including decreases in the number of complaints.

It was noted that complaints which related to the contractors work had fallen by 58%, and in relation to grass cutting this had fallen by 63%.

Members commented on cars parked on green swathes and the difficulties this created in relation to grass cutting. It was suggested that the Highways Joint Member Panel was the most appropriate forum for raising such matters.

It was accepted that the Council still received a high number of complaints which related, in the main, to other agencies eg Hertfordshire County Council.

*Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE)*

The Head of Contract Services outlined the background in relation to Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE). It was noted that East Herts Council was believed to be borderline in terms of its ability to break even in providing the service. Stevenage and Welwyn were experiencing similar situations and so entered into an agency agreement with East Herts Council to undertake DPE on their behalf, and so benefit on savings.

Following an analysis of the penalty charges, it was noted that approximately 72% of all Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) were resolved by means of payment, 18% were cancelled. It was also acknowledged that the Council might have to write off approximately 7% of PCNs which could not be pursued.

The difficulties encountered in relation to Blue Badge Holders were noted.

ACTION

The Chairman thanked the officers for providing such an informative report and asked that Members be provided with an update at some future date to be determined.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

342 FORWARD PLAN

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

The Head of Performance provided an update in relation to the inclusion of the report on Performance Monitoring of the Leisure Contract on the agenda for the meeting on 19 October, 2005.

It was also noted that the date of the December meeting of Performance Scrutiny Committee had been changed and would now be held on 8 December, 2005.

RESOLVED – that the amended Forward Plan be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm.