

Minutes of: PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 25 July 2007

PRESENT: Councillor Sandiford (Chair)
Councillors Barnes, Dickinson, Forshaw, Lamb
Morris and Neal

IN ATTENDANCE: Bill Lawley, Interim Legal and Democratic Services
Manager
Andrew Buckle, Head of Customer Services and e-
Government
Gary Parson, Housing Research and Strategy Officer
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Challinor. Councillor Essex also sent his apologies due to a family bereavement.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2007 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Committee were asked to consider whether they had an interest in any matters to be discussed at the meeting and the following interests were declared:

Councillors Barnes and Dickinson declared a personal interest in Minute Number 8 (Green Vale Homes) as they both served on the Operation and Strategic Governance Board of Green Vale Homes.

Councillor Neal raised concern that elected Members were asked to represent the Council on outside organisations but had to declare an interest when the organisation was brought before a Committee.

The Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager indicated that there were special rules for Overview and Scrutiny Meetings. A new Code of Conduct recently adopted gives Members wider powers at other Committee meetings and although Members who declare a personal or prejudicial interest in a particular item cannot participate in the decision process they could contribute at the meeting

Councillor Sandiford welcomed the revised Code of Conduct Procedures.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions were raised under this item.

5. CHAIRS UPDATE

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

As requested at the last meeting, letters had been sent to the relevant Heads of Service congratulating them on the significant improvements to BVPI target levels. Copies of the letter were also requested by Cabinet Members.

The Chair informed the Committee that 11 Members had responded to the questionnaire on services provided by Street Scene and Liveability. The results had been sent to the Portfolio Holder and the Head of Street Scene and Liveability for comments and these would be taken to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee Meeting in September.

Members were reminded of Overview and Scrutiny training information which had been sent to all Members. Anyone interested in attending had been asked to contact the Scrutiny Support Officer.

6. FIRST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNGER PEOPLE'S CHAMPION

The meeting were informed that Councillor Brian Essex, The Children and Younger People's Champion was unable to attend the meeting due to personal circumstances.

Resolved

That Councillor Essex be invited to the next Performance Scrutiny Committee to present the Annual Report.

7. PERFORMANCE SURVEY 2006/07 – LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager presented the results of Performance Surveys undertaken in November 2006 on services provided by the Legal and Democratic Services.

a) Legal Services – Member Survey

A satisfaction questionnaire had been sent to all Members in November 2006 asking for their views on the service they received from Legal Services.

15 completed questionnaires were received which highlighted only 2 areas of dissatisfaction.

b) Legal Services – Client Survey

A client satisfaction survey resulted in 5 responses being received. There were no adverse comments and everyone indicated they were very satisfied with the services received from Legal Services.

c) Democratic Services – Member Survey

A questionnaire had been sent to members asking for their views on services provided by the Democratic Services Team.

There was discussion on the Member Enquiry Service and whether or not it would be more appropriate to send all enquiries through the member enquiry system to enable them to be monitored appropriately.

Some members indicated that this would put pressure on the Democratic Services Team and they would prefer service requests to be fed directly to the particular service rather than being fed through the Member Support Assistant.

The Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager informed Members that he and the Committee and Member Services Manager were due to meet with the Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council to discuss future plans for the Member Enquiry Service. Once a proposal had been agreed this would be sent to all Members of this Scrutiny Committee for comments.

Resolved

1. That thanks be sent to Legal and Democratic Services Team for their prompt responses to Member Enquiries.
2. That the results of the surveys be noted.

8. PERFORMANCE OF GREEN VALE HOMES

The Housing Research and Strategy Officer presented a report on the targets/outputs and achievements of Green Vale Homes both on the 12 customer promises and the Homelessness Service during 2006/07.

The Council transferred its housing stock to Green Vale Homes on 27th March 2006, and as part of the transfer agreement, the Council also agreed that Green Vale Homes would deliver the Homelessness Service on behalf of the Council for a period of 5 years.

Within the contract there were 32 indicators, although at the present time there were 18 indicators which did not have a target set against them. The Housing Research and Strategy Officer would be meeting with Green Vale Homes to discuss and develop targets for those 18 indicators.

Members raised individual concerns which the housing research and strategy officer agreed to take forward.

Green Vale Homes had made excellent progress on the Decent Homes Standard with 472 homes being brought up to standard.. Emergency and Urgent Repairs had achieved their targets with 98% of all jobs being completed within 8 hours for emergency repairs and 5 days for urgent repairs.

The Housing Research and Strategy Officer indicated that there had been no spot checks undertaken during 2006/07. Proposals were being developed to carry out validation checks and spot checks on each indicator during the next 12 months. The Chair indicated that she was pleased to hear that checks would be undertaken in the future.

The success this year had been to increase the number of applicants that had been prevented from becoming Homeless in the first instance and the outstanding achievement of not placing anyone in Hostel accommodation. There would also be closer working with the Private Rental Sector using the 'bond scheme'.

Resolved

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the concerns of members be raised by the Housing Research and Strategy Officer at a future meeting with the Operations Director of Green Vale Homes.

9 CAPITA MONITORING AND PERFORMANCE

The Head of Customer Services and e-Government presented an update on the monitoring methods established for the Capita contract and a review of the current performance for 2007/08.

He explained that the Council had agreed an excellent contract with Capita in September 2006, which included 25 termination clauses.

A Governance Model had been established to oversee and ensure that the partnership worked effectively to meet the needs of the Council as determined by the contractual obligations of both parties. The model was being delivered through the following three tier approach.

Strategic Governance Board – which has overall authority for ensuring that the partnership delivers the objectives and service standards as detailed in the current contract. Three elected Members serve on the Board which meets every 6 months.

Operational Board – reports to the Strategic Governance Board and is responsible for reviewing the service performance, agreeing the work programme for the Service Assurance Team and identifying opportunities for changes to the services. The Operational Board meets bi-monthly.

Service Review Meeting – this is a primary meeting responsible for the review of performance.

The Head of Customer Service and e-Government reported that the Council and Capita met on a monthly basis.

He explained the Electronic Document Management System which enabled the improvement for processing new claims as well as the Experian System which could search for people with outstanding debts.

Members discussed the payment dates for Council Tax and raised concerns that people were receiving payment reminders too early.

There was also a concern raised in relation to the need for continuity of advice from one particular member of staff, rather than more than one person being involved in one particular issue.

Members asked that consideration be given to providing any individual who contacts the Council with a reference number and logging this into the computer system. This would help identify who had been providing advice and ensure continuity of advice, should the individual contact the Council again in relation to the same issue.

The Head of Customer Service and e-Government agreed to take the issues forward and report back to the Scrutiny Support Officer.

Concern was also raised by members, that if they are contacting the Council on behalf of a constituent they are asked for written consent from the individual. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to contact the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to discuss the legality of this.

Resolved

1. That the information be noted.
2. That the Head of Customer Service and e-Government take forward the issues raised by members and report the information to the Scrutiny Support Officer
3. That the Scrutiny Support Officer ask the Head of Legal and Democratic Services for advice on the legality of Members making enquiries on behalf of an individual.
4. That a further report be presented to the Committee in 12 months.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.20pm)

Signed.....
(Chair)

Date