

## BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

2.00 P.M.

13<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2004

**PRESENT:** Councillors K. Budden (Chairman), J. Gilbert (Vice-Chairman), T. Clifford, A. Johnson, J. Kirkman, P. Robinson, R. J. Sherlock and J. Whitelegg.

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive (Part)  
Corporate Director (Community Services) (Part)  
Corporate Director (Central Services) (Part)  
Head of Corporate Strategy Services (Part)  
J. Doble – Principal Democratic Support Officer  
J. Glenton – Democratic Support Officer

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor D. Kerr

### 3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2004 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 4 ACCESS TO SERVICES REVIEW

A report from the Access to Services Review was presented to the Panel to advise Members of progress to-date with regard to the Access to Services Review and, in particular, the decisions made by Cabinet at its meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 2004. Appended to the report was a report to Cabinet of the 29<sup>th</sup> June 2004 for background information.

The Head of Corporate Strategy advised Members that the Access to Services Review was looking at the way the Council's customers accessed its services and had employed BMG Research to carry out research, which had shown that 80% of customers would prefer to use the telephone as a means of contact, whilst only 15% would prefer to visit Council offices in person.

It was reported that, in line with customer expectations and Government policy, cultural change was required to ensure that Services made it as easy as possible for customers to contact them by e-mail, phone or face-to-face, provide instant responses and make a reduction in the number of referrals of customers from an Officer or Service.

Members were advised that, to this end, the Council, at its meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2004, had taken an in principle decision that a Council-wide Customer Service Centre would be established. It was reported that customers would access the Customer Service Centre via a single telephone number and would be dealt with by a Customer Service Centre member of staff, who would either answer the enquiry themselves, or ensure that an Officer did so or arranged an appointment with the customer. Members noted that calls taken would be logged and actioned, and that the standard of service that the customer could expect would be established, via consultation, and published.

It was reported that the City Council had successfully bid for Government IEG (Implementing Electronic Government) funding to support the bulk of the cost of establishing the Customer Service Centre. It was noted that a condition of the grant was that certain outcomes must be delivered and be in place (available electronically) by the end of 2005.

Members were advised that the Access to Services Review was looking at the future use and maintenance of Council accommodation and had recognised that both Town Halls were currently inadequate in terms of accessibility and inefficient with regard to energy usage.

It was reported that a draft proposal had been drawn up in July 2004 for the introduction of a new complaints procedure.

Members were informed that networking had taken place with other Local Authorities in order for comparisons to be made, and a visit to Swale, a Beacon Authority, was proposed.

Members were advised that an Options Appraisal and Challenge Day was scheduled for Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2004, with reports going to Cabinet in September and Council in October.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the Panel notes the progress of the review to-date.
- (2) That the Chairman attends the Options Appraisal and Challenge Day scheduled for Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2004.
- (3) That an informal group, comprising Councillors from the Panel, meet to consider the findings of the Options Appraisal and Challenge Day and that the Chairman of the Panel be delegated to make recommendations, if appropriate, to the Access to Services Review.
- (4) That Administration Services facilitate a meeting of the group before Cabinet take their decision.

***(Councillor P. Robinson and the Head of Corporate Strategy left the meeting at this point.)***

## **5 STAR CHAMBER PROCESS**

A background report from Cabinet was presented to the Committee to which notes of the "Star Chamber" meetings held in respect of Leisure, Engineering and Planning and Building Control Services were appended (Appendices A to C).

A Briefing Note from the Leader was additionally presented, which contained records of the Star Chamber's meetings with Leisure Services at Salt Ayre, Engineering Services, Council Housing Services and Health and Strategic Housing Services.

Members were advised that the Star Chamber's remit was to examine the efficiency, economy and effectiveness of spend with the aim of reducing expenditure where possible, improving Services, looking at financial, physical and human resources and re-diverting resources towards Council priorities. Members noted that Star Chamber meetings were held each Friday afternoon and lasted no longer than 1½ hours, with a record of proceedings being taken.

It was reported that the Star Chamber's core membership comprised the Leader, Councillors Bryning, Barry and Quinton, the Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer and the three Corporate Directors, and that meetings were additionally attended by the Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility for the Service being reviewed and the relevant Service Head.

The Leader of the Council informed Members that the Star Chamber had held a set of meetings prior to the budget meetings of Council in February with the aim of reducing the Council Tax figure, which had ultimately resulted in the budget presented to Council.

Members noted that the Medium Term Financial Strategy approved by Council at its meeting in March 2004 had set financial targets for the next three financial years, including a target to achieve year-on-year savings in 2005/06 and 2006/07, subject to quarterly review. It was reported that the Star Chamber was reviewing all service areas with a view to ensuring targets were met which, it had been recognised, would necessitate a reduction in overall staffing costs, by a staff reduction of 5%. It was noted that this could be achieved through a mixture of restructuring, redeployment and early retirement.

Members were advised that the Chamber had looked at the costs of rolling out recycling and waste collection across the District and would be considering this further at their meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2004. It was reported that monies from Central Government could be acquired to offset these costs and details would be reported to the Audit Committee.

In order to assist Star Chamber process, Members made the following suggestions:

- *The duplication of existing green boxes in the recent deliveries for the three-stream collection.* It was reported that there were no records to show which households already had green boxes and so it was suggested that arrangements be made for the collection of those where duplicates existed.
- *A cut in the number of bus services subsidised by the City Council.* It was reported that it might be possible to reduce the number of services by obtaining information on ridership, for example where low ridership made it unviable to offer a service, or where ridership was so high that a profit could be achieved without subsidisation. The Panel were concerned that the effect of this on the transport infrastructure should be considered first.
- *The commissioning of a piece of work to establish whether bulky waste collection could be improved via consultation with Furniture Matters.* It was reported that research should be undertaken to see whether there was a business case for Furniture Matters and the Arson Reduction Team going beyond their present operations and whether the establishment of a partnership to co-ordinate some of the activities would be viable.
- *Holders of unexpired parking tickets offering them to other car park users.* It was reported that there was a need for specific vehicle details to be included on the tickets, which would make them non-transferable and this should be a feature of newly-purchased machines.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the following issues, (a), (c) and (d) be referred for inclusion in the Star Chamber process and item (b) to the Cabinet Transport Liaison Group:
  - (a) Green boxes with a view to arrangements being made for the collection of those where duplication exists.
  - (b) The effect on the transport infrastructure of the possibility of withdrawing subsidy from some bus routes.
  - (c) The commissioning of a piece of work to establish whether bulky waste collection could be improved via consultation with Furniture Matters, the business case for Furniture Matters and the Arson Reduction Team going beyond their present

operations and the possibility of a partnership to co-ordinate some of the activities.

- (d) Upgrading machines in car parks to enable vehicle numbers to be punched in and for details to be included on tickets issued.

## 6 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

The Corporate Director (Community Services) reported that the Corporate Performance Plan 2004-2005 had resulted from the Peer Review commissioned from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in 2000, which had highlighted areas for improvement. It was noted that the resultant Action Plan had provided the Council with a framework for improvement.

In preparation for the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), a second IDeA Peer Challenge had taken place in July 2003 and this had identified the improvements, which had taken place.

Members were advised that the Audit Commission CPA inspection in November 2003 had identified the Council's strengths and areas for further improvement.

Areas where the Council had shown strengths were in Council Housing, Service Standards, Financial Position, Partnership Working and Community Leadership. The Council needed to improve in areas such as Prioritisation, Performance Management and Pace of Change.

Members were advised that, with regard to Council Housing, a new software system to record complaints and requests for responsive repairs had been introduced called ANITE, and that this would assist with planned, rather than responsive, maintenance.

Members' attention was drawn to the table of Statutory and Local Performance Indicators 2003/04 extracted from the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP), which showed areas where Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) had not met their targets and indicated whether those areas were improving in the "Getting Better" column by a "smiley" or "glum" face.

Members were advised that the Panel should select those areas where there were concerns and invite relevant Service Heads to attend future meetings to answer questions. It was noted that areas where BVPI's had particularly failed to meet targets were in Revenues and Recycling and Waste Collection.

The Corporate Director (Community Services) informed Members that the BVPP PI's would be monitored by the Performance Review Committee and that they would be considered at their meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2004.

### **Resolved:**

- (1) That an abstract of the report be recirculated to Panel Members containing only those Services that are assessed as "getting worse".
- (2) That the Chief Revenues Officer and Head of City Contract Services be invited to attend the next meeting of the Panel to answer questions in connection with areas of particular concern, where BVPI's had failed to meet targets. Following the completion of recommendation (1) above, Members invite a maximum of three other Service Heads to the meeting to answer questions on BVPI.
- (3) That Business Plans be brought to each meeting of the Panel, as support documents.

*(Councillor J. Whitelegg left the meeting at this point.)*

*(The meeting was adjourned for a 10-minute comfort break.)*

## **7 BUSINESS PLAN MONITORING**

The Corporate Director (Community Services) gave a Powerpoint presentation on Business Plans and Performance Management and circulated an accompanying supporting document to the meeting.

Members were advised that Service Business Plans aimed to describe 100% of Service activities and to link activities to outcomes, for which resource implications were required and PI's could be set. It was reported that Service Business Plans should link to the Corporate Plan.

Members welcomed that it was proposed that better quality information on Performance Indicators would be available in the future.

### ***Resolved:***

That the plans be noted and that the Panel revisit Service Business Plans in the course of their work initially in terms of the analysis of Best Value Performance Plan Performance Indicators set out in Minute 6.

## **8 WORK PROGRAMME**

### **(a) Proposal to Consider Alternative Software Packages to Microsoft**

The Corporate Director (Central Services) reported that the proposal to consider alternative software packages to Microsoft was an item which followed on from the previous meeting of the Panel, and that he had been requested to check the Information Services' Business Plan and provide a short scoping paper on the issue.

Members were advised that the item was not in Information Services' Business Plan, but that a pilot of Star Office within Information Services had begun. Additionally, the matter had been discussed at the Council's E-Government Executive Group. It was reported that many of the Council's software applications were dependent on links to Microsoft Office, but that there might be an opportunity to restrict the number of Microsoft Office licences in the Council where functionality could be suited to Star Office products.

Members were informed that it would be necessary to assess the number and cost of Microsoft Licences currently in use by the Council, and the suitability and potential benefits to the Council of using alternative open source products to Microsoft Office.

### ***Resolved:***

- (1) That the scoping report be noted and that Officers liaise with Councillor Whitelegg in progressing this task.
- (2) That an assessment of the number and cost of Microsoft Licences currently in use by the Council is undertaken.
- (3) That an analysis be carried out of other local authorities'/public organisations' strategies in relation to this issue.

- (4) That the Head of Information Services reports back to the Panel on the outcome and progress of the Star Office pilot, including costs of using this product.

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Chairman

(The meeting finished at 4.41 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
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