

Minutes of: **PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 11th November 2009

PRESENT: Councillor Sandiford (Chair)
Councillors L Barnes, Crawforth, Lamb, Neal,
Stansfield, and Thorne

IN ATTENDANCE: Steve Jackson, Head of Regeneration
Michelle Gray, Town Centre and Tourism Manager
Lee Birkett, Project & Performance
Improvement Officer
Emma Hussain, Principal Policy Officer
Jenni Cook, Committee Services Officer
Councillor Essex, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources
1 member of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Bernard Divine (Co-opted Member).

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th September 2009 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items for discussion.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow the member of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

5. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair updated the meeting on the request for further explanation of the compliments received by the Elections Office. The compliments related to positive feedback for the internet and telephone registration for

the Register of Electors. Many of the compliments noted that this was a good alternative to sending information through the mail.

An update was provided on the Planning Unit in relation to Ombudsman complaint response times. The Planning Unit Manager was to attend complaint handling training in January. Response deadlines were closely monitored by the Planning Business Unit Manager and cover was arranged for absences to ensure compliance. It was noted that all Ombudsman complaints from the Planning Department since 1st April had been responded to on time.

The Chair updated Members on the agenda for the next Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. The agenda consisted of the following:-

- Presentation from the Consultant in Dental Health attended by Melanie Catleugh and Sharon Young.
- Presentation from the Lancashire Probation Trust and the Crime and Disorder Partnership, attended by Andrew Cass and Trish Ellins.
- Presentation from the East Lancashire Health Trust on the proposed new service model for Rossendale Rehabilitation Day Unit attended by Meg Davey.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Progress Report.

The Chair informed Members that the date of the Leisure Performance Scrutiny Committee had moved to 19th November 2009. The meeting would be held at Hardmans Mill. The move was to enable Knight Kavannagh and Page (KKP) Consultants to deliver a presentation on the Leisure Review to the Committee. It was noted that this was a public meeting and the agenda had been published.

The Chair noted that a query raised by a member of the public with regard to financial performance matters had been answered directly.

6. DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PERFORMANCE TARGETS

The Planning Unit Manager updated members on improvements with reaching performance targets since the Quarter 1 report and explained that the Quarter 1 report was his and the Business Unit Manager's first time of compiling performance target figures, and subsequently, some targets had been incorrectly identified as amber. This had been rectified for Quarter 2.

A more detailed explanation of the targets which had been raised as a concern at the previous committee was given as follows:-

DC3 – Improve performance against agreed measures

The Business Unit Manager was in the process of arranging for service level questionnaires to be distributed to assess the performance of the Planning Unit. Questionnaires would also be distributed to Members and

it was intended to provide Members with training on the planning process and conservation matters into the New Year. Service improvements had been implemented, in particular the timely answering of telephones and regular updates to applicants at weeks 5 and/or 6. A Customer Services Charter for Planning was also being written. It was agreed that the Planning Unit Manager would return to the next meeting to provide a further update on this performance target.

DC4 – Improve securing specialist arrangement for conservation and arboriculture advice

The Principal Conservation Officer and the Conservation Assistant had now commenced in post. It was noted that the Principal Conservation Officer post was 50% funded by English Heritage.

In response to a query on arboriculture advice the Planning Unit Manager provided clarification the current situation. It was noted that this target should be separated into conservation and another for arboriculture.

In response to a query by a member of the public, the Planning Unit Manager clarified the funding split with English Heritage and the work plan that the new officers would be working to.

DC6 – Processing of other major planning applications

The Planning Unit Manager provided information to Members which explained why some of the major applications had adversely affected the performance figures. It was noted that an application overturned by the Development Control Committee, which then had to go to the Government Office North West had adversely affected the figures, as had the withdrawn Henrietta Street application. In addition, the current financial climate had resulted in fewer major applications coming through.

Members expressed dissatisfaction that the late response from Lancashire County Council Highways had had a negative impact on the performance figures for the Alder Grange application. Discussion took place on this matter and it was agreed that the Chair of Scrutiny would write to Lancashire County Council Highways to express her concerns.

DC7 – Bring into use further modules of new IT system

Training on the Northgate M3 system would take place in either the third or fourth quarter.

In response to questions by a member of the public, it was clarified that the current contract with planning consultants, Urban Vision would expire in December and would not be renewed. However, if a large application that Urban Vision had been heavily involved in previously arose, their expertise would be called upon.

The location of DC10 in the Performance Report was clarified and an explanation of this performance target was given, being to demonstrate

the staff levels at Rossendale Borough Council related reasonably to other authorities.

The Committee thanked the Planning Unit Manager for his informative update.

Resolved:

1. That Members note the update provided by the Planning Unit Manager.
2. That the Planning Unit Manager be asked to provide an update to the next meeting of Performance Scrutiny on performance target DC3.
3. That the Principal Policy Officer would separate DC4 in to two sections; conservation and then arboriculture.

7. UPDATE ON TOURISM PROMOTION THROUGHOUT THE BOROUGH

The Tourism Officer provided an update to Members on tourism promotion throughout the Borough:-

- Rossendale Visitor Guide 2009/11
- Pennine Lancashire Festival of Food and Culture
- Visit Rossendale Website
- Visit Lancashire Guide 2010
- Taste International
- Taste Lancashire
- Lancashire and Blackpool Tourism Awards 2009

Discussion took place on the success of the above projects, in particular the Rossendale Visitor Guide, which had been extremely popular. Clarification was provided to a member of the public on the costs of this Guide, in particular the £8,000 raised by advertising and confirmed that a local designer and printer had been used. In addition, it was noted that some of the 'iconic' shots used in the Guide were to be used in Visit Lancashire and Visit Britain marketing activity.

The Food and Culture Event for 2010 was discussed and the Tourism Manager noted that she was planning more events for Rossendale, to involve the Horse + Bamboo and the Coconutters to maximise visitor experiences.

The Taste initiative was discussed and it was noted that a total of 24 establishments had signed up to the initiative. Councillors would be sent out a list of participating businesses. Committee Members were asked to let the Tourism Manager have any further ideas by Friday 13th November 2009.

The success of the Tourism Awards was discussed, with Helmshore Textile Museum winning the Small Visitor Attraction of the Year. The East Lancashire Railway 1940s Wartime Weekend had won second prize in the People's Choice Best Tourism Event of the Year, losing to the Blackpool Illuminations. Both of these applications had received support from Rossendale Borough Council.

Signage was discussed and it was noted that a bid had been submitted to obtain Performance Reward Grant funding for tourism signage throughout Rossendale. Suggestions that students could be involved in design and creation of the signage were taken on board, however it was noted that this particular bid was for signage suitable for roads and motorways.

A Tourism Strategy was planned for 2010 and sessions would be arranged with Members to obtain input into the strategy.

The Committee thanked the Tourism Manager for her hard work and informative update. It was noted that much work was going on 'behind the scene' and the general performance reports of the Regeneration Team were always comprehensive, clear and an example of good practice.

Resolved:

That Members note the contents of the report and the work of the Tourism Manager and congratulate the Regeneration Team as a whole for their excellent performance reports.

8. LI64 PERFORMANCE TARGET UPDATE – NUMBER OF PRIVATE SECTOR DWELLINGS WHICH ARE RETURNED INTO OCCUPATION

The Head of Regeneration presented a report which clarified to Members achievement with regard to performance target LI64. Much work had been done to achieve the target previously, however it was noted that due to the current financial climate, it had proven necessary to lower the target to a realistic level. That notwithstanding, projects were currently underway to make significant progress with achieving the targets.

An Empty Homes Task Group had been established to develop a robust Empty Property Strategy, which would overarch across the Regeneration, Team, the Communities Team and Planning and Legal Services. This strategy would be brought back to a future meeting of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.

A pilot scheme had been implemented in Haslingden, 'Haslingden Home Renew' which allowed the Council to approach owners of vacant homes and introduce them to a housing association, who could purchase the property, bring it up to a high standard of repair and use it as social housing. This pilot had been a success so far, and it was hoped to roll this out across the Borough. It was noted that this was a pioneering

project which was the only one of its kind in Lancashire. Suggestions were made and noted that young people with housing problems could be involved in fixing up the homes, in order to live in them as social housing tenants.

In response to a query regarding derelict homes, it was noted that this was more a compulsory purchase matter, however, some properties may be suitable.

Resolved:

The report was noted and the Head of Regeneration was thanked for his informative update.

9. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUARTER 2

The Principal Policy Officer and the Project and Performance Improvement Officer presented the Quarter 2 Integrated Performance Report for July – September 2009.

The report highlighted the following information:-

- Current performance against the Council's priorities
- Current performance against Local Performance Indicators and national Indicators including the associated action plans
- Position of identified risks
- Complaints
- Compliments

Currently 90% of actions identified within the Corporate Plan were on track to be delivered. This was a 10% improvement on performance in the same quarter last year. Clarification was provided to a member of the public on how the figures and percentages were calculated.

Members discussed the report and the following targets were highlighted:-

DC5 – Work with the new owner of the Valley Centre to determine an amended scheme – this target was still red, however as much work as possible was being undertaken to encourage this project to move forward.

LI109c – Planning Applications 'Other' Applications – this target was up on the previous quarter, however the actual number of applications for the period was requested and would be included on the Quarter 3 report.

LI218a & b – abandoned vehicles – these targets were being exceeded. The Principal Policy Officer agreed to obtain reasons for 7 day and 24 hour notices, however it was noted by Members that this performance target was consistently exceeding target and this was noted.

LI82aII – Tonnes of household waste recycled – discussion took place on this apparent downturn in recycling and it was agreed that the Operations Manager would be asked to attend the next meeting to provide further information.

Members expressed concerns that the following targets appeared to be slipping:-

- C&MS2 – To achieve Level II of the North West Charter for Member Development
- C&MS3 – To deliver a joint programme of Ward Walks with the County Council
- C&MS4 – Implement actions arising from the Local Democracy Bill.

It was agreed that the Director of Business would be asked to attend the next meeting to provide information on the above targets, and additionally, clarification on C&MS10 – Community Governance Review.

Members suggested that the latest status note on action OP4 was incorrect. The Principal Policy Officer agreed to investigate this matter and clarify.

A member of the public raised a query with regard to tipping fees for glass cans and plastics and the Chair agreed to provide an update on this at the next meeting.

Project Update

The Principal Policy Office and Head of Regeneration provided members with a project update on the Accommodation Strategy and Town Centre Development, including Valley Centre risks.

It was noted that an Accommodation Working Group was to be arranged shortly and confirmed that the Valley Centre, when at the appropriate stage would go out to public consultation.

A brief update was given on the town centre development plans and it was noted that some work had been done since compilation of the Quarter 2 report.

It was agreed that the next project update would focus on the Play and Open Spaces Strategy.

Resolved:

1. That levels of performance detailed in the report be noted.
2. That the performance of under-achieving targets continue to be closely monitored and the comments of the Committee be passed to the relevant service area.

3. That the Officers identified above be asked to attend the next meeting of the Committee in order to provide clarification on Member's queries.

10. EQUALITIES PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Principal Policy Officer presented a report which outlined the equalities data which the Council had a legal duty to collect and report to the appropriate committee. The data ranged from 1st October 2008 – 30th September 2009.

It was noted that the Council was required to comply with the Equality Legislation. In addition, the Council will be undertaking an external peer assessment in the new Equality Framework for Local Government in March 2010, final confirmation pending. It was noted that the Framework focuses on outcomes and difference made rather than just having the correct processes in place, and considers wider community equality needs.

In response to queries, it was confirmed that all leavers are invited to attend/offered an exit interview by their Manager, circumstances permitting.

It was noted that official written warnings regarding sickness were being given in a consistent manner across the organisation, within the timelines in accordance with the Council's policy and not on a case-by-case basis. In response to queries by Members the sickness procedure was outlined, in particular the welfare visits and support for helping staff return to work.

In response to queries by Members, the Principal Policy Officer agreed to clarify the adoption of the Dignity at Work Act and the Chair would include this in her update at the next meeting.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm at finished at 9.05pm

Signed:
(Chair)

Date: