

BUDGET & PERFORMANCE PANEL

Democratic Services Performance 11th September 2007

Report of Head of Democratic Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides information on the performance of Democratic Services in relation to the publication of minutes.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the report be noted.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 As a result of the Panel's consideration of the 4th Performance Review Team Reports at their meeting in June 2007 it was agreed that I should be invited to discuss with members the measures taken to ensure that the targets relating to publication of minutes are met.

1.2 Below is the extract from the Report which gave rise to members' concerns.

PI Ref	DS03	Comment
Council Priority		This drop in performance has been investigated and is primarily the result of poor performance by one member of staff and only 'average' performance by a number of others. The issue is to be addressed through EDPAs with targets set individually and monitored on a weekly basis.
PI Definition	% of minutes published within 5 working days (2 days for Cabinet meetings)	
PI Type		
Target 06/07	95%	
Future Target		

2.0 Background

2.1 For Members' information the performance over the full year was as follows:

1 st Quarter	53%
2 nd Quarter	63%
3 rd Quarter	73%
4 th Quarter	50%

- 2.2 Members should be aware that a further performance measure included for Democratic Services is the publication of Agenda with at least 5 clear days' notice. The target for this is 100% and is consistently achieved. It is in fact an absolute priority that this target is achieved as failure would result in the cancellation of the meeting concerned as it would fail to meet the requirements of Access to Information legislation.
- 2.3 Furthermore the Council's Constitution stipulates that the minutes of every meeting of the Executive (Cabinet or Cabinet Committee) shall be published normally within 2 days of the meeting (Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16). This element of the target is consistently met with only very rare exceptions usually as a result of circumstances outside the control of Democratic Services.
- 2.4 For this reason, if there are any capacity issues, it will always be necessary to prioritise the writing of reports and publication of agenda over the production of minutes, with the exception of those relating to Cabinet meetings and those from Overview & Scrutiny meetings which have considered a call-in. This does not mean to say however that the importance of ensuring that minutes are produced in a timely fashion should be overlooked and officers working in democratic support need to understand that the production of agenda and minutes is their basic workload which cannot be allowed to be overshadowed by other work.
- 2.5 Members will see from above that the performance at the end of June 2006 was poor. This was at a time when it had been acknowledged that there were capacity issues in Democratic Support and Council had identified funding to allow the appointment of an additional Principal Officer in that section. With some internal promotions, this appointment took some time to result in an additional member of staff who then required some training, but Members will see that steady progress was made in September and December 2006 to improve performance. It was therefore particularly disappointing to see all this progress lost in the figures at the end of April 2007.

3.0 Remedial Action Taken

- 3.1 An investigation into the reason behind the drop in performance was therefore immediately carried out and it became evident that it resulted from a fairly average performance all round and a particularly poor performance by one individual in respect of the timely production of minutes.
- 3.2 The timing was such that EDPA interviews were about to be held and it was possible therefore to address this issue individually, ensuring that all staff fully understood the need to ensure that all minutes are produced as quickly as possible and were aware of their part to play in achieving the Service's overall performance level.
- 3.3 The Principal Democratic Support Officer responsible for managing the section put in place a management system to check that all minutes were being published on or before the designated day.
- 3.4 Staff were also asked to alert their line manager in sufficient time if they felt they were in danger of missing a deadline, so that help could be provided if possible. It should be noted that once produced in Democratic Support, minutes are then checked by the most senior officer in attendance at the meeting which can sometimes cause a delay due to their availability.

4.0 Current Performance

- 4.1 As a result the performance for the quarter ended 30th June 2007 has risen to 89%. Whilst this still falls short of the target of 95% it has meant a return to the steady improvement achieved as a result of the additional member of staff.
- 4.2 Members should also be aware that performance in producing action sheets (the list of decisions following a meeting which is used to ensure that all decisions are implemented) has steadily risen from 67% at the start of 2006/07 to a current performance of 100% within 5 days of the meeting. The production of the action sheets takes place during the 5 days allocated for the production of minutes, and on occasions it is also sometimes necessary for specific action to be implemented quickly after a meeting and this too eats into the available time for actually writing the minutes.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Members were rightly concerned at the drop in performance of Democratic Services in producing Minutes. Whilst capacity has in the past been a factor affecting this performance the additional member of staff has made a difference and this drop in the level of performance was, I believe, caused by a lack of understanding on behalf of one or more members of staff of the importance of this area of work and a lack of judgement therefore in the prioritisation of their work.
- 5.2 The evidence points to this having been a temporary situation which has now been rectified. Whilst the Service remains stretched on many occasions, with no capacity to take on additional work and there are times when choices over what is to be treated as a priority have to be made, I am confident that we can maintain a satisfactory level of performance.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

None

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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