

UP DATE ON CURRENT ISSUES

Agenda Item 9a

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Background Papers:-	None
Financial Implications:-	None
Equalities Implications:-	None
Legal Implications:-	None
Options:	None
Risks:	None

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the current issues that impact upon the Council or activities of the Council that would not necessarily be reported for decision. This report highlights these issues and should Members wish for additional information, where appropriate, this will be made available.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES**Economy:**

The slow down in the economy and the housing market impacts directly on the Council. Land and asset sales have reduced in value and have a direct impact upon the capital funding and projects. Examples of the impact can be seen in the capital report earlier on the agenda. For example, the sale of ex-council houses (transferred to Greenfields) has slowed down dramatically; housing land has decreased in value and developers will be more risk averse in the current economic circumstances. We are currently reviewing projects and sales in an attempt to assess the future impact.

Business Efficiency Reviews:

The following reviews have been completed:

Customer Services (considered by the Performance and Efficiency Programme Board)

Cultural Services

Waste Management (considered by the Performance and Efficiency Programme Board)

Where appropriate, reviews will be presented to the Performance and Efficiency Programme Board and then go to Cabinet to review any policy issues that need to be addressed. Where the reviews are only dealing with operational issues, these are being implemented by management as part of the day-to-day process of improvement.

Working in Partnership:

Working together continues with Colchester Borough Council in the areas of:

Parking
Council Tax and Benefits
Waste Management
Customer Services
Building Control
Support Services

A significant amount of learning has occurred between the two Councils, which has led to minor improvements. Potentially the most significant developments could be within the Building Control service, where consideration is being given to establishing a joint arms length service, and in Parking where consideration is being given to three Councils (this includes Uttlesford DC) joining together where one of the Councils provides the parking service for all three. I anticipate proposals coming forward to Cabinet over the next few months.

Witham Academies:

As Members are aware, Bramston and Rickstones schools will be changing to Academy status from 1st September with significant investment from the government to improve the facilities at both schools.

There are implications for this Council regarding the provision of sports facilities at the Bramston School. From early information, the Academy will reprovide some of the dry side facilities (exactly what is yet to be determined) and these facilities will be open to the community outside of core academy hours. We are opening discussions on this issue to assess the implications and to ensure that the review of leisure facilities, community facilities and any reprovision are linked together. It is anticipated that a report on any future leisure/community provision will be brought to Cabinet before the year-end.

Management Structure and Capacity

As Members will be aware, it is intended to supplement the current senior management capacity for a period of approximately two years. Securing this capacity is currently being pursued through three options:

Option 1:

Continued support from Alexander Consulting with the intention of securing independent capacity from October onwards.

Option 2:

Securing independent capacity through interim management.

Option 3:

Securing independent capacity through a fixed-term appointment.

It is anticipated that we will secure this additional senior capacity during this month.

Municipal Journal Achievement Awards

The Council has been short listed for these national awards in the category of Public Private Partnerships. It is a great achievement to be short-listed in competition with so many other Councils. The results and award ceremony will take place on 26th June 2008.

Annual Ombudsman Complaints

Set out in the appendix 1 is the 2007/08 number of Ombudsman complains compared with previous years. Member will note that there was a reduction in the number of complaints.

Summary

It is anticipated that these updates will develop and improve the communications and information process for Members. Members comments would be appreciated as to particular areas/issues they would like covered in future reports.

June 2008