

RESOURCES SCRUTINY PANEL**19 March 2009****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Wright (Chairman) (P)

Anthony (P)
Henry (P)
Higgins (P)
Huxstep (P)
Izard (P)
Jeffs (P)Learney (P)
Sanders (P)
Mitchell (P)
Verney (P)**Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:**Councillor Allgood (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency)
Councillor Godfrey (Portfolio Holder for Performance and Organisational Development)

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillors Allgood and Godfrey declared personal and prejudicial interests due to their involvement as Cabinet Members in actions taken or proposed in the Reports outlined below.

However, the Panel asked the Cabinet Members, as Portfolio Holders, to remain in the meeting, under the provisions of Sections 21(13)(a) of the Local Government Act 2000, in order that they could provide additional information to the Panel and/or answer questions.

2. MINUTES

With regard to the Minute relating to "Performance and Organisational Development Portfolio 2009/10 Performance Monitoring Third Quarter Update" (Report [RE76](#) refers) the Corporate Director (Policy) confirmed that progress was still being made in some of the four areas for resolution.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting, held 10 February 2009, be approved and adopted.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No comments were made or statements received.

4. **THE DEPOT SERVICES CONTRACT – MANAGEMENT AND RENEWAL**
(Oral Report)

The Corporate Director (Policy) gave a presentation to the Panel about the current management arrangements, and forthcoming renewal, of the Depot Services Contract.

The Director explained the three key areas which required close management; service delivery, relational matters and contract administration. Whilst any contract required formal control, there was a need for flexibility to ensure continual improvement and adaptation. The existing contract was due to expire in March 2011 and various options and sub-options potentially available to the Council were outlined - including the possibility of a seven authority joint project with Havant, Portsmouth, East Hampshire, Test Valley, Hart and Basingstoke. This required careful consultation due to the human resource implications, and the differing individual requirements of each Council. A flexible approach would need to be deployed if such an agreement was entered into.

During discussion, the Panel agreed that the Depot Services Contract was an issue of great importance, which required closer scrutiny. Therefore it was agreed to convene the Contract Management Informal Scrutiny Group promptly to ensure this occurred.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Contract Management Informal Scrutiny Group be convened as a matter of priority.
2. That the Corporate Director (Policy) be thanked for his presentation.

5. **LEGAL SERVICES DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**
(Report [RE80](#) refers)

The Head of Legal Services confirmed that implementation of the Electronic Document Record Management System (EDRMS) in the Legal department would commence in April 2009. The Division was currently approving the required file plans to allow its records to be held electronically within the system. As well as the benefits which Members would be aware of, the system would also make it easier to monitor and compile statistics on letter response rate times.

Members discussed the payment of undisputed invoices within 30 days of receipt. Councillor Godfrey reported that Cabinet had recently approved a change to ensure invoice payments were now made within 15 days (Report [CAB1815](#) refers). The Head of Legal Services assured Members that this

new target could be achieved. The Corporate Director (Governance) added that systems would be implemented across the Council to ensure this revised target could be monitored effectively.

A Member requested an explanation on the delay of the User Satisfaction Survey. The Head of Legal Services explained this was due to the high work load of the responsible officer within his team.

Following further discussion, the Head of Legal Services acknowledged Members' comments regarding target setting and reporting on delayed critical projects and undertook to make improvements where necessary. He also agreed to add a risk matrix at an appropriate point within the Business Plan.

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel raises no specific comment on the Legal Services Division Business Plan extract, attached as Appendices to Report RE80, subject to the introduction of a risk matrix as part of its final drafting.

6. FINANCIAL SERVICES DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS
(Report [RE81](#) refers)

The Panel recognised that this item had not been notified for inclusion on the agenda within the statutory deadline. The Chairman agreed to accept the item onto the agenda, as a matter requiring urgent consideration, due to the requirement for the Panel's comments to be taken into account during the preparation of the Division's Business Plan.

Councillor Allgood explained to Members that in the current economic climate, cautious investment was essential to optimise returns. Also during the business planning period, there were going to be new challenges for the division – the implementation of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) for example. In recognition of this additional budget had been provided for 2009/10 to enable recruitment to assist the Division with their workload.

Following discussions Councillor Allgood explained the complexities regarding planning staff resources necessary to support the financial aspects of the Council's major projects. Members were assured that the division's responsive nature, and general awareness, would seek to ensure that project needs could be met.

Following discussion, the Panel agreed the Business Plan as set out. It did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel raises no comment on the Financial Services Division Business Plan extract, attached as Appendices to Report RE81.

7. **ESTATES DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**

(Report [RE83](#) refers)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency reiterated to Members that, following the Head of Estates resignation, the Facilities Manager and Senior Estates Surveyor were currently managing the Division under the guidance of the Corporate Director (Governance).

The Corporate Director (Governance) reported that good progress was being made on the preparatory work concerning the Compulsory Purchase Order for Silver Hill and negotiations were ongoing with the developers, Thornfields, on the revisions to the Development Agreement. Key significant milestones as agreed at Cabinet on 18 November 2008, were being adhered to. He confirmed that the use of skilled consultants was essential for such a project and it was not economical for the Division to recruit such services in-house.

Member's asked for clarification regarding progress with the disposal of the lease of Avalon House. The Corporate Director (Governance) indicated that negotiations were continuing with the NHS regarding the possibility of establishing an out-patients department within the building. A comprehensive assessment was being carried out to consider the details of works required.

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel raises no comment on the Estates Division Business Plan extract, attached as Appendices to Report RE83.

8. **ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**

(Report [RE82](#) refers)

During detailed discussion Members identified a lack of comprehensive quantifiable targets in some areas of the Plan. It was requested that, in future plans, if no material data was available, estimated figures be provided so that Members could gauge approximated aims.

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel raises no comment on the Organisational Development Business Plan extract, attached as Appendices to Report RE82 but, in future, more detailed quantitative targets are provided.

9. **REVENUES DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**
(Report [RE78](#) refers)

During discussion, the Head of Revenues provided clarification on the Rate Relief Scheme offered by the Council. The scheme was not new and was utilised to assist businesses in times of extreme hardship. It was solely for exceptional cases and involved the waiving of rates, as deemed appropriate, on a case by case basis. No cases had currently been presented to the Division.

Following detailed discussion on the introduction of a new electronic mileage reimbursement form, Councillor Allgood agreed to examine further whether it was economically beneficial to re-claim back the VAT on officers/Members mileage claims.

As with other Heads of Division, the Head of Revenues agreed to implement a 15 day target for the payment of undisputed invoices.

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel raises no comment on the Revenues Division Business Plan extract, attached as Appendices to Report RE78.

10. **INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**
(Report [RE79](#) refers)

The Panel questioned the key project due dates and considered that, due to the extended timeframe, it was appropriate to provide Members with further detailed information on the progression of key projects. It was agreed that the Head of IMT make a presentation to a future meeting of the Panel so that Members could assess progress. Furthermore it was noted that a Programme Board was currently being formed to oversee projects.

Following discussion, the Panel agreed the Business Plan as set out. It did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Head of IMT provide further detailed information on the progression of key projects of the Division to the Resources Scrutiny Panel on 18 November 2009.
2. That the Panel raises no comment on the Information Management and Technology Business Plan extract, attached as Appendices to Report RE79.

11. **CUSTOMER SERVICES DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**
(Report [RE84](#) refers)

The Head of Customer Service explained that, through seeking Customer Service Accreditation, the Division had engaged with Customer focus groups to ensure the training of officers was targeted to meet customer needs. The Division was considering wider publicity of their operations once accreditation had been achieved by the first group of divisions. This was to ensure that the public were aware of the assistance that Customer Services staff could offer. The Division would also seek to engage more diverse customer groups so as to continuously improve operations.

During discussion, the Head of Customer Service explained an apparent fall in quality assessments rated as "good or excellent." He reported that the Division had become more stringent on the methods of assessing officer skills, but were ensuring staff were supported in achieving the raised standards required.

Members also sought clarification regarding missed calls from officers within the Council. Members queried whether it was possible to record the specific officer's number who had made the call, rather than the general Customer Service number. Due to the existing equipment utilised, this method was not available. However, a recorded message when customers telephoned back assured them no further action was required and they would be re-contacted as necessary.

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel raises no comment on the Customer Services Division Business Plan extract, attached as Appendices to Report RE84.

12. **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES DIVISION BUSINESS PLAN 2009/10 ONWARDS**

(Report [RE77](#) refers)

With regard to implementation of a 15 day target for the payment of undisputed invoices, the Head of Democratic Services advised that this would be achievable due to the relatively small number of invoices received.

The Panel did not identify any particular issues to be included in future performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel raises no comment on the Democratic Services Business Plan extract, attached as Appendices to Report RE77.

13. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

(Report [PS354](#) refers)

It was agreed that priority should be given to the Contract Management Informal Scrutiny Group and that the Maintaining General Fund Properties Informal Scrutiny Group be convened later in the year.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda and as extracted from Report PS354, be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.25pm

Chairman