

RESOURCES SCRUTINY PANEL

20 March 2007

Attendance:

Councillors:

Macmillan (Chairman) (P)

Anthony (P)
Clohosey (P)
Cooper (P)
de Peyer (P)
Goodall
Hiscock (P)

Learney (P)
Maynard (P)
Ruffell (P)
Worrall (P)
Wright (P)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Allgood (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Goodall.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel held on 31 January 2007 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

4. **BUSINESS PLAN 2007/08 ONWARDS – HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTORATE**

(Report RE41 refers)

The Director of Human Resources explained that the Council had a duty to promote diversity and was working towards the development and implementation of an Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality Strategy. The approach would be linked to the work of the Local Strategic Partnership, where appropriate.

During discussion, Members raised the issue of flexible working. The Director stated that being able to offer this would make the Council a desirable place to work and would positively impact on its ability to recruit. In relation to vacancy monitoring, she confirmed that this responsibility sat with senior managers and that the role of Human Resources was to advise upon recruitment and the best value approach to filling vacancies.

In discussing sickness absence, Members suggested that targets for reducing this were not ambitious enough. The Director reported that approximately 20% of sick leave was long term but that the average number of sick days per member of staff had continued to decrease.

Responding to questions from the Panel, the Director reported that the Selima Joint Human Resources and Payroll system would be used to collate records on staff training and competencies in the near future but that this information was currently collected manually. The annual appraisal process was also undergoing review.

A Member asked why some Divisions had included a Service Review, including the operation of staffing structures, within their Business Plans and others had not. Councillor Allgood indicated that he was looking at how the Service Reviews would be conducted across the Council during 2007/08.

RESOLVED:

1. That, having regard to the Council's agreed Corporate Priorities on an Efficient and Effective Council, the Panel recommends to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources:

(i) that consideration be given to a reduction in the target for the number of days sick per member of staff

(ii) that the targets given in Key Performance Indicators be reviewed and clarified where the data is currently not available

(iii) that Disability be added to the Age/Gender/Race profile in the Recruitment Strategy.

(iv) that a Business Process Review of the Human Resources Directorate take place in the future

(v) that an additional action be added to investigate the possibility of a skills portal.

5. **BUSINESS PLAN 2007/08 ONWARDS – ESTATES DIVISION**
(Report RE43 refers)

Members asked detailed questions in relation to the key extracts from the draft Business Plan as appended to the report, specifically on items such as vacant and void properties. The Chief Estates Officer responded that a further report would go to Cabinet on 11 April 2007, outlining the revised costs of the maintenance programme of operational property. The figure of £75,000 quoted in the Business Plan went to Cabinet on 17 January 2007. The revised report would provide a more accurate figure as estimates for the work had since been received from contractors. In response to a suggestion from the Panel, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources confirmed that it was the intention of Cabinet to carry out reviews of all key service areas.

RESOLVED:

1. That, having regard to the Council's agreed Corporate Priority on an Efficient and Effective Council, the Panel recommends to the Portfolio

Holder for Finance and Resources no changes to the extracts of the draft Estates Division Business Plan 2007/08 as set out as Appendices to RE43.

6. **BUSINESS PLAN 2007/08 ONWARDS – FINANCE DIRECTORATE AND PROCUREMENT**
(Report RE42 refers)

The Director of Finance reported that, although no significant savings had been realised since the Customer Service Centre opened, this should change as more services were included within the Centre's remit. The Panel considered that the Customer Service Centre was a good service, but that it was important that the target of making savings across the Council was achieved. The Director agreed to present service delivery plans at a future meeting of the Panel.

During discussion of the Customer Service Centre, the Director of Finance confirmed that the reporting of targets was constantly being improved, but that she did not want to set unrealistic targets for 2007/08. The targets for 2007/08 onwards took account of revised Government targets for this service. Two new members of staff were being trained and a list of the most common transactions and frequently asked questions was being compiled, in order to improve the service at the first point of contact for the customer.

It was noted by the Panel that, to assist with the implementation of the Electronic Document Record Management System (EDRMS), a Government grant had been received towards capital. It was agreed that an update of the EDRMS project should be brought to the Panel in six months' time, including details of any efficiency savings made. Responding to questions, Councillor Allgood confirmed that the Council had been unable to share EDRMS procurement with other Local Authorities due to conflicting deadlines for implementation, but that the Leaders of Hampshire Local Authorities were keen to share resources on other appropriate projects in the future to better realise savings on procurement.

It was reported to the Panel that tenders following the printer and copier review had been received a contract with the preferred supplier was being negotiated. This would be linked with the office moves project and would realise savings on the Digica contract. The Director also outlined other projects that were moving forward, such as the switchboard contract and integration of back office systems with EDRMS.

The Director of Finance reported that it was planned to streamline monthly procedures to improve the timeliness of financial reporting. She informed the Panel that the Performance Indicator was in line with the timescale identified in the CPA key lines of enquiry (e.g. management reports to be produced by working day 10 after the period end). Cabinet had requested that monthly updates were brought to them, which would mean that any relevant actions could be identified sooner.

During debate, the Director of Finance stated that achieving improvements reflecting best practice would require appropriately trained and skilled staff and that more efficient ways of working were being investigated.

RESOLVED:

1. That, having regard to the Council's agreed Corporate Priorities on an Efficient and Effective Council, the Panel recommends to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources no changes to the extracts of the draft Customer Service Division, Financial Services Division, IMT Division,

Revenues Division or Performance Division (procurement issues) Business Plans 2007/08 as set out as Appendices to RE42.

2. That the implementation progress of the Customer Service Centre be reported to the next meeting of the Panel.

3. That a review take place in six months' time on the implementation of the EDRMS project and is reported back to the Panel.

4. **That Cabinet consider how input from Scrutiny Panels could be useful in developing joint working with other Local Authorities on shared services.**

7. **BUSINESS PLAN 2007/08 ONWARDS – CITY SECRETARY AND SOLICITOR'S DIRECTORATE: SECRETARIAT AND LEGAL DIVISIONS**
(Report RE40 refers)

The City Secretary and Solicitor explained that there had been a trend to reduce the number of Member meetings but that, due to the implementation of the Civil Contingencies Act, there had been a conscious use of staff resources for other work. Meeting numbers had also decreased due Winchester Town Forum Public Consultation meetings taking place later in the year and a smaller number of licensing hearings/Planning Development Control Sub-Committee meetings to the previous year.

During debate, the Panel discussed costs to the Council during the Silver Hill Development project. The City Secretary and Solicitor confirmed that the 'landlord role' external legal and surveyor costs were regularly reimbursed by the developers. The Council had to meet the cost of processing planning applications but applicants were charged the nominal statutory application fees.

RESOLVED:

That, having regard to the Council's agreed Corporate Priorities on Economic Prosperity, High Quality Environment, Safe and Strong Communities and an Efficient and Effective Council, the Panel recommends to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources no changes to the extracts of the draft City Secretary and Solicitor's Business Plan 2007/08 as set out as Appendices to RE40.

8. **SCRUTINY REVIEW OF E-GOVERNMENT**
(Report RE44 refers)

The Chief Executive presented to the Panel the final report of the Informal Scrutiny Group, highlighting the issue raised of 'Gateway Reviews'. He explained that the Group felt it was important to scrutinise the procedures during procurement and that projects should only progress once all the relevant criteria for a project was met.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Finance reported that work was progressing on various projects that would ultimately show significant savings for the Council. She outlined projects such as the telephone, internet and data line providers. A new switchboard maintenance contract had recently been awarded and savings had been achieved.

Following consideration of the report, the Panel requested that additional recommendations be added, to ensure that best use was made of existing systems before the Council considered investing in new systems, and to ensure that the results of Business Process Reviews were implemented where the potential for more efficient and effective working has been identified.

RESOLVED:

1. **That Cabinet be recommended:**

(i) **that the efficiency savings and reductions in the budget for the IEG Programme identified in the course of this review be welcomed;**

(ii) **that more formalised 'Gateway' reviews be included in any major IT procurement exercises, in order to ensure that the scope and costs of the procurement remain clearly defined and identified;**

(iii) **that a separate review be carried out into the Council's procurement procedures to ensure that these are delivering best value for money**

(iv) **to ensure that the best use is being made of existing IT systems before investment in new systems is considered**

(v) **to ensure that the results of Business Process Reviews are implemented where the potential for more efficient and effective working has been identified.**

9. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel noted that at its meeting on 27 February 2007, the Scrutiny Chairs Liaison meeting had proposed that this Panel consider establishing in-depth Scrutiny Reviews on Procurement, Council Transport and Flexible Working. The Panel agreed that priority should be given to the Procurement and Flexible Working reviews.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda, and as extracted from Report PS275, be noted.

2. **That Cabinet and Principal Scrutiny be asked to approve the following in-depth reviews for 2007/08 by informal scrutiny groups of the Resources Scrutiny Panel:**

- (a) **Procurement**
- (b) **Flexible Working**

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 8.45pm.

Chairman