

## Community Focus Scrutiny Committee



Date	Thursday, 2 December 2010
Venue	Town Hall, St Annes
Committee members	Councillor Keith Hyde (Chairman) Councillor Roger Small (Vice-Chairman)  Councillors Christine Akeroyd, Maxine Chew, Barbara Douglas, Tony Ford, Kathleen Harper, Ken Hopwood, Janine Owen, Dawn Prestwich, John Singleton, Paul Rigby
Officers	Phillip Woodward, Bernard Hayes, Allan Oldfield, Clare Platt, Tracy Scholes, Paul Walker, Darren Bell, Lyndsey Lacey, Darius Ward

### 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. No members declared any interests.

### 2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Community Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 14 October 2010 as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

### 3. Substitute members

There were no substitutions

### 4. Performance Exception Report

Darius Ward (Corporate Performance and Efficiency Officer) presented the Performance Exception Report. The report examined areas of under and over performance for the Authority based on the National Indicator set and local (service based) indicators. For each item identified an overview of the position was detailed in the report.

Particular consideration was given at the meeting to areas of under performance including: (NI181) time taken to process new changes and change of events, (FLI015) Percentage of Overdue Freedom of Information Requests, (FLI016) average number of days to respond to all Freedom of Information requests, (XNI14) avoidable contact made by customers, (SPPP002) percentage of high risk food hygiene inspections completed together with a new indicator (SPPP001) relating to the satisfaction of non-business users with service.

In terms of areas of good performance, Mr Ward highlighted the following areas: (SPL001) Green Flag Awards, (SPL002) Community Groups Supported, (SPL003) In Bloom, (FLI028) number of complaints received, (FLI029) % of complaints dealt with in 5 working days and (FLI013) the number of unique web hits on the council's website

An update was also given by Mr Ward on (NI187) relating to tackling fuel poverty, ((NI157a) processing of 'major' applications within 13 weeks, and (NI157c) processing of 'minor applications

Councillor Tony Ford asked about the implications associated with (SPPP002) high risk food hygiene inspections. In response, Ms Platt made reference to the recent reduction in permanent staff. She stated that the shortfall essentially related to category C premises but that the team would continue to respond to complaints and notifications of food poisoning. Essentially, the increased workload within the section related to investigation of food poisoning outbreaks/ formal prosecutions and the reductions in staffing had given rise to the backlog. Members were advised that measures to address the shortfall were currently being implemented.

Councillors Christine Akeroyd and Paul Rigby sought further clarification on the time taken to process housing benefits/council tax benefit claims (NI181). In response, Tracy Scholes made reference to the recent report presented to committee by Marie McRoberts (Assistant Director: Revenues and Benefits) She reiterated that the System Replacement project had placed various challenges on the team. The transfer of systems had inevitable impacts on processing times which in turn affected the recovery of former performance levels. She explained that in addition to the normal workloads, every member of staff required training and that this was further compounded by the time required to undertake data cleansing and reconciliation work. Members were reminded that Marie McRoberts had previously advised that it was the intention to bring processing times back to target as quickly as possible aiming for 31 March 2011.

Councillor Janine Owen expressed her disappointment that the local performance indicator (FYS17) relating to the percentage of employees trained in customer care had not been included within the data presented as previously requested by committee. As assurance was given that this would be included in future reports.

In addition to the above, members sought further clarification on XN114, FLI028, and FLI29. These were addressed by the relevant directors.

Following detailed consideration the Committee RESOLVED:

1. To request that an updated report on N1181 (time taken to process housing benefits/council tax benefit claims) be presented to a future meeting of the committee.
2. To make appropriate arrangements to include the relevant targets relating to customer care in future Performance Exception reports.

(The Chairman indicated that he was satisfied that the matter was not controversial and dealt with the matter by a show of hands rather than by taking a recorded vote on it)

5. General Fund Budget Monitoring Report 2010/11- Position as at Quarter ended 30 September 2010

By way of introduction, Bernard Hayes (Deputy Section 151 Officer) stated that the Council continued to operate within an environment where tight financial control is essential.

Mr Hayes added stated that this report was for the second quarter and whilst it was not possible to draw any firm conclusions, it did begin to flag up potential problems. However, it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter report which was the better indicator of the year end financial position.

Mr Hayes provided the committee with an update on the General Fund Revenue budget as at 30 September 2010. In brief, the report provided details of the actions being taken to address the 'hot spots' variances in excess of 10K against the profiled budget. In particular, the report highlighted budget areas of concern that impinged on the Council's general income and areas that required further attention relating to costs for the first quarter.

Mr Hayes further reported that since the publication of the agenda, further information had been received on the concessionary travel front whereby the operators (with the expectation of 1) had agreed to the Lancashire leaders' offer of 59.5%. He added that the latest figure from Lancashire County Council was still awaited.

Councillor Hopwood read out (in part) a letter he had received from Blackpool Transport relating to the reduction of bus routes.

Following consideration of this matter it was RESOLVED to note the current position as outlined in the report.

(The Chairman indicated that he was satisfied that the matter was not controversial and dealt with the matter by a show of hands rather than by taking a recorded vote on it)

6. Financial Forecast Update (Including Revenue, Capital & Treasury Management) 2010/11 to 2014/15

In accordance the Scrutiny Management Board's request for scrutiny involvement in the budget preparation process, Bernard Hayes (Deputy 151 Officer) presented a comprehensive updated report on the financial forecast for the five years 2010/11 to 2014/15. This included changes arising since the Budget was set by Council in March 2010.

Scrutiny members were requested to consider the report and invited to make any comments or recommendations on the overall budgetary position for consideration by Cabinet.

The report provided an update on the latest financial forecast. It included details on the purpose and background to the financial forecast and key areas of financial risk in relation to the General Fund, Capital and Treasury Management. It also included detailed information on the following areas:

- Forecast approved at Council on 1 March 2010
- Schedule of unavoidable changes to the forecast
- A narrative on general and specific assumptions
- The latest five year forecast position
- Contract performance information (in relation to the Waste Management Contract)
- Comprehensive Spending Review - Summary Position

Mr Hayes stated that the key to the forecast was centred on the Government's grant settlement. In his report Mr Hayes highlighted key areas of financial risk to the general fund revenue budget forecast, the capital programme and for treasury management. In addition, he made particular reference to appropriate adjustments that had been made to the forecast with particular reference to Concessionary Fares exemplifications; Pension Review, Pay inflation, Waste Management Contract and the Government formula grant support.

Councillor Tony Ford enquired about the amount of balances in the Parks and Opens spaces reserves and whether or not this could be utilised to fund the remaining works at Ashton Gardens. Mr Hayes said this was possible but alternative savings would need to be identified. Further to this, Ms Platt provided an update on the Play Builder grant which would be subject to a Cabinet report in December. She added that this would go some way address the concerns raised by Councillor Ford.

Councillor Janine Owen commented on the proposed sale of Clifton (Lytham) Housing Ltd and the proposed new homes bonus scheme and whether this could act as a buffer in the short term. Mr Hayes stated that Clifton (Lytham) would be a capital receipt available to finance the Capital programme and

could not therefore be directly utilised to fund the revenue budget. In respect of the new homes bonus, given that this is still a proposal at present it needed to be omitted from the forecast until the detail was released.

Following detailed consideration of this matter the Committee RESOLVED to note the position.

(The Chairman indicated that he was satisfied that the matter was not controversial and dealt with the matter by a show of hands rather than by taking a recorded vote on it)

#### 7. Additional meeting of the Community Focus Committee

At the conclusion of the meeting and in relation to the previous item, the Chairman made reference to the possibility of the committee engaging more closely with the budget preparation process and in this regard sought members' views on the matter. It was suggested it would be appropriate to consider an additional meeting of the committee during January to consider such matters.

Following discussion it was RESOLVED to support this proposal and make appropriate arrangements for an additional meeting of the committee to take place in January to consider the 2011 - 2015 budgets.

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