

PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 15 NOVEMBER 2006

Present:- Councillor A Dean – Chairman.
Councillors A J Ketteridge, T Knight and M J Savage.

Also present:- Councillor D Morson

Officers in attendance: - D Burridge, A Clarke, P Evans, S Martin, P O'Dell, R Pridham, C Roberts, T Turner and C Wingfield.

PS 48 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M L Foley, V J T Lelliott, P A Wilcock and E Tealby-Watson.

PS49 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman explained that Councillor E Tealby-Watson had resigned from her position as Vice-Chairman due to her present state of health.

RESOLVED that Councillor M Savage be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee

PS 50 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 9 AUGUST AND 21 SEPTEMBER 2006

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 9 August and 21 September 2006 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

PS 51 MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman referred to the action list attached to the agenda and asked whether any Member wished to raise any item aside from those on the list.

The Executive Manager (Strategy and Performance) updated the Committee on two items. She was currently looking at the potential for making a Capital Building Fund bid to support diversity and migrant workers with East Herts and Braintree District Councils. She also said that the consultation function within Strategy and Performance had been moved from Communications to Performance Improvement and she introduced Paula Evans who would be helping Alaine Clarke with this.

PS 52 PERFORMANCE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Performance Improvement Manager giving a summary of performance data for 2006/07 Quarter 2 (July-September) Best Value Performance Indicators. She explained that of the indicators in the report:-

- 18 were on or above target (58%).
- 2 were up to 5% off target (6%)
- 11 were 5% or more off target (35%).
- 1 was in abeyance (3%)

Explanations for the 11 indicators that were 5% or more off target were given in the report. These had been discussed by the Executive Management Team and appropriate remedial action was being considered.

In answer to questions the Performance Improvement Manager explained that data for other performance indicators was still being collected and that the data in BV12 was under investigation.

The Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) stressed that some targets were extremely difficult to meet and that analysis following the instances of being off target showed valid reasons eg in housing matters.

RESOLVED that the words of the Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) be noted with the reasons for the drop in performance in some housing matters, and that officers be congratulated on the performance overall.

PS53 **INTERNAL AUDIT HALF-YEAR REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Audit Partnership Manager, prepared at the Committee's request. The Audit Partnership Manager explained that variances between planned and actual work were expected at this time of year. Audits of the Council's key financial systems were scheduled in Quarter 4 so that as much of the financial year as possible was covered.

The Chairman of the Committee asked that Audit look at external communications and IT, particularly e mails, and that Members be involved in the audit work if possible.

PS 54 **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – BUILDING CONTROL FEES AND CHARGES**

The Committee received the report of the Audit Partnership Manager on systems of control and management of risk within this area. The Chairman of the Committee congratulated the Staff on the favourable result of this audit. He expressed the view that this was a well organised part of the organisation. It was noted that the Section Manager was a member of JMT and that there was an opportunity to share best practice through that medium.

RESOLVED that the Section Manager be requested to share best practice.

PS 55 **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – RESPONSE MAINTENANCE**

Consideration of this item was postponed to the next meeting of the Committee as, due to an administrative error, the relevant Appendix had been omitted from the agenda.

PS 56 **MUSEUM AUDIT REPORT – CONTEXT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee received the report of the Museum Curator advising on the context and essential background information for assessment of the recent internal audit of the Saffron Walden Museum. The report explained the role of volunteers, which in

the Museum Service was relatively restricted, and why some general criteria referred to in the audit report, such as Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks, might therefore be inappropriate or the risk contained in other ways. It confirmed recommendations already enacted within the Museum Service and advised Members where recommendations required action by the Council. Members were further directed to the Museum Service Forward Plan 2006 (Stage II) which placed further improvements to sales and visitor facilities in context of future developments.

Councillor D Morson who was the Chairman of both the Museum Management Working Group and the Museum Resource Centre Project Team was also present with the Museum Curator.

The Museum Curator explained the action which had been undertaken to implement the recommendations accepted at the last meeting. Banking /cash collection arrangements required completion of a contract. HR input was needed to produce a Council Policy for Volunteers with Guidance Notes to give to the volunteers as well as a corporate child protection policy, and training days had already been allocated in this context. She referred to the question of risk management for volunteers and the need for and cost of CRB checks.

In answer to a question from Councillor Knight the Chairman said that the matter of a till had been covered.

Councillor Savage said he thought the Heritage Centre and income improvement were being treated in the wrong order.

The Museum Curator explained the need to provide more space before the inefficiencies of the existing building could be met. Councillor Morson added that the stages were interdependent and the Museum Society had been most pro-active with regard to extension of facilities at the existing site to allow improvements and to allocate funds for Stage II.

In answer to a question the Museum Curator explained that improving the front desk area would cost about £10,000 before any of the outlay could be recovered.

Councillor Knight said the apparent inflexible attitude of some staff needed to be addressed. They were running a business which was not being marketed correctly and needed to be addressed to its full potential. They needed to spend to re-vamp. The sales would give them a bigger income to spend on getting staff trained for sales. There was no independent web site which was so important for children. She considered that this would give Councillors more confidence to support the new one. She felt the Museum was not being run commercially properly, and considered that most charities ran on volunteers and that if they would not bend then it became necessary to look for other volunteers.

The Museum Curator explained that the till recommendation had been withdrawn.

The Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) referred to Para 1.7 of the report which showed that recording cashing-up now had a new system which was deemed entirely satisfactory.

The Audit Partnership Manager confirmed that the daily cash procedure was fit for purpose and that subject to verification, control procedures were satisfactory.

Councillor Knight considered this far from ideal and Councillor Savage said he wanted to be satisfied that it was a good system. He asked why such a complex till been trialled and said that expertise elsewhere in the Council should have been used. He also felt there should have been consultation on costs. Councillor Ketteridge commented that consultants cost a lot.

The Museum Curator explained that the new Heritage Centre would not be a public building with a shop, but that its use would enable expansion of the desk area in the listed building with later TIC expansion. It was a period of technological change; the Museum uniquely relied on volunteers for its front-of-house staff and there was not a choice of volunteer staff out there.

Councillor Morson detailed the four options open to the Council as:-

- 1 do nothing
- 2 improve the shop (£10-17,000)
- 3 use the school house to provide a shop and refreshment area
- 4 use £44,000-76,000 to build an extension.

Option 2 was a short term measure. A café etc could only be provided in an extension and the majority of the Working Party had thought option 4 was the best in view of the space problems with the existing shop.

Councillor Knight considered this swept important issues under the carpet.

Councillor Morson explained that the till issue had been withdrawn as a part of the wider plans to deal with front of house services, but Councillor Knight said that there were concerns she had expressed very strongly which were not addressed in the report, not just the till. She thought that any person handling money should have a Criminal Records Bureau check because of the possibility of expropriation of funds. She felt there was lack of marketing expertise in what was being undertaken and that the Council staff could contribute more.

The Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) referred again to Para 1.7 of the report which showed that recording cashing-up now had a new system which was deemed entirely satisfactory.

Councillor Savage asked how much the till had cost and the Museum Curator explained that it had been moved to another location within the Council's services.

Councillor Morson commented that he had not realised that this was to be the subject of discussions but he referred to the cost of improving the shop and added that turnover would be about £11,000 pa.

Councillor Knight said that she wanted to re-visit these matters.

The Audit Partnership Manager confirmed that the purport of the original audit report had been about financial control, and as such it needed to be divorced from the main discussion about wider performance. He reiterated that he was happy that, subject to verification, control procedures were satisfactory.

Councillor Knight said the Committee were there to judge performance.

Councillor Dean said that the Committee should decide whether to review the matter of the Museum when it looked at its Committee Programme. He suggested that CRB

matters should be left to the discretion of officers and he suggested an informal site visit.

Councillor Morson replied that in the wider context the project was a long term one which he would be happy to discuss with Councillor Dean and that it had more implications than quick finance turn-around.

The Museum Curator added that she would be happy to provide an update on marketing and on the Museum's Forward Plan.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the report be noted and reconsidered in February.
- 2 an informal site visit be arranged for Members

PS 57

ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) about progress with improvements recommended by the Audit Letter. He explained that his staff had struggled with the time-scales but that the Council should get a tick for their medium term financial strategy.

Councillor Dean said that he had spoken to Paul King who was impressed with the half-year report and the rigour and quantity of ongoing matters. The focus would be more upon outputs next time.

Councillor Ketteridge commented that he hoped to see enough savings under "procurement best practice" to outweigh the money invested.

Councillor Savage wanted details of the activities proposed in para 7.4 (partnership and procurement). The Executive Manager (Strategy and Performance) said that both of these were the subject of corporate plan project plans. She ran through the details of both projects and said that further information was within the detailed plans on the intranet.

Councillor Knight said the Council should not restrict entry to the Essex Procurement Hub. The Executive Manager (Strategy and Performance) explained that any authority could buy from a Hub negotiated framework contract, but that operational support and resource sharing were currently confined to the six original establishing authorities.

The Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) said that he had been to the Procurement Working Group where the timetable had been discussed. He had been reassured by the Essex Procurement Hub Manager on the level of savings expected to be made.

He said, in the context of "People, Performance and Accountability." that all managers would be instructed to attend a development centre to be assessed on skills packages. This was being done in conjunction with the County Council and a report was going to the Operations Committee about it.

Councillor Knight relayed various complaints she had heard about waste collection. Councillor Dean said this should be raised under the next agenda item.

In answer to a question from Councillor Dean about 11/26 p43 of the report the Executive Manager (Strategy and Performance) described opportunities for open learning across the organisation.

Councillor Dean asked who would do the review of Member training. The Executive Manager (Finance and Asset Strategy) said that he did not know the detailed plan, but it was necessary to have a Member training need analysis and to get Members to attend the courses. Councillor Knight asked that the courses take place out of work hours.

RESOLVED that the Chairman set up a dialogue with the Audit Commission about the direction of travel.

PS 58

AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION OF WASTE AND STREET SCENE

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Manager (Environmental & Cultural Services) updating Members on the Audit Commission inspection of Waste and Street Scene.

The report awarded a “one star” rating based upon the historical performance but a “promising” rating in respect of the plans that were in place. The inspection came at the point where there was little firm evidence of how the 3 bin scheme would perform but the auditors were interested to know the outcome.

As this was an innovative new scheme that fitted with the latest guidance from DEFRA and the National Audit Office (24 July 2006) the Commission wished to track the scheme’s success and might be able to revisit next year to undertake a ‘light touch’ inspection.

The report listed the very many positive comments made by the inspectors.

The Executive Manager (Environmental & Cultural Services) circulated an action plan in response to the Audit Commission’s recommendations which was accepted by Members.

Councillor Knight who had an assisted collection complained that her bins had been left in the middle of the drive and stressed that there was a problem of missed bins at huge additional cost and an attitude problem on the part of some staff. The Chairman suggested she pursue this “off-line”.

Councillor Ketteridge asked whether the budget for implementation would hold good and the Executive Manager (Environmental & Cultural Services) explained that a business plan for the new service was being developed. It would assess how the new service was performing against the model; this work would be completed before the January budget cycle.

RESOLVED that Members note the report and accept the action plan.

PS 59

BUSINESS FOR NEXT MEETING

Members considered the list of items for the next meeting and agreed

Response Maintenance report

Performance Information (Quarter 3 October – December)
Risk Management Update
Target Setting
Internal Audit Plan 2007/08
Museum Report

PS60

URGENT BUSINESS

The Chairman reported that there would be an Improvement Conference on 6/7 March 2007.

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm

PS49	Councillor Savage appointed Vice-Chairman	CR
PS53	Audit reports: external communications, IT and e mails	SM
PS54	Building Control – sharing best practice	SM
PS55	Response maintenance report	SM/CR
PS56	Museum report and site visit – next meeting	CW
PS57	Audit letter progress report – direction of travel dialogue	AD
PS58	Waste report planned action	DB