

**Performance
Improvement Scrutiny
Committee**



Date	24 th September 2008
Venue	Reception Room, The Town Hall, Lytham St Annes
Committee members	Christine Akeroyd (Chairman) Linda Nulty (Vice Chairman) Craig Halewood, Kathleen Harper, Ken Hopwood,, Cheryl Little, Fabian Craig-Wilson
Other Councillors	Councillor Tim Ashton, Councillor Albert Pounder
Officers	Ian Curtis, Mark Evans, Dave Joy, Allan Oldfield, Alex Scrivens, Paul Walker, Carolyn Whewell, Andrew Wilsdon,
Others	Ken Mansfield (Blackpool Health and Safety)

Prior to the start of the meeting, Councillor Linda Nulty was nominated to act as Vice-Chair for the duration of this meeting.

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 Scrutiny Committee meeting held 19th June 2008 as a correct record for signature by the chairman.

3. Substitute members

The following substitutions were reported under council procedure rule 22.3:

Councillor Fabian Craig-Wilson for Councillor Keith Hyde

4. Local Government Ombudsman Annual Letter and Report 2007/08

Dave Joy (Director of Corporate Resources) and Ian Curtis (Monitoring Officer) presented a report detailing the annual letter and report for 2007-2008 from the Local Government Ombudsman.

Mr Joy reported that the Local Government Ombudsman was responsible for investigating complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities, about most council matters including housing, planning, education, social services, consumer protection, drainage, council tax etc. The Ombudsman was able to investigate complaints about how the council has done something but they can not question what a council has done simply because someone does not agree with it. A complainant must also give the council concerned an opportunity to deal with a complaint first.

The Ombudsman Annual Letter reflected on the complaints made to the Ombudsman about Fylde Borough Council over the last year and provided comments on the authority's performance and complaint handling arrangements. For the year ending 31 March 2008, the Ombudsman received 15 complaints against the Council which was three complaints less than the year before. There were no findings of maladministration.

Mr Joy reported that the main concerns raised by the committee about last years reports was with regard to the average time taken to respond to Ombudsman complaints. It was noted that the time taken to respond has now dropped from 54.8 days to 29.5 days and the Ombudsman comments favourably on this significant improvement in performance, although this is still outside the recommended 28 day period. Mr Curtis reported that this was largely attributed to a number of complaints which were carried over from the previous year. The council was on target to hit the 28 day target for the year 2008/2009.

Mr Joy further reported that key staff would be taking up a training course in Complaints Handling organised by the Local Government Ombudsman on the 2nd October 2008.

Following the presentation, Members queried the protocol for dealing with persistent complainers. Mr Joy responded that the council had expanded the corporate complaints procedure to include protocols for dealing with Unreasonably Persistent Complainants and Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour based on models recommended by the Local Government Ombudsman. In the one incident where the council has used these protocols, it appears to have been successful.

Members commended the improvement to the time taken to respond to Ombudsman complaints and thanked Mr Joy and Mr Curtis for their presentation.

Following the debate, it was RESOLVED:

1. To note the report

5. The Corporate Performance Report (April - September 2008)

Allan Oldfield (Director of Performance and Business Improvement) presented a report detailing the first quarter performance based on the new national performance indicator framework. Mr Oldfield also advised that members had been provided with an additional report detailing the first quarter budget monitoring information.

Mr Oldfield reported that the Budget information up to June 30th 2008 was set out in two sections:

1. The General Fund "Hot Spots" where there was an under or over spend (with a variation in excess of £5000) for the quarter ended 30th June 2008 which included the Budget Holders comments as to the reason for the variation. The table in the

report identified the position at the end of the first quarter and highlights areas of concern.

2. A progress update at the end of the first quarter (to June 30th 2008) in respect of the Budget Savings agreed by Council in setting the Revenue Budget for 2008/09.

Mr Oldfield further reported that the Council was not achieving its savings in several areas due to the unexpected cost of fuel and energy costs, concessionary travel arrangements and civil parking enforcement. Where the council is not achieving savings, work was underway to identify other areas where the savings could be made.

Members questioned the reasons for Streetscene overspends in the budget "hot spots" report other than fuel costs. Councillor Tim Ashton (Portfolio holder for Operational Services) reported that a number of schemes which were anticipated to raise additional income from Wyre Borough Council as part of the joint waste contract (e.g. collection of side waste, fly tipping) and which were included in the budget had been unsuccessful due to Wyre Borough Council not passing this work on to Fylde. This was currently under review as part of the joint review of the waste contract. Additional costs had also been accrued to replace bins and recycling boxes across Fylde and Wyre. There had been an unusually high demand across Europe for these and as such costs had increased. The possibility of charging for replacement waste receptacles (grey bins in particular) was being considered in an effort to recover future overspend in this area.

Councillor Ashton further reported that a number of savings had not been made in the fleet procurement activities and the shared service agenda with Wyre Borough Council. The timetable for the joint Streetscene service had stalled due to the Section 151 officers from both councils need to evaluate the business case for the joint service. It was unlikely any savings would be achieved in 2008/2009.

Members also questioned whether the "Fylde Solutions" company would be resurrected following the Comprehensive performance Assessment recategorisation in November. Councillor Ashton reported that this would be reviewed pending the outcome of the inspection.

In terms of general performance, Mr Oldfield reported that the Council was doing well in a number of areas. The performance data showed that the authority was performing well with the number of hits to the website (FYS09) and the continued increase of online services (FYS10). The percentage of employee appraisals was significantly up on the 2007/08 figure (FYS11) at 75.42% which was a reflection of the importance the Chief Executive had placed on this in the 'Moving to Excellence' approach. The incidents of crime in the borough were also very low and well within the target set for the year further reinforcing the fact that Fylde is one of the safest places in the country.

Performance was highlighted as an area of concern for several indicators. The number of days lost to sickness and absence was still high at 12.91 days per employee. This was actually worse than the 12 months to April 1st 2008 however, the figure is now reported as a "snapshot" of the previous 12 months performance. Since April 1st 2008 the number of long term sick employees has reduced in Operational Services as a direct result of a targeted approach with Blackpool HR. The benefit of this work will start to be seen in the performance data throughout the year. A comprehensive revised Absence Management Policy with supporting procedures was produced and was to be presented to the joint meeting between management and the unions on September 30th 2008. Members agreed

that this was an issue that needed reviewing in more detail and requested a report in November.

Another highlighted area of concern was with regard to the time taken to determine planning applications (NI157 a to c) which showed a decline in performance against the final out turn for 2007/08 and was significantly below the targets set for the service. In April this year the development control fees went up by on average 25% across the board. This resulted in a flood of applications during March 2008 which meant the number of applications for 2007/08 totaled 1,314 which was the highest figure ever received. These extra applications have had to be determined in the new financial year 2008/09 resulting in an additional workload on the Development Control team.

Mark Evans (Head of Development Control) and Paul Walker (Director of Strategic Development Services) provided a detailed reasoning behind the drop in performance. Mr. Walker reported that the Council had agreed as part of the closure of accounts for 2007/08 to allow the income from these additional applications (nearly £150,000) to be used in the current year to recruit help to deal with the backlog. The Planning Advisory Service report carried out in early 2008 noted that Fylde were in the lowest quartile for spending per head of population on planning services.

Fylde had recently recruited an additional senior planning officer who would be starting in December 2008 as well as extra administrative resources in the Development Control team. An Assistant Planning Officer had also been recruited to deal with the minor planning applications and this had resulted in faster times taken to determine minor applications in August. It was also noted that a Principal Planning Officer was also leaving the team. Mr. Walker confirmed that the Chief Executive had given clearance to replace this post as soon as possible. Recent performance for the month of August has shown an improvement

- NI 157a the % of **major** applications determined against target = 75%
- NI 157b the % of **minor** applications determined against target 47%
- NI 157c the % of **other** applications determined against target 77%

Mr. Evans further reported that the task and finish group set up by the Performance Improvement Scrutiny Committee in February had also agreed a revised scheme of delegation for officers and agreed to implement charging for pre planning application advice. To date, Fylde had only received two enquiries for advice but this was largely attributed to the current economic climate.

Members questioned the current capacity for enforcement within the Development Control team. Mr. Evans reported that there was currently one Enforcement officer but the additional administration resource brought into the team included some administration support for the Enforcement Officer enabling them to spend more time dealing with direct enquiries.

Following this, Mr Oldfield reported that the Place Survey had been commissioned through the Lancashire Consortium that was led by Lancashire County Council and the membership includes every district authority in Lancashire. The Place Survey was being carried out from September to November in accordance with the Audit Commission guidance and initial results were expected early in 2009 after comprehensive validation by the Audit Commission.

Mr Oldfield further reported that the Escendency performance management system had been in place for almost 18 months and was seeking to maximise the use of the reporting facilities. The committee agreed to recommend that they would receive a live demonstration of the Escendency system in order to provide members with more up to date information and to familiarise themselves with the system. The first demonstration would be at the November meeting.

Following the debate, it was RESOLVED

1. To agree the list of supplementary performance indicators included in Appendix 2 to this report and the regularity of performance reporting proposed subject to any additional supplementary indicators the committee may request.
2. To agree to consider a performance report at the start of every meeting that includes an online view of up to date performance using Escendency projected on screen for the committee to interrogate.
3. To agree to have a separate performance report on sickness absence presented to the November meeting with detailed performance by service area.
4. The incidents of crime in the borough are very low and well within the target set for the year further reinforcing the fact that Fylde is one of the safest places in the country.

6. Review of Joint Working - Occupational Health & Safety Advisory Service

Dave Joy (Director of Corporate resources), Andrew Wilsdon (Insurance and Risk management Officer) and Ken Mansfield (Blackpool Occupational Health and Safety Manager) presented a report detailing the progress of the joint working arrangements for Occupational Health and Safety between Blackpool, Fylde, Wyre Borough Councils.

Mr Joy reported that the council entered into a service level agreement with Blackpool Council for the provision of an Occupational Health & Safety Advisory Service (OH&SAS) in October 2006. The Service Level Agreement states that the council pays Blackpool Council £40,000 per year indexed from October 2006. In return for this, Blackpool Council provide a service including advice on the implementation and operational management of Health and Safety management systems, coordination of Health and Safety training, assistance with health promotion and initiatives in support of workplace wellbeing and development of guidance for carrying out health and safety audits and workplace inspections.

In addition to reactive and routine activity, the OH&SAS team had also completed the following planned work:

- 40 Occupational Health & Safety Manuals distributed to managers across the authority
- 16 H&S procedures reviewed or introduced
- Risk Assessment audits in the two largest business units (5 year plan)

More recently, the team had completed a survey of internal customers at Fylde. The responses to this survey were being collated and would form the basis of a service improvement plan.

Members questioned the breakdown of where the £40,000 was allocated. Mr Wilsdon advised that prior to this service, Fylde had a shared Health and Safety Assistant with Wyre Borough Council and a shared vacancy for a Health and Safety manager. This presented problems of capacity, particularly during staff holidays. This service provided access to 13 staff which were all available to help Fylde. Mr Mansfield further reported that approximately half this team focused on reactive work while the other half focused on proactive preventative measures. Mr Wilsdon felt that although this service cost more than before, the value for money was excellent.

Members also questioned the level of health and safety training provided to staff and the benefit of this. Mr Wilsdon reported that amongst other training, all fire wardens had been retrained and several first aiders were also trained. All new staff were provided with an induction in health and safety. The council now had access to many more training courses and a dedicated training budget. It was important that staff were fully trained to reduce sickness and insurance claims against the council. It was not yet clear the impact of the service on these but the committee requested a report back at a later date. It was also noted that in general, claims for accidents against anybody were rising due to society becoming more litigious.

Following the debate, it was RESOLVED:

1. To note the report
2. To thank Mr Joy, Mr Wilsdon and Mr Mansfield for their presentation
3. To request that trend information regarding the effect of health and safety measures on sickness and insurance claims is reported back to the committee next year.

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