

Performance Improvement Community Forum



| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Date | 21 st November 2005 |
| Venue | Lowther Pavilion, Lytham |
| Committee members | Keith Hyde (Chairman) John Dolan (Vice-Chairman) Kevin Eastham, Derek Lancaster, Albert Pounder, Thomas Threlfall and Fabian Wilson |
| Other Councillors | William Thompson |
| Officers | Dave Joy, Andrew Lee, Oliver Shimell, Savile Sykes and Peter Welsh |
| Others | None |

1. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any personal/prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.

2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Performance Improvement Community Forum meeting held on 24th October 2005 as a correct record for signature by the chairman.

3. Substitute members

The following substitution was reported under council procedure rule 22.3:

Councillor Kevin Eastham for Councillor Hilda Wilson

4. State of the Borough Report

Dave Joy (Executive Director) presented a report describing the State of the Borough event.

The event generated information on a broad range of budget topics which would be of value to members when they began making their deliberations on how to set the budget for the next financial year.

The estimated cost of the event was just under £6,000. The figure could be broken down into £2,600 to provide the event with technical support and keypad voting systems, £3,000 to pay for the recruiting of one hundred and twenty members of the Citizens Panel, £200 in refreshment costs and a further £150 to hire tables and linen for the event.

Members enquired about the feasibility of purchasing the key pad technology, whether the panel selection was completely random and whether questions asked of the Citizens Panel could have been phrased in a less leading manner.

Following discussion the forum RESOLVED:

1. To encourage the Council to hold similar events in the future.
 2. That where appropriate, more time should be spent on the debate and question time session.
 3. At the conclusion of future events Members be on hand to discuss issues with the citizen panel.
 4. To thank Mr Joy for his efforts which made the State of the Borough event such a success
5. Findings of the Development Control Task and Finish Group

Councillor Fabian Wilson presented a report detailing the findings of the Development Control Task and Finish Group.

The Task and Finish Group was originally set up due to concerns with BVPI 204 - "Percentage of Planning appeals allowed", which were raised at this Forum in September 2005.

The Group carried out specific research activities including: set interview questions, similar authority comparison research and a significant amount of desktop research. Members also attended a number of Development Control meetings. The greatest degree of concern was with the relationship that existed between the Officers and Members of the Committee. There were instances when Members made personal remarks to Officers which were considered unacceptable by the Task and Finish Group.

Members debated each of the recommendations in detail including issues surrounding substitute members, training for both Officers and Members. And Officer/Member relationships.

After detailed debates the Forum RESOLVED, that:

1. It would be beneficial if training for Development Control Committee Members be made mandatory and the constitution be revised to reflect this. Substitute Members also to undertake mandatory training if they wished to substitute for any Member of the Committee. Training is to be provided by an external organisation, subject to budgetary provision. .
2. Any Officer or Member who shows disrespect in a meeting be reprimanded by the Chairman if deemed necessary.

3. Quarterly informal Development Control Committee meetings should be held to discuss items of concern and to generate any training requirements.
4. Application sites should be videotaped where it may avoid the need for site visits and deferrals.
5. Training and presentations be offered to Parish Councils, local pressure groups, surveyors, architects and lawyers on subjects of local interest and possible service improvements. Again, subject to relevant budgetary restrictions.
6. Planning Officers be invited to undertake courses on Communication and Presentation skills as part of their Personal Development Appraisal.

6. Internal Audit Charter

Savile Sykes (Head of Internal Audit) presented a report detailing the proposed amendments to the Internal Audit Charter.

The Council already has an Internal Audit Charter, which sets out the purpose, authority and responsibilities of the Internal Audit Team and was adopted in September 2002.

The main change in this area since the adoption of the initial Charter had been the issue of the CIPFA Audit Panel's updated 2003 version of the Code of Practice.

While the Councils current working practices met many of the new standards, there were some areas in the new Code that required consideration including: the definition of internal audit, the statutory framework, head of internal audit, fraud and corruption, independence, audit planning, reporting to Members and responsibilities in other organisations.

Following a brief discussion it was RESOLVED:

1. To approve the revised Internal Audit Charter.
2. To thank Mr Sykes for revising the Internal Audit Charter.

7. Statement on Internal Control

Savile Sykes (Head of Internal Audit) presented a report on the Statement on Internal Control, in order to provide the Forum with the opportunity to review the progress being made in managing the Council's internal control environment.

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 introduced a mandatory requirement for all Councils to produce a Statement on Internal Control. This statement must show the Council's current position on internal control as well as outlining the actions to be undertaken over the coming years to ensure the prescribed controls are operating effectively.

Members enquired about the progress of a number of specific Internal Control Actions and raised concerns over the possibility of failing to meet the targets contained within the action plan.

Following a full debate the forum RESOLVED:

1. That an interim report on the corporate governance and internal control action plan be submitted to the Forum in February.
2. To Thank Mr Sykes for his Report.