

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 – RESOURCES ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS held at 7.30 pm at the COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 6 JULY 2005

Present: - Councillor S Flack – Chairman.
Councillors H D Baker, E Gower, M A Hibbs, R M Lemon,
S V Schneider and F E Silver.

Officers in attendance: - V Borges, M Brean, D Burrige, R Chamberlain,
W Cockerell, T Fennell, J Mitchell, N Harris, R Pridham,
E Spencer, T Turner and A Webb.

SC2.1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C A Bayley and D J Morson.

SC2.2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2005 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SC2.3 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute SC2.49 – Scrutiny Committee 2 Work Programme 2005/06

The Executive Manager (Performance and Strategy) informed Members that a fees and charges review would take place soon and asked if any other Members wanted to be involved. In reply Councillor R M Lemon agreed to become involved with the review.

She also recommended that the agreed work on scrutinising waste would not now take place, as there was potential duplication with work on the Essex Waste Management Contract. Councillor J P Murphy, who was to have acted as the lead Member, had also now left the Committee.

(ii) Minute SC2.50 – Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill

Councillor S Flack informed the Committee that the item went to full Council who decided the issue did not need to be discussed and recommended that the item went back to the Environment Committee. The Environment Committee had discussed the item and decided to hold a Member workshop on the Bill.

SC2.4 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The Executive Manager (Performance and Strategy) introduced the report, which outlined the Councils performance against Best Value Performance and

Local Indicators for those sections that were off target or outside the top quartile figures for District Councils.

The sections that had not met their target or were outside the top quartile had been identified and had developed performance improvement plans. Officers were in attendance at the meeting to clarify performance issues and to outline their performance improvements.

Performance Indicator No.	Corporate Health
8	<p>The Principal Accountant provided Members with a report that explained the causes for the lower than targeted performance. He explained that the target was a national performance indicator and had been at 100% for several years as it was considered that 30 days was ample time to pay invoices.</p> <p>He explained that the Council had improved over the past year where the indicator was 91.79% on 2003/04 and was 93.78% during 2004/05. He said that the improvement was due to the new Financial Management System, but it had also caused some delays, which limited the improvement. He also explained that the target required a corporate effort as the 30-day limit started when the Council received the invoice, not within the Financial Services, or it was based on the invoice date. He then explained to the Committee the twice-weekly procedure in which invoices were handled. He stressed that disputed invoices were another area that caused delay.</p> <p>He informed Members of an improvement plan that included issuing a guidance leaflet explaining the importance of paying invoices promptly, as well as reminders of the procedures for disputed invoices to ensure they were annotated as 'in dispute'. Possibly changing the logging of invoices to record date received and in the longer term move towards electronic invoice authorisation.</p>
157	<p>The Head of IT provided Members with a report that informed them of the BV157 that required all Council services to be available electronically by 31 December 2005.</p> <p>He explained that due to staffing difficulties between the end of September and November 2004 work had been affected. However new staff had joined the team during January 2005 and work was now progressing very well. He said that there had been 640 electronic interactions to achieve and so far 576 had been completed leaving 64 to achieve. He added that this work had resulted in the Council being one of the leading Essex authorities on BV157 and it was expected that all services would be available electronically by 31 December 2005.</p> <p>In response to questions from the Committee the Head of IT informed Members that staff had been lost through personal reasons and there was now the ability to bring in additional staff if a similar situation occurred again.</p>
64	<p>The Principal Environmental Officer explained that the target of 5 properties had been selected in anticipation of the new powers in the</p>

	<p>then Housing Bill and knowledge of one or two properties that might have been returned to use due to action by the Council. However there was a delay in passing the Housing Act 2004, and the absence of commencement orders and official guidance on the use of new Empty Dwelling Management Orders, which had significantly contributed to the failure in reaching the target. He added that one of the two properties likely to be returned occurred in the first quarter of 2005 and was too late to be included in the outturn data.</p> <p>After a debate Members agreed that a letter would be written to Parish Councils asking if they were aware of any empty flats/houses and to raise this as an item at the Health and Housing Committee.</p>
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Performance Indicator No.	Housing
66a	<p>The Executive Manager (Housing Services) provided Members with a report. He explained that they had experienced technical problems, which had resulted in the BV66a target not being achieved. He added that staff workload at the end of the financial year meant that tenant arrears were not written off before the end of the financial year.</p> <p>He said that the Easter bank holiday weekend occurred in the last collection week of the financial year, which impacted the level of collection. Some tenants who would normally pay on a Friday or a Monday were not able to do so and therefore made the payment in the following week.</p> <p>Payments that had been received via the bank for the period 29 March 2005 to 1 April 2005 had not been posted into the rent account until the current financial year.</p>
66c	<p>The Executive Manager (Housing Services) presented the Committee with a report and explained that there was a significant increase in the number of tenants with very high arrears at the end of March. He explained that most of the cases had Suspended Possession Orders against them and there were 21 evictions applied for but only 4 went ahead which affected the 2004/05 outturn. He said that improvements would be made as the imminent upgrade of the housing computer system would enable a review of the rent arrears procedure and results would go to the Health and Housing Committee in the future.</p>

Performance Indicator No.	Benefits
76c 76d	<p>The Executive Manager (Corporate Governance) provided the Committee with a report, which explained that the management of benefit fraud had been transferred to the Executive Manager (Corporate Governance) as part of the restructuring of the Council.</p> <p>The report explained that the targets had not been met as there had been difficulties in recruiting a Benefit Fraud Investigator. However the vacancy had now been filled. It was also agreed, in order to reduce costs that the post of administrative assistant would not be filled. This resulted in investigators having an increased workload and reduction in time available for benefit fraud investigations.</p>

	<p>The report explained that the former Head of IT & Benefit Fraud had set the target of 80 investigations per 1000 claimants for BV76c, which the Executive Manager (Corporate Governance) felt was unrealistic. The report informed Members that with the resource reduction in the team and with only one investigator for 6 months the outturn of 59.66 was impressive and that a target of 60 investigations per 1000 claimants would be set for the current year.</p> <p>The BV76d target was again set by the former Head of IT & Benefit Fraud and was unrealistic. It explained that the upper quartile figure was 5.83 prosecutions and sanctions per 1000 caseload. The benefit fraud team actually achieved 16.67, which was almost 3 times higher. This resulted in an inspection due to the high performance of the Council in terms of prosecutions and sanctions. In view of the department's constraints it had been agreed that a target of 15 prosecutions and sanctions per 1000 would be a reasonable target.</p> <p>There were no plans to improve an already high achieving service. The only area of improvement would be to employ additional resources if it would be self-financing.</p>
79b	<p>The Executive Manager (Customer Service) presented the Committee with a report on behalf of the Principal Revenues Quality Officer. He explained that the indicators showed a percentage of Benefit Overpayments that were recovered in the year as a result of the claimant either failing to report a change of circumstances or initially failing to fully declare their true circumstances. He explained that customers were often on low income with no capital to pay off large invoices if an overpayment had occurred.</p> <p>He explained that the Council abided by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) guidelines, which state that Benefit overpayments would be collected from ongoing benefit to ease the burden of debt on people with low incomes. He said that the maximum recovery rate was £8.55 per week, which affects the performance indicator. He added that the performance indicator had been amended to reflect detailed statistics and suggested that the possible use of an agency to trace absconders was being investigated.</p>

Performance Indicator No.	Planning
106	The Executive Manager (Development Services) informed the Committee that the target was set by Government and was unrealistic for Uttlesford. He said that within the department they had agreed to a target of 40%.
109b	The Executive Manager (Development Services) informed the Committee that there had been a sustained and dramatic improvement in minor applications. He added that the current outturn figure for the end of June was 77%.
170c	The Executive Manager (Environmental Services) presented the Committee with a report that informed Members that an analysis of school visits in recent years had led to changing the target to 6,500 pupils. She explained that this was due to a number of factors outside

	<p>the museum's control for instance transport costs, days when schools cannot take pupils out, slight reductions in school class sizes, limitations in timetables and staffing resources. She added that they were anticipating a one off reduction in the target for 2005/06 due to staff sickness</p> <p>She explained that the majority of the museum's school visits were from Primary Schools. Uttlesford has 5,631 pupils in primary school and the museums school visit total was 6,463, which was due to the ability to draw in schools from other areas.</p> <p>She said that in the long term the museum was also looking to develop other types of links with schools. However a review of the facilities at the Museum was needed as the facilities were in danger of becoming outdated and currently there were issues with restricted toilets and lack of teaching space in comparison with other venues.</p> <p>Members were impressed with the number of primary school visits and congratulated officers on their success. They also clarified that the target for 2005/06 would be 5,500 and then 6,500 for the next two years.</p>
174 and 175	<p>The Performance Improvement Manager explained the circumstances of the one incident. He said that the outturn for BV 175 was 100% because any racial abuse needed to be dealt with at 100%.</p> <p>Members asked if Officers could find out how many incidents were reported and how many were recorded.</p>

Local Performance Indicator list

Performance Indicator No.	Customer Services
CS1	<p>The Executive Manager (Customer Services) presented the Committee with a report. He explained that the target was considered unrealistic and a more realistic and sustainable target of 95% for 2005/06 had now been set. However the 95.92% outturn achieved in 2004/05 in comparison with 92.33% in 2003/04 showed that performance had improved.</p>
CS2	<p>The Executive Manager (Customer Services) presented the Committee with a report, which included a table showing a breakdown of the total number of calls that were received by each service area. He explained that some areas had met their target. He added that the number of calls received in the 1st quarter had increased from 91,776 in 2004/05 to 148,403, which had affected the outturn result.</p> <p>Members appreciated that all calls could not be answered within 15 seconds and commended Officers on the amount of calls that were answered within this time.</p>

Performance Indicator No	Development Services
DS1	<p>The Executive Manger (Developmental Services) explained that he would be looking at all indicator targets, as they had been set without his control. He added that the outturn for DS1 at the end of June was well on</p>

	target and showed a significant sustained level of improvement.
DS2	The Executive Manager (Development Services) explained that the outturn had become distorted due to some big planning applications, which have legal issues and could not be determined within 10.71 weeks or less. He said that 3 big applications were now into two or three years due to legal factors.
DS3	The Head of Building Surveying informed the Committee that the outturn for 2004/05 was 96.6%, which was an improvement on 2000/01 at 91.3%. He explained that he was happy with the progress especially with the increase in applications.
DS4	The Executive Manager (Development Services) explained that Development Services were achieving 100% outturn this year, showing a sustained improvement in registering planning applications in five days.
DS5	The Head of Building Surveying informed Members that they were improving and he was happy with the performance.

Performance Indicator No.	Environment and Culture
EC3	The Environmental Services Officer informed the Committee that the 3-day or less target was not realistic and a target of 4 days or less would be used in the future. He explained that a number of different parties were involved in the removal of fly-tips, which tended to delay the process.
EC4	The Environmental Services Officer explained that the one and only removal vehicle had broken down, which caused delays. Members suggested that benchmarking of other authorities performance take place.
EC5	The Environmental Services Officer explained that 30,000 bins were collected per week and approximately 7 bins a week were missed. He added that the outturn for the end of the 1 st quarter was nearer to 12 than 20.

Performance Indicator No.	Housing
H1	The Executive Manager (Housing Services) explained that they had not been hitting the target due to staffing difficulties, a high number of transfers to RSL dwellings in Great Dunmow and hard to let sheltered units. He explained that they would be holding open days to encourage people to rent sheltered accommodation. He added that they were also looking at ways to update some accommodation as people's needs were changing.

SC2.5 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Flack was concerned that the Birchanger Wood Trust Management Committee had not been consulted about the possible proposal of the duality of the A120.

SC2.6 TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE – 16 JUNE 2005

Members expressed concern with item 7 on the decision list and asked for clarification on the issue of parking spaces for schools. Members also asked Officers to investigate if Waitrose was still charging for the use of some their parking spaces where the income was going to a local charity. Members suggested if the spaces were still in use Waitrose would possibly let the school use them.

SC2.7

MATTERS ARISING FROM COMMITTEE MEETINGS

There were no matters arising from the meetings of the Licensing, Environment and Resources Committees.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.