

Performance and Efficiency Programme Board

19th February 2008

Attendance:

Councillor M C M Lager (Chairman)
Councillor M Banthorpe
Councillor G Butland
Councillor Dr R Evans
Councillor D Hume
Councillor J McKee
Councillor Mrs C Sandbrook

Officers:

C Fleetham, Finance Director
Ms G Irving, Organisational Development Manager
Ms J Lycett, Alexander Consulting
P Partridge, Head of Operations
Mrs C Root, ICT Manager
A Reid, Chief Executive

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Abbott.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Lager declared a personal interest in any joint working initiatives with Essex County Council (as in minute 4 of the minutes of the last meeting) as he is deputy to County Council Cabinet Member Peter Martin.

2. MINUTES

DECISION: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Efficiency Programme Board held on 13th December 2007 be approved as a correct record.

3. QUARTERLY REPORT FOR QUARTER THE PERIOD OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2007

The Chief Executive presented details of (a) the Performance Summary for Quarter 3 2007/08 and (b) the Corporate Action Plan Status Report for Quarter 3 and he advised Members that the Finance Director would be presenting details of the financial situation as at the third quarter. All three documents were circulated at the start of the meeting.

The Chief Executive briefly outlined details of the reports which were in a new format designed to present the information in an easily digestible format with the familiar traffic light system showing where Performance is on track (Green), slightly below (Amber) and significantly below target (Red).

Members received an update on all those areas currently at red and amber and made the following comments:-

Invoices paid (BV8): It was noted that this area was under review as part of the business efficiency process. There were opportunities to look at moving to a completely electronic system and the Finance Director indicated his staff would be looking carefully at Southend Council's pilot with a view to analysing the potential efficiency gains of this proposal.

Council Tax Collection (BV9): Councillor Mrs Sandbrook asked if she could look at the flowchart for this process. She offered to meet with the Manager responsible and discuss this area of work using her experience. The Finance Director welcomed this and agreed to arrange a meeting with Councillor Mrs Sandbrook.

Recycling (BV82a): Councillors were informed that whilst this area was showing at red it was known to be largely due to the seasonal nature of the indicator. Members asked that

Officers look at profiling the performance indicator to reflect the fact that this was seasonal – in which case the indicator should not show at red in the future.

Planning Applications (BV109b and BV109c): The Chief Executive indicated that significant resources had been invested into looking at process changes in Planning and performance had showed significant signs of improvement during December and January.

Violent Crime (BV127a): Members noted that although the Council was responsible for this indicator and it worked with its partners through the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP). The Police Authority was responsible for supplying the figures.

During discussion of the report Councillor Sandbrook asked if the Council advised its customers when it was experiencing problems, difficulties or bringing in new systems as in her experience this was what happened in the private sector. Officers agreed to look at communication with customers and this matter in particular.

The Chief Executive commented that more of the indicators would be monitored on a quarterly basis in the future. It was suggested that Members needed to be given more guidance and information on how to access the Covalent System. Members noted that they already had “read only” access to Covalent.

The Finance Director presented the financial position as at the end of the third quarter. Members noted that the organisation had been targeted to achieve savings of £500,000 by October 2008 with an additional £500,000 target within two years. This provided the background to what would be a tough financial situation over the next three years and the Business Efficiency Reviews that were referred to under the following agenda item.

It was explained that although the Housing Stock had been transferred the Council would continue to have a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) until March 2009 and whilst funds in the HRA could not be accessed they were being invested carefully.

The Board noted that the balances were above the 10% target set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. However, the Finance Director explained that because Government Funding did not keep pace with inflation the effect was to increase the Council’s budget demands year on year by more than inflation. The three yearly financial projections showed a shortfall of about £1m in the Council’s budget hence the savings targets referred to earlier in the meeting.

DECISION: That the revised format for the Performance reports be welcomed and subject to the comments and issues raised above the reports be received.

4. **BUSINESS EFFICIENCY REVIEWS**

The Chief Executive introduced the report provided by Jan Lycett from Alexander Consulting which outlined the results of a number of high-level reviews of front line services.

Jan was then invited to present details of her report. Jan highlighted that the Council and its staff had made significant achievements but a number of further opportunities existed, some of which were identified in her report. She drew to Members attention the fact that the reviews had identified some policy and charging issues that would need to be considered prior to implementation of the changes. In addition some of the proposals offered short-term savings whereas others would require a longer lead in period before the savings could be realised. Some reviews offered cashable savings and others non-cashable efficiencies, whilst other projects would require investment in order to bring about the efficiencies.

Jan also highlighted that some areas such as Grounds Maintenance would need to be the subject of a further review in particular with the view to the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Greenfields Community Housing expiring in March 2009. It was noted that at this point there had not yet been a review of Leisure Services.

Councillor Butland felt that the report indicated that provided the Council could take on board some difficult decisions, some of which might be unpopular with customers then the targeted savings were achievable over the next two to four years.

The Chief Executive outlined a need to incorporate a number of other areas of work such as the joint initiatives with Colchester Borough Council and other projects such as the accommodation review being discussed with the County Council. He wanted to ensure that all of this work would fall under the theme of "Shaping up for Excellence".

The Chief Executive informed Members that there was still some work to be undertaken in verifying the projected efficiencies identified in Jan's report, but that subject to this work he would be establishing an internal efficiency team to implement a number of the efficiencies/savings. He anticipated that this team would need to call upon consultancy advice and guidance and he would be requesting that a budget be identified for this work but that this project would be self-financing funded from the savings identified.

The Chief Executive advised the Board that he would be issuing a paper on how the proposals within Jan's report could be implemented and he would not wait for the next meeting before issuing this report.

DECISION:

- (1) That the report be received and noted;
- (2) That the Chief Executive issue a paper to Members of the Board on how the identified savings will be implemented.

5. JOINT REVIEW OF PARKING – BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Paul Partridge, the Head of Operations presented details of a joint review of Parking Services with Colchester Borough and Uttlesford Councils. The report identified the main issues of each Council. Consultants had been engaged to review the service and a first draft of this report had just been received. Once the key findings had been discussed with staff and trade union representatives a report would be presented to Cabinet.

DECISION: That the report be noted.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members agreed to future meetings being held at 4.30pm. It was agreed that the Chairman be consulted on a programme of meetings and details be circulated to all Members of the Board.

The meeting commenced at 4.30pm and closed at 6.21pm

M C M Lager

(Chairman)