

Performance Improvement Scrutiny Committee



Date	20 July 2006
Venue	The Town Hall, Lytham St Annes
Committee members	Keith Hyde (Chairman) Fabian Wilson (Vice-Chairman) Christine Akeroyd, Eric Bamber, Derek Lancaster
Other Councillors	Susan Fazackerley, Roger Small, Bill Thompson
Officers	Tracy Scholes, Allan Oldfield, Paul Walker, Tony Donnelly, Dave Joy, Mark Evans, Annie Womack, Carolyn Whewell
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 Scrutiny Committee held on 25 May 2006 as a correct record for signature by the chairman.

3. Substitute members

No Substitute members were reported.

4. First Quarter Performance report 2006/07

Councillor Susan Fazackerley, Cabinet Portfolio for Corporate Performance and Development together with Allan Oldfield, Executive Manager for Policy and Performance, presented the report which outlined the performance of the Council during the period April 1st 2006 to June 30th 2006 measured against key performance indicators agreed by the committee. Performance in other key areas and any significant performance issues during the first quarter were highlighted in the report.

Tony Kendall, Fraud and Verification Manager, presented the first quarter BVPI report for Benefit Fraud and Investigation. It was noted that the unit was progressing well.

Members received a presentation from Councillor Roger Small on Development Control whose service was underperforming on BVPI indicators 109b, and 109c. It was noted that BVPI 109a is exceeding its target and achieved 100% in the first quarter of 2006/07. Members were advised that underperforming targets for BVPI 109b and 109c was largely due to the failure to recruit replacement Planning officers at a suitable level despite

previous recruitment drives. This was attributed to a scarcity of planning officers at a national level. To compensate for this the Development Control Unit had recruited 2 part time casual staff and was pulling staffing resources from other areas within the Council to deal with the backlog of major planning applications. Minor applications had been outsourced to an external company. A new recruitment drive was planned with additional resources allocated to attract new applicants. The Development Control Unit was optimistic that the figures for BVPI indicators 109b and 109c would improve and meet the targets by the end of the financial year. Councillor Small was optimistic that the next performance report to the committee would see an improvement in performance.

Members sought clarification on a number of issues relating to the recruitment of new staff, the cost of outsourcing minor planning applications and the effect the dip in performance will have on the Planning Grant.

Mark Evans, Development Control Manager, advised the Committee that the measures taken to improve targets were only suitable for the short term and every effort would be made to attract suitable full-time permanent members of staff. Advertisements for the vacant posts would go out in August with interviews taking place in September. It was advised that minor planning applications would continue to be outsourced as this was working well and caused no extra financial burden on the authority.

The Committee was advised that assessment criteria for the Planning Grant were changed annually so it is possible that the dip in performance could affect the amount of money the Council is allocated but this was not known at this stage.

The Committee agreed that the performance of the planning BVPI's should be monitored on a regular basis and requested that they be brought back before the committee in three months time. Due to the seriousness of the concern over the issue Councillor Keith Hyde, Chairman of the Committee would be involved in real time monitoring of the situation.

Having considered the issues raised it was RESOLVED-

1. That Councillor Roger Small, Mark Evans and Paul Walker provide the committee with an update on planning performance in three months relating to BVPI 109 b and c.
2. That Councillor Keith Hyde, Chairman of the Performance Improvement Scrutiny Committee be included in the regular monitoring meetings for the planning service (including Councillors Small, Eastham and Fiddler as advised by Councillor Small) to ensure that incremental improvements to recover performance are being made.
3. That the committee agrees the revised target for BVPI 2b (the duty to promote race equality) from 80% to 50%.
4. That the committee agrees the revised target for BVPI 8 (the payment of undisputed invoices within 30 days) from 100% to 97%.
5. That the committee agrees the revised local performance target for the number of online transactions from 50 to 800.

6. That the committee agrees for the Chairman and Vice Chairman to receive the benefits service and Streetscene BVPI 199 first quarter figures as soon as they are available and make any appropriate recommendations to the portfolio holder.

5. The Efficiency Statement Progress report

Allan Oldfield, Executive Manager for Policy and Performance presented the report which provided an update on the efficiency work at Fylde in the format agreed by the committee and details of the backward looking statement submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The report informed Members that this was the third progress report to the committee on the efficiency work being carried out at Fylde. The report provided the end year position of the actions carried out to achieve the efficiency savings at Fylde in 2005/06.

Despite some of the intended savings not being made the Council had achieved the required efficiency savings for 2005/06 (subject to audit) of £270,000 of which at least £135,000 had to be cash savings. The Council had always planned to undertake more than enough actions to achieve the required savings in order to allow for some actions not being possible during 2005/06.

The key specific actions that had contributed to the efficiency savings were:

- Shared service arrangements in place with Blackpool to deliver a joint revenues and benefits service.
- An increase in the number of electronic payments to and from suppliers, customers and contractors.
- An increase in the number of planning applications dealt with using the same resources.
- Winning two grounds maintenance tenders in open competition.
- Merging the streetscene services and delivering the waste collection and cleansing services for Wyre Borough Council.
- Transferring employees from weekly pay to monthly pay and streamlining the pay roll system.
- Use of OGC (Office of Government Commerce) frameworks and contract agreements for the procurement of goods and services.
- Development of in house expertise and skills through training and developing rather than external consultants and agency employees.
- Improved IT systems to support transactions e.g. revenues, benefits, finance, planning and licensing.
- Partnership working with friends groups and training providers to improve the local community, sharing resources to achieve more.

The report also included a copy of the Forward Looking Efficiency Statement that the Council submitted in April 2006. The Forward Looking Statement outlined the efficiency savings that would be achieved during the previous 12 months. The format of the Forward Looking Statement was determined by the DCLG and focused on the higher-level outcomes as opposed to the individual actions.

Members also considered the key actions extracted from the 2006/07 Forward Looking Statement.

It was noted that the efficiency agenda was going to become more challenging because the Council had to achieve further savings this year. The Section 151 Officer and the Executive Manager for Policy and Performance would be implementing a more systematic approach to the measurement and management of efficiency savings and would include process improvement reviews of key back office functions.

Members of the committee were reminded that the efficiency savings could not come from front line or service cuts.

Members questioned whether the efficiency savings had been achieved at the expense of personnel cuts and were advised that the Council had restructured by not replacing staff that had left the authority. Members were assured that all savings were achieved by redirecting the resources from these posts to other areas where they were needed.

Following a full debate it was RESOLVED to approve the action plan for 2006/07 and agrees to receive progress reports throughout the year.

6. Asset Management Planning

Paul Walker, Strategic Planning & Development Executive Manager presented the report which provided information on the progress on asset management planning as requested by the Policy & Service Review Community Forum.

The Government had in recent years required local authorities to prepare and submit an annual Asset Management Plan (AMP)/Capital Strategy (CS) which set out how the Council was to manage and look after its land and property assets. Following a 'Poor' assessment in 2003 the council had been working towards improving the way it manages and makes best use of its assets.

Earlier this year officers submitted the revised AMP/CS, which received a 'Good' assessment from the Government Office for the North West. This meant that the council no longer had to submit an annual plan for assessment although the Government hoped local authorities would continue to improve the way they managed their assets. As part of this overall plan it was important that councils constantly reviewed and challenge why they held particular assets and consider if they could be put to better use.

In April 2005 as part of the background work to improve the council's AMP, the Policy & Service Review Community Forum approved an asset review policy and procedure. This was centred on the following aims and priorities:

Aim:

'To maximise the use of all the council's assets in supporting quality service delivery'

Service priorities:

- Providing assets that are 'fit for purpose' in supporting service delivery
- Obtaining the maximum income from property and land used for purposes other than service delivery
- Disposing effectively of assets that are not supporting service delivery or generating appropriate income for the council.

Details of the process for reviewing assets were detailed in the agenda report. The Asset Management Group (AMG) had a key role in identifying which assets to review and to consider the different perspectives of the council (i.e. legal, financial, housing, health, planning, leisure, etc) in arriving at a recommendation.

Last year the Executive Committee resolved that it wished to see a more robust asset disposal programme which would see some sites being sold to fund the council's capital programme ambitions. However, due to various issues impinging on the service recent progress has been slow.

Earlier this year the Policy and Service Review Scrutiny Committee (PSRSC) considered a request for 'call-in' in relation to a decision by the Cabinet not to transfer Mill Street car park to Kirkham Town Council. The decision was based on the council getting best consideration for the asset. The P&SRSC however felt that there was a need for Cabinet to introduce a policy on the transfer/disposal of Council assets to Town and Parish Councils. Current policy as mentioned above was that assets should only be disposed of if they were not supporting service delivery or generating appropriate income for the council. Again resourcing issues had prevented this report being brought forward.

Members were concerned that that the long term absence of Fylde Borough Councils' Corporate Property officer would stall work on reviewing the Council Assets (which had also been identified as a scrutiny review priority for the PSRSC) and considered it urgent that this needs to get underway as soon as possible. Members advised that resources should be made available to recruit a Surveyor on a secondment/fixed term contract basis to make headway with review activity in the interim.

Following full consideration it was RESOLVED to recommend to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency that resources be made available for the recruitment of a Surveyor to allow work on reviewing council assets to continue.

7. Review of Customer Services

Annie Womack, Senior Overview & Scrutiny Officer presented a preliminary report on the preparation for an in-depth review of customer services. "Customer services" in this report refers to the Call Centre and the One Stop Shops.

Customer services was identified in a recent IDeA training session for Cabinet and Scrutiny Members as an area of concern which needed to be addressed as a priority through an in-depth review.

As a result a preliminary scoping meeting was held with the responsible officers, the Executive Portfolio Member and the Performance Improvement Scrutiny Chairman, in order that issues could be identified and an approach to the review recommended.

The report contained a draft scoping document, which set out the proposed terms of reference for the review of customer services, which would commence when a Task and Finish Group had been appointed.

The document identified the principal areas of concern to be addressed, detailed the research methodology, the objectives of the review, indicators of success and timescales.

Councillor Fabian Wilson was nominated to lead the Task and Finish Group and would be supported by Councillor Christine Ackeroyd.

Following consideration it was RESOLVED-

1. That the scoping document detailed in the report be approved as an accurate record of the terms of reference for the review of customer services.
2. That the timescale laid out in the scoping document be agreed.
3. That a Task and Finish Group consisting of Councillor Fabian Wilson as Lead Councillor and Councillor Christine Ackeroyd to assist be appointed to carry out the review.

8. Local Government Ombudsman Annual Letter and Report 2005/06

Ian Curtis, Executive Manager for Legal Services presented the Ombudsman Annual Letter, which has been received, from the Commission for Local Administration in England upon complaints relating to the Council for the period 2005/2006

The Ombudsman's Annual Letter, which was circulated with the agenda, reflected on the complaints made to the Ombudsman about Fylde borough over the last year and was supported by statistical data governing a three year period and a note to help the interpretation of the statistics. The letter also gave the average time taken by the council to respond to Ombudsmen enquiries and included comments on the effectiveness of the liaison arrangements between the Council and the Ombudsman's. Suggestions for improvements were also made. This year, lists had also been provided showing which cases were covered by each data sets complaints received, complaints determined and response times.

For the year ending 31 March the Ombudsman received 13 complaints against the Council (a slight fall in the number of complaints (18) received in the previous period). It was noted that complaints about planning matters made up the single largest group of complaints.

There were no findings of maladministration and there were 12 decisions made during the year, three of which were determined to be premature.

The committee RESOLVED to note the report