

Community Focus Scrutiny Committee



Date	4 March 2010
Venue	Town Hall, St Annes
Committee members	Councillor Keith Hyde (Chairman) Councillor Thomas Threlfall (Vice-Chairman) Maxine Chew, Leonard Davies, Barbara Douglas, Tony Ford, Kathleen Harper, Ken Hopwood, Linda Nulty, Dawn Prestwich
Other Councillors	Karen Buckley
Officers	Allan Oldfield, Clare Platt, Tracy Scholes, Paul Walker, David Gillett, Christine Miller, Lyndsey Lacey, Darius Ward
Members of the Public	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 Community Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 7 January 2010 as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

3. Substitute members

The following substitution was reported under Council procedure rule 22.3:

Councillor Leonard Davies for Councillor John Singleton

4. Finance Service Level Agreement- Value for Money Overview

Tracy Scholes (Director of Governance and Partnerships) presented a report on a Value for Money review of the financial management contract that the Council has with Preston City Council.

Circulated with the agenda was a summary document which provided an overview of the current contract terms with Preston City Council, comparison costs of the contract with current market place rates/ direct employment of personnel, qualitative issues together with an examination of the outputs delivered by the contract since its commencement in 2008.

Mrs Scholes (who acts as the client officer) indicated that, in her opinion, the shared service arrangement with Preston City Council is providing good value for money based on the market rate comparisons, the comparative costs of employing our own staff and the outputs delivered through the contract

Mrs Scholes suggested that the contract to date had resulted in a higher level of compliance for the council and stronger financial control, more robust financial management and overall improved performance of the finance function.

Councillor Linda Nulty enquired about staffing levels within the finance team based at the Town Hall and the number of qualified staff within the section. She also enquired about the implementation of various processes and procedures that had been carried out by the Preston team and whether the preparation of such documentation was mandatory or deemed good practice. Mrs Scholes addressed these points.

After the debate the committee RESOLVED to recommend to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency and Director of Governance and Partnerships that the following measures be implemented to ensure that the contract continues to deliver value for money:

- (i) A quarterly statement being submitted by the Deputy Section 151 Officer (Assistant Director - Preston CC) confirming that the terms of the contract had been met.
- (ii) Comparison with market rates being carried out annually.
- (iii) Benchmarking against other Lancashire Districts being carried out annually.
- (iv) Performance being measured against external assessment including UoR and external audit reports.
- (v) Performance being measured regularly against compliance criteria.
- (vi) Feedback from the external auditors being actively sought.
- (vii) Feedback from leading Members being actively sought.

5. General Fund Budget monitoring Report 2009/10 Position as at Quarter ended 31 December 09

Tracy Scholes (Director of Governance and Partnerships) together with other relevant Directors provided members of the committee with an overview of the General Fund 'hot spots' under and over spending for the quarter ended 31 December 2009.

The report provided details of the actions being taken to address the hot spots and an update in respect of the savings targets agreed by members for 2009-10 as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Mrs Scholes explained that Appendix A of the report detailed the significant variances over £10k highlighted by budget monitoring undertaken during the year to 31 December 2009.

Mrs Scholes further reported that Appendix B of the report detailed the in-year budget savings forecast position for the year against the targeted savings set by Council at its Budget meeting on 3rd March 2009 (as amended by the subsequent MTFS updates)

The report highlighted particular budget areas of concern that impinged on the Council's general income and areas that required further attention relating to costs for the 3rd quarter.

Members of the committee sought clarification on various matters including: corporate restructure proposals with particular reference to Building Control, Development Control and Operational Services. Members also enquired about capitalisation, concessionary fares, disabled facilities grant fees, legal services fees, Wyre and Fylde waste schemes, agency staff arrangements and sickness and absences monitoring. The relevant Directors addressed each matter at the meeting.

After detailed consideration of this matter and following a recorded vote as set out below, the committee RESOLVED to note the current position and the comments outlined in the report.

Approval of the recommendation (10) Councillors Keith Hyde, Thomas Threlfall, Maxine Chew, Leonard Davies, Barbara Douglas, Tony Ford, Kathleen Harper, Ken Hopwood, Linda Nulty, Dawn Prestwich

Refusal of the recommendation (0)

Abstentions (0)

6. Performance Exception Report

Darius Ward (Corporate Performance Officer) Tracy Scholes (Director of Governance and Partnerships) and Councillor Karen Buckley (Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Community Engagement) presented a report detailing

the performance exceptions for data reported up to December 2009. The report highlighted both good and poor performance to date measured against the targets set for the current financial year.

By way of introduction, Mr Ward made reference to the current performance management system, Escendancy. In doing so, Mr. Ward outlined that Performance Plus, an alternative performance management system was currently being considered.

In terms of under performance, the report highlighted the following areas: Freedom of Information requests, customer care training, net additional homes provided, number of households living in temporary accommodation, living in temporary accommodation, processing of 'minor' planning applications and street and environmental cleanliness (detritus and mechanical sweeping) .

The areas highlighted in the report for over performance related to: web site hits, serious violent crime processing of planning 'major' planning applications, time taken to process housing benefits and street and environmental cleanliness(levels of litter and fly posting)

Councillor Buckley made reference to the new format of the performance data table which was circulated with the agenda. She added that it gave a clear indication as to whether the matter was on target and the direction of travel.

Councillor Ford enquired about the nature of Freedom of Information requests and whether most of these requests received were deemed frivolous. Other questions from members related to fly posting, management of the local economy, processing of planning applications and customer care. Each issue raised was addressed by the relevant Director.

Following discussion it was RESOLVED to provide an updated report to the next meeting of the committee on those areas identified within the performance data table which outlined under performance with a flag up made about direction of travel of the indicator

7. Homeless Households in Temporary Accommodation- Update on Performance against Target

David Gillett (Housing Manager) presented an updated report on the number of households in temporary accommodation arising from homelessness and progress made towards achieving the nationally set target of no more than 6 households in temporary accommodation.

In brief, the report made reference to the homelessness legislation and the national target. In addition, it outlined the local situation including the number of temporary units of accommodation available to the council, details of households in temporary accommodation for the current year and the previous two years, and the number of homelessness presentations and housing advice to the Council.

Mr Gillett stated that currently the Council had 5 families in temporary accommodation and although the national target was extremely challenging, it was hoped that this would be achieved by a variety of measures including:

- Provision of advice services directly through the Councils Housing advice officer or in partnership with external organisations i.e. Face 2 Face YMCA
- Provision of a rent bond scheme financially supported through the Council to Face 2 Face YMCA
- A reduction in the number of Homelessness presentations through Homelessness prevention work (mediation services etc)
- Provision of an Invest to save budget to assist households to access the private sector.
- The elimination of the use of temporary accommodation through the provision of a Supported Housing scheme which would deliver a comprehensive support service to homeless households.
- Working with our partner RSL's to ensure homelessness is addressed within their priorities and own homelessness strategies.

Councillor Nulty enquired about the supported housing scheme. Councillor Ford asked about the government grants made available to the Council aimed at homelessness prevention. Mr Gillett addressed these points.

Following consideration of this matter the committee RESOLVED to note the contents of the report and the action being taken to address performance in relation to the temporary accommodation target.

8. LSP Economic Development Theme Group

Christine Miller (Head of Partnerships) provided an overview of the current work of the LSP Economic Development Theme Group. Attached to the report was a copy of the Economic Development Theme Group Action Plan.

Councillor Ford asked about available resources to support the 2020 programme and suggested that the recently appointed Community Development Officer would be able to offer any necessary support.

IT WAS RESOLVED to note the report and proffer support for the activities outlined in the Action Plan.

9. Scrutiny Review of Enforcement Capacity and Resources

Paul Walker (Director of Strategic Development) and Clare Platt (Director of Community Services) presented a progress report on the scrutiny review of enforcement capacity and resources which had been agreed by Cabinet in November 2007.

The report made reference to previous scrutiny reports on the matter. In addition, it included details of progress made in relation to development control, licensing, litter/waste and dog fouling enforcement.

Circulated at the meeting was a copy of the geographic split of the Development Management Area Teams. Minor amendments to the blue and green teams split of duties were reported at the meeting.

Mr Walker indicated that two further officers within Operational Services would be trained and authorised to deal with waste related enforcement issues.

The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.
