

Performance and Efficiency Programme Board

13th December 2007

Attendance:

Councillor M C M Lager (Chairman)
Councillor J Abbott
Councillor M Banthorpe
Councillor G Butland
Councillor J Gyford

Officers:
C Fleetham, Finance Director
Ms J Lycett, Alexander Consulting
A Reid, Chief Executive
T Wilson, Deputy Finance Director

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dr R Evans, D Hume, J McKee and Mrs C Sandbrook.

The Chairman welcomed Members to the expanded Performance and Efficiency Programme Board, which had been increased in size from 3 to 8 and now included Members of the original Board, 2 non-Cabinet Members from the Conservative Group and one Member from the other three political groups.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Banthorpe declared a personal interest in any matters relating to Greenfields Community Housing as a Member of the GCH Board.

2. MINUTES

DECISION: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Efficiency Programme Board held on 30th October 2007 be approved as a correct record.

3. QUARTERLY REPORT FOR QUARTER 2 – JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2007

The Chief Executive referred to the Quarterly report which had been presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 3rd December 2007.

The Finance Director advised that at Cabinet the Leader had asked for reports on those BVPIs at red and he circulated the responses that had been received in respect of two areas;

BV82a Percentage of Household Waste Recycled

The Board considered a response from Peter Chisnall. It was noted that the Council had achieved its targeted tonnage, but as the BVPI was based upon measuring this as a proportion of all waste collected, the Council's performance had slipped as a result of collecting more garden waste following a warm wet spring.

BV84a Household Waste collected per head in kilos

The Board considered a response from Peter Chisnall. It was noted that slippage under this BVPI was due to a number factors. These included the Council's policy of collecting side waste in Braintree pending the availability of an amenity site, the collection of garden waste - a discretionary service offered in part due to the lack of available Civic Amenity sites in the District.

BVPI 79bii Housing Benefits overpayments recovered as a % of the total debt

The Board considered a response from Julie Rigby, Benefits Manager. Members noted that current performance of 31.49% is below the target of 35% for the year. The Finance Director explained that recovery was often very slow with the Council only able to collect £9 per week if people were on benefits. A large amount of the debt outstanding was more than one or two years old and as the percentage figure was of the total debt outstanding officers were carefully reviewing all debts to see the potential for collecting these. The review had also looked at comparisons with Oxford City Council a high performing authority and would look at greater use of external collection agencies.

Action Point: *That some figures be made available to the Board to demonstrate the year on year problems of collecting debts and how the Council is performing against its targets.*

Other BVPIs at red and therefore causing concern included:

- The percentage of private properties vacant for 6 months – a briefing note had been requested from the Strategic Housing Team;
- The percentage of minor applications being dealt with within 8 weeks. The Chief Executive indicated that the performance on planning was expected to be on track for the next quarter;

Councillor Lager indicated that he would be looking at the format of the performance report with a view to improving the information available on those indicators at red. The intention was to hold the responsible Cabinet Member to account.

Action Point: *The Chief Executive to circulate examples of what the revised performance information would look like.*

4. **WORKING TOGETHER WITH COLCHESTER AND ESSEX COUNTY COUNCILS**

The Finance Director updated the Board on the ongoing discussions with Colchester Borough Council regarding the Customer Service Centre Project. He circulated a briefing note which bullet the four main areas being discussed. The paper also listed support services identified as potential areas for further discussions.

A review was ongoing with Revenues and Benefits with six areas identified for further investigation. It was noted that the work with Colchester would not prevent looking at partnerships with other authorities if this was felt to be of benefit to the Council.

A second table was circulated to the Board identifying 11 additional areas for review and potential quick wins.

The Chief Executive added that the advert for a Programme Director had been placed and the closing date was 17th December with interviews planned for mid-January 2008.

It was noted that although each Council had set aside £50,000 it was proposed that a further £50,000 be set aside to fund the new post and other necessary work.

Members noted that one of the key tasks for the Council would be to ensure effective communication of the project and the reasons for the work and manage rumours throughout the organisation.

To this end a Member Conference had been organised for 6th March 2008 for Members of both districts and County Councillors.

A joint Board meeting had been arranged for February 2008 and a joint Cabinet meeting for 12th March 2008.

Action Point: *That a project plan with timescales be brought to a future meeting of the Board.*

The Chief Executive felt that considerable learning had taken place by the two Councils officers, but the primary reasons for the projects would be to evaluate where the Council could obtain added value and to make the Council more resilient to future changes.

The Chief Executive went on to update Members on progress with the Essex County Council joint office project. This project had been quiet since September and it appeared that the County Council had expressed concerns over the costs. The Chief Executive highlighted that the District Council would need to make a number of clear decisions during the early part of 2008, as there would be a funding shortfall to bridge when GCH moved out of Causeway House in early 2009.

Finally, Members were advised that the joint project with Essex County Council regarding the Discovery Centre would be complete in May 2008 and a report would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting in February 2008 concerning the governance arrangements.

5. **ESSEX CHIEF EXECUTIVE ASSOCIATION (ECEA)**

The Chief Executive referred to the letter from the ECEA dated 5th December 2007. He proposed to respond by supporting proposals 2 and 3 around joint public access working and making better use of property assets – areas where the Council was already working on but to ask for more information about the intentions behind proposal 1 – developing a Council Tax Utility for Essex.

The Board fully supported this approach.

Action Point: *The Chief Executive to respond to the letter and to update the Programme Board on progress.*

6. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Programme Board consider proposed terms of reference and agreed that these be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

Recommended to Cabinet: That the terms of reference as set out at appendix 1 be approved.

7. BUSINESS EFFICIENCY REVIEWS

Jan Lycett of Alexander Consulting presented a report updating the Programme Board on

- (1) Workstream 1 – Central Support Services (link to HRA support). It was noted that the deficit as of the meeting was down to £71,947 and these savings were all deliverable.
- (2) Service Level Agreements. The Council had considerable risk attached to the SLAs and some like the Grounds Maintenance Contract were at considerable cost. The Chief Executive felt that these might be at risk regardless of the actions to improve efficiency/reduce costs. It was also noted that a number were associated with GCH remaining at Causeway House.
- (3) Workstream 2 – Front Line Service Reviews
- (4) Miscellaneous including Community Halls. During discussion it was suggested that the Council should carry out a full review of all Community Halls, what they provide, who they serve, where customers come from, what level of provision existed and what was charged and to whom. Members recognised the sensitivity of this subject but also noted that the current cost to Council taxpayers was significant.
- (5) Cross Cutting Issues

The Chief Executive advised the Board that the Council was a shrinking organisation and the only way to reduce costs would be to reduce the workforce.

The Board recognised the need to be clear about the level of resources, the quality of services and communicate this clearly to customers.

The Deputy Finance Director circulated an update on the budget position so far as the Business Efficiency Reviews are concerned. This showed £760,000 committed against a budget of £817,000.

Members noted that the Chief Executive planned to bring a report to the next meeting on future resourcing of the Business Efficiency Programme (BEP).

Action Point: *Chief Executive to report to the next meeting on proposals to resource the BEP.*

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

DECISION: It was agreed that the next meeting of the Performance and Efficiency Programme Board should be held towards the end of February/early March 2008 with a programme of meetings being agreed for the year.

The meeting commenced at 5.00pm and closed at 6.42pm

M C M Lager

(Chairman)

PERFORMANCE AND EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME BOARD

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To review the opportunities for performance improvement in all areas of the Council's work and especially any BVPIs or KPIs that deliver the Council's priorities.
2. To receive and review the quarterly performance report.
3. To continually review the Council's operations to ensure that value for money is being secured for the taxpayer.
4. To oversee the programme of work concerning the 'working together' agenda with other partners, to enable delivery of the most efficient and effective services.
5. To ensure that effective communications are maintained with all Members and throughout the organisation which ensure an understanding of performance and improvement issues.
6. Any other business concerning the efficient, effective and economic delivery of the Council's services through performance improvement or partnership with others.