

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 – RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT held at  
7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES SAFFRON WALDEN on 1 OCTOBER 2003**

Present:- Councillor S Flack – Chairman.  
Councillors H D Baker, C A Bayley, M A Hibbs, R M Lemon,  
J P Murphy, V Pedder, S V Schneider, G Sell and F E Silver.

Officers in attendance:- M Brean, J B Dickson, J K Mercer, J R Mitchell,  
I Orton, M T Purkiss and R M Secker.

**S2.12 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D J Morson.

**S2.13 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2003 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**S2.14 BUSINESS ARISING**

**(i) Minute S2.8 – Golds Nurseries**

It was reported that additional initiatives were being explored in relation to this site and a review was being undertaken by Internal Audit. A full report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Hibbs said that he was concerned that a problem of this magnitude had arisen without being brought to the attention of Members at an earlier stage. The Director of Resources said that lessons had been learnt from this matter and new procedures had been introduced and reference would be made to this in the report.

**(ii) Minute S2.11 – Community Support Officers**

The Performance Manager explained that reference to this matter was included in the item on the agenda concerning the Work Programme for 2003/04.

**S2.15 MEMBERS HOME COMPUTING**

The Head of Audit and IT introduced a comprehensive report providing an update on the implementation of new IT facilities for Members. He said that the new system was proving to be more reliable and cost effective. He explained that a great deal of work had been undertaken by the IT Section leading up to the implementation date. Despite some teething problems the project was now going reasonably well. However, he said that general feedback had suggested that the system was slow and the webmail system had caused some concerns. He explained that the slowness had resulted

mainly from the size of attachments sent by some officers and Members and this was being addressed.

He said that officers were proposing the following actions to take the project forward:

***To improve performance issues:***

- i) Install broadband, where available. This would speed up system performance, for example, when opening large email attachments. Initial research had identified that about twenty five Members would be able to receive broadband by the end of this year.
- ii) Remind staff to limit the size of email attachments wherever possible.
- iii) Encourage greater use of the Intranet for posting information, as an alternative to emailing larger documents to several Members.
- iv) Upgrade or replace laptops and printers. As there was no budget presently available, this item would need to be included in the draft 2004/05 IT Programme.

***To overcome objections to webmail functionality***

- v) Encourage more use of the Virtual Private Network connection to access the full version of Outlook. The connection was already set up on the laptops. This would also enable Members to work on their email off-line.

***Other proposed enhancements***

- vi) Upgrade CMIS, the committee management system, once the supplier was happy that the new release was working correctly (this release had been put back several times). Training would then be provided to Members.
- vii) Offer further general training. Officers would arrange a number of informal 'drop-in' sessions before committee meetings where members could discuss issues and queries with IT staff. Formal training courses would also be arranged where requested.

The Head of Audit and IT added that the Council would upgrade to a new version of webmail when this was possible.

Councillor Silver thanked the Head of Audit and IT and his staff for the help and support which had been given to Members during this project. Councillor Flack said that one of the problems was caused by people attaching coloured slides from presentations. She suggested that these needed to be reduced in size and kept to black and white. Councillor Schneider agreed that larger documents did cause problems and asked whether better printers could be provided. The Head of Audit and IT said that the use of some laser printers were being trialed and the matter would be considered in the Capital Programme. Councillor Hibbs referred to the delay in receiving some papers

and problems with the Committee Management system. He also suggested that a notice board should be provided for comments to be made. The Head of Audit and IT explained the problems with the Committee Management System and said that the suggestion of a notice board was being investigated. Councillor Murphy made a number of suggestions relating to the use of broadband, security procedures and suggestions of a reference library to improve such matters as best value reviews etc.

Following comments relating to information on planning matters, Councillor Hibbs declared an interest as an architect and took no part in the discussion on this part of the item. The Head of Planning and Building Surveying said that the planning website was one of the best in the country and included provision for the public to make comments and track process. He added that it would shortly be improved by the inclusion of application plans on-line.

RESOLVED that the action plan set out above be supported.

S2.16

## **MEMBER INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS**

Councillor Hibbs declared an interest in this item as an architect and left the meeting.

The Head of Planning and Building Surveying explained how Members were involved in the planning process. He said that Members were extensively involved in the formulation of policy through the local plan process which it is then the duty of the Development Control Committee to implement, either through the determination of planning and other applications or through the enforcement of breaches of planning control. He also explained a chart which summarised Member involvement from National Planning Policy, through to the local level. Councillor Flack said that, particularly in relation to Section 106 Agreements, the Council needed to be in control of the flow of development and the provision of infrastructure, rather than this being left to the developer. Councillor Murphy expressed some concern at recent experience and asked for a report on the process for handling Section 106 Agreements to be submitted to the next meeting. He also suggested that the Council needed to look at the consultation process and be more proactive and involve people at an early stage, particularly in relation to larger projects. The Head of Planning and Building Surveying said that such a change would need to be a policy decision and he encouraged Members to attend the Planning Best Value Challenge Workshop on 22 October and a further workshop on 1 December where these and other issues could be discussed.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the report be noted and used as a basis to inform discussion as the Best Value Review progresses
- 2 a report on the existing 106 policy process be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

S2.17

**WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2003/04**

The Performance Manager submitted the following suggested Work Programme for 2003/04:

Work Programme 2003/04	Date of Committee	Comments
Best Value Process	3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2003	
Service & Financial Planning		
Comprehensive Performance Assessment Process		
Licensing		
Sponsorship	4 <sup>TH</sup> February 2004	
Budget Monitoring Process		
IT Services		
Community Support Officers		
Decriminalisation of Parking Control	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2004	
Best Value Reviews for 2004/05		
Contract Management		

In relation to Community Support Officers, Members asked that an interim report be submitted to the next meeting with a further report in February 2004 providing details of performance.

In relation to policing issues, the Performance Manager undertook to contact the Chairman and Members of the committee direct concerning the future of the police house in Newport.

Councillor Lemon said that he had been assured that the Community Support Officers would complement and not replace existing police officers and would be placed within the district. Councillor Flack added that the advantage of Community Support Officers was that they could not be moved elsewhere. Councillor Silver said that there were many opportunities for sponsorship and these should be explored further. Councillor Flack referred to Member involvement in the audit programme and the monitoring of Best Value Indicators. It was noted that there would be a report to the next meeting concerning the audit programme and the Performance Manager agreed to address the Best Value issue.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme, as set out above, be agreed.

S2.18

**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

The Committee was advised that in relation to the Best Value Performance Plan and the CPA Corporate Self Assessment, there was a need for the authority to strengthen the range of performance information and report this

on a regular basis to both Members and managers. To achieve this, a comprehensive performance system had been developed using around 60 Performance Indicators that were already generally collected within the authority. The Indicators had now been extended to include all sections within the Council.

In order to keep the process simple and straightforward, it was recommended that the reporting of performance be linked to a traffic lights system showing the degree of slippage from the performance target. Members commented that the reporting system should be designed so as to be usable for those with impaired sight.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and a further report be made to committees early in the New Year.

S2.19

### **BEST VALUE REVIEW OF REFUSE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING SERVICES**

The Head of Environmental Services explained progress to date with the Best Value Review. He outlined the consultation process which had been undertaken with householders and trade customers and explained how this and the comparative studies and information on partnerships would help in the development of the improvement plan.

He concluded that the end of the current Uttlesford refuse/recycling contract in July 2006 and the imminent start then of an Essex County Council disposal contract for West Essex could provide a number of opportunities to:

- merge the Uttlesford services into a single competitively tendered service contract
- utilise the entire fleet of collection vehicles, which except for the specialist trade vehicles would be twin bodied vehicles
- residual waste and recyclables could be collected using a single vehicle on the same day each week
- easily understood district wide collection leaflets could be produced and issued. Notifications of changes for Bank Holidays etc would be easily and effectively communicated to all customers.

Councillor Silver said that the refuse and recycling service was first class. Councillor Hibbs agreed and asked why the issue of wheelie bins had not been addressed. The Head of Environmental Services confirmed that this would be covered in the final report. In response to a question from Councillor Murphy regarding joint working, the Director of Resources said that the Council had recently joined the Essex Procurement Group.

RESOLVED that the report submitted by the Head of Environmental Services be accepted as the basis of the Draft Improvement Plan for the Refuse Collection and Recycling Services Best Value Review.

## S2.20 **BEST VALUE REVIEW OF REVENUE SERVICES**

The Head of Revenue Services submitted a detailed report setting out progress made with the Best Value Review of Revenue Services. In particular, he referred to the performance figures which had been supplied by the CIPFA benchmarking club. A challenge event had been held on 25 September 2003 and had been well attended and provided some useful information which would help in preparing the Service Improvement Plan.

Councillor Hibbs said that the Housing Services Committee had previously expressed some concern at the lack of flexibility within the housing benefit system, delays in processing claims and the need for the Revenues and Housing Sections to discuss areas of common concern. The Head of Revenues said that the Council was in the top 10% in terms of processing claims and would be more proactive in promoting the availability of benefits. He also said that the section would liaise more closely with the housing section. In response to a question from Councillor Murphy, the Performance Manager said that the issue of providing services at Dunmow would be looked at, as part of the review of access to services.

Councillor Schneider urged other Members to identify and assist people in their wards who needed help in filling out benefit forms. Councillor Sell asked whether it would be possible to provide Members with a simple guide to the eligibility for claiming benefit and whether Revenue Services staff could be involved with the mobile police station. Councillor Bayley said that staff had gone out on the mobile police station to assist in these matters and she said that the Citizens Advice Bureau would always help in these cases.

RESOLVED that the report submitted by the Head of Revenues be accepted for the basis of the Draft Improvement Plan for the Revenue Services Best Value Review.

## S2.21 **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

The Performance Manager reminded Members that the Resources Committee on 20 March 2003 had agreed the introduction of a Code of Corporate Governance and that this committee would monitor the progress of the Code on a regular basis. He said that all authorities had to adopt a Code of Corporate Governance and it was essential that progress towards implementing the code was regularly reported to Members. He circulated a check list showing the action required to ensure compliance and evidence of compliance and said that it was intended that reporting would take place twice a year, normally in April and October. In response to questions from Members, the Performance Manager said that the use of the term 'on-going' would be deleted and replaced by some examples and target dates. Reference would also be made to budget consultation and liaison.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Progress with implementing the Code of Corporate Governance be noted,

- 2 Scrutiny Committee 2 receive updates on the progress with implementing the Code of Corporate Governance twice a year.

## S2.22 **MATTERS ARISING FROM ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

Members noted the decision list from the Environment and Transport Committee on 9 September 2003. In relation to the item on decriminalisation, Councillor Flack said that she was disappointed that the Environment and Transport Committee had not explored the opportunity of working in partnership with other authorities to help share some of the administrative burden. Councillor Hibbs said that, in the past, the County Council had been opposed to this option.

RESOLVED that the decision of the Environment and Transport Committee be noted, but that the Committee be asked to explore opportunities for sharing the management function of decriminalisation schemes with other local authorities.

## S2.23 **MATTERS ARISING FROM RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

There were no matters arising from the meeting of the Resources Committee held on 18 September 2003.

The meeting ended at 10.10 pm.