

**BUDGET AND
PERFORMANCE PANEL**

4.30 P.M.

23RD OCTOBER 2007

PRESENT:- Councillors Jim Blakely (Chairman), Tina Clifford, Jean Dent, Keran Farrow, Sarah Fishwick, Mike Greenall, Tony Johnson, Ian McCulloch and John Whitelegg

Also in attendance:-

Councillors Roger Mace, Stuart Langhorn, Susan Bray (part)

Officers in attendance:-

Nadine Muschamp	Head of Financial Services
Sarah Taylor	Head of Legal and Human Resources
Mark Davies	Head of City Contract (Direct) Services
Richard Tulej (part)	Head of Corporate Strategy
Alan Humphreys (part)	Legal Services Manager
Elizabeth Stokes	Corporate Performance Manager
Liz Bateson	Senior Democratic Support Officer
Jon Stark	Democratic Support Officer

27 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2007 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

28 CITY COUNCIL PRIORITIES 2008/9

The Leader of the Council delivered a presentation on the City Council's draft corporate priority proposals to the Panel. It was reported that the priorities were divided into three blocks of Highest, Other and Corporate Plan Priorities and reflected a balance between continuity and change.

The Leader explained in some detail the rationale behind the priorities. It was noted that the draft would be modified as a result of the consultation process with a final version to be produced in early 2008.

The Panel was advised that Climate Change had joined the list of priorities and a number of measures were already in place to improve the energy efficiency of the Council's buildings and further areas to reduce the carbon footprint were under analysis through the Climate Change Cabinet Liaison Group.

Members requested that the Council seek to strengthen its influence over County Council to meet the expectations of the local community on issues such as road safety, which fell under the County Council's area of responsibility.

The Chairman informed Members that any further comments on the draft priorities be communicated to Democratic Services to be directed into the consultation findings.

Resolved:-

That Panel Members notify Democratic Services of any comments regarding the draft proposals and the submission of any views be delegated to the Principal Democratic Support Officer in consultation with the Chairman of the Panel.

29 STAR CHAMBER UPDATES

The Leader of the Council provided a progress report on the Star Chamber meetings held since the last report to Budget and Performance on 12th June and 19th September 2007. The Leader gave a brief outline of the role of Star Chamber as a mechanism for making budgetary considerations that involved a representative from each political group on the Council's Cabinet and senior officers.

It was reported that the Council faced a difficult budgetary situation in 2008/09 as the revenue budget needed to be reduced in order to keep the rise in Council Tax down to 4.5%. Members were advised that the Leader would welcome ideas, advice and recommendations from the Panel for the forthcoming budget proposals as part of the pre-scrutiny process.

Resolved:-

That the report be noted.

30 LEGAL FEES FOR LEASES

The Head of Legal and Human Resources introduced a report to inform the Panel of the legal fees charged in property transactions, and in particular for leases, and of the outcome of a recent review of the fees. Complaints had been received in respect of tenants in St Leonard's House, Lancaster, prompting a review of practices and procedures of Legal Services and Property Services in dealing with leases.

The Panel was advised that the Council imposed charges to deal with legal costs incurred on the sale of land, on the grant and renewal of leases and for various other legal arrangements. It was reported that the legal fees charged in relation to leases were based on the rent payable under the lease, and from time to time were compared with those fees charged by other local authorities in the North West to ensure comparability.

The Panel was advised that following the review, a reduced legal fee was being introduced for individual tenants establishing a new business at St Leonard's House. For such tenants, the standard legal fee for a commercial lease was being reduced to £150 on the initial grant, with a fee on renewal of £50.

It was agreed that details of the survey of fees charged by other local authorities in the North West, referred to in the report, would be circulated amongst Members of the Panel, and that the Head of Legal Services and Human Resources would obtain and circulate information from Property Services about the demand for accommodation at St Leonard's House.

Upon being put to the vote 8 Members voted in favour of noting the report and 1 Member voted against.

Resolved:-

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That details of the survey of fees charged by other local authorities in the North West, referred to in the report, be circulated amongst Members of the Panel together with information about the demand for accommodation at St Leonard's House.

31 EFFICIENCY STRATEGY REVIEW

The Head of Financial Services introduced a report that sought comments from the Panel on the draft updated Efficiency/Value for Money strategy prior to its consideration by Cabinet. It was reported that the Strategy detailed the strategies and policies that would be utilised in meeting the Council's targets.

Members were advised the Strategy had been updated due to changes in central government's agenda and initiatives, in particular the recently announced target for councils to achieve further savings over the 3 year period commencing April 2008 equivalent to 3% of their revenues spending as part of the Chancellor's Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

The Panel were asked to consider whether a training session would be useful to assist them in their consideration of the draft Strategy before it was submitted for adoption by Cabinet. This was supported and it was agreed by the Panel that 'models' for efficiency delivery be provided within the training so that Members could recognise and evaluate the success of varied approaches to the topic.

Resolved:-

- (1) That financial training be provided by Financial Services and participation be coordinated by Democratic Services.
- (2) That following the training, further consideration be given to the draft Efficiency/Value for Money Strategy in order that and comments could be passed on to Cabinet for their consideration.

32 CORPORATE PLAN MONITORING - UPDATE

The Head of Corporate Strategy introduced a report to advise the Panel of progress to date in implementing the Council's Corporate Plan priorities and of agreed actions to address any underperformance. Members were informed that the second cycle of Performance Review Team meetings had been completed under which the corporate priorities were discussed and their success evaluated against projected targets.

It was noted that the Agenda contained details of agreed actions taken to address areas that the Council was not performing well in. It was reported that these agreed measures should be evaluated in future to evaluate if the steps taken had been successful in improving the performance.

Resolved:-

That the report be noted.

33 LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY PILOT STUDY

The Head of Corporate Strategy introduced a report to advise Members of the City Council's involvement in a national pilot study aimed at responding to residents perceptions about their local environment quality. The pilot would seek to gather qualitative data from residents on how they perceive their environment and their opinion of the Council's efforts to improve it.

The Head of City Contract (Direct) Services informed Members that the pilot study, that would take place in the Poulton area, would be used to develop a performance management framework that could be used as a basis for rolling out the initiative to other neighbourhoods in the District.

It was reported that a questionnaire survey to canvass the opinion of Poulton's residents would be completed by December 2007 with a final completion date for the pilot phase by 31st March 2008. The findings of the project would then be discussed with the partners in the Local Government Association (LGA) sponsored study, which also included the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) and Environmental Campaigns – Keep Britain Tidy (ENCAMS).

Members queried if the questionnaires would be a standard format with the same questions as those used in the other 3 authorities taking part in the pilot. It was reported that a template had been received on which they would be basing their questionnaire. However, it was intended to adjust the template to suit this District and to deliver the type of data that the Council felt was most useful for its purposes.

Members were advised that the project had gained full support from the Poulton Neighbourhood Management Sub-Group, who had even offered to fund a prize draw to encourage wider participation in the questionnaire amongst residents.

Resolved:-

- (1) That Members note the intention to take part in this study.
- (2) That the outcomes of the completed study be considered by the Panel to make recommendations as to how they may best be incorporated into the future working of the Council.

34 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT

The Senior Democratic Support Officer introduced a report to update Members with regard to the Work Programme. Members were advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested the Panel to consider the issue of Recharging within the Council with particular regard to City Council (Direct) Services (CC(D)S) and Information Services (IS).

It was reported that the request stemmed from a presentation by the Cemeteries team that highlighted the expensive charges of CC(D)S in comparison to equivalent charges

from the private sector. Similarly, investigation into local printers revealed the cost of colour printing to be cheaper from external sources than using the in-house printing department within IS.

Members agreed that the issue should be investigated and that a report be brought before them with the respective services' justification of the rates they charged for work carried out for other Council services. It was noted that IS had indicated plans to reduce their charges with the addition of new equipment and so the Panel requested details of these proposals.

It was reported that Overview and Scrutiny had also referred to the Panel the issue of evaluating the pricing of car parks against the cost of penalty enforcement and to consider the possibility of installing barriers to car parks. It was agreed that these issues be added to the Panel's Work Programme and their conclusions be added to Overview and Scrutiny's response to the proposed Parking Strategy.

Members were advised that following a request from the Panel at its last meeting for further information on the Council's procedures and performance in the collection of vehicular fines, a report would be presented at the next meeting for consideration.

Resolved:-

- (1) That a report be requested regarding City Contract (Direct) Services and Information Services justifying their levels of recharge to other Council Services and any proposals for reducing those charges.
- (2) That the issues of car park pricing against the cost of enforcement and the possibility of adding barriers to car parks be added to the Panel's Work Programme.
- (3) That the Panel notes a report on 'Procedure and Performance in the Council's Collection of Vehicular Fines' will be presented at its next meeting.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 5.58 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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