

SCRUTINY BOARD (CENTRAL AND CORPORATE)

MONDAY, 5TH JANUARY, 2009

PRESENT: Councillor M Dobson in the Chair

Councillors B Atha, S Bentley, B Chastney,
J Dowson, P Ewens, M Hamilton,
V Kendall, B Selby and P Wadsworth

58 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

59 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Bale, Davey and Lowe.

60 Minutes - 1st December 2008 - and Matters Arising

- (a) Minutes – 3rd November 2008 – Declarations of Interest (Minute No 50 refers)

With reference to Minute No 50, 1st December 2008, and Minute No 43, 3rd November 2008, Councillor Wadsworth requested that his name too be added to the amended Minute No 43, as he too had been advised to leave the meeting on 3rd November during the discussion of the Review of the Capital Programme 2008-2012 due to his position as a Director of Leeds East North East Homes ALMO.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That subject to the above addition, the minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2008 be confirmed as a correct record;
- (b) That the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development, in conjunction with the Senior Governance Officer, be requested to review the minute format, to establish whether it is possible to perhaps provide more clarity or certainty regarding the necessary follow-up actions resulting from the Board's discussions.

61 Budget Strategy 2009/10

Consideration of this item was deferred to the meeting to be held on 2nd February 2009, due to the indisposition of the Director of Resources.

62 Council Business Plan 2008-2011 - Performance Report for Quarter 2 2008/09

Further to Minute No 33, 6th October 2008, the Head of Policy, Performance and Improvement submitted a report regarding the Quarter 2 performance indicators (PI) in respect of Central and Corporate Functions. The report charted progress against targets across the raft of individual performance indicators in this area, and highlighted areas of under-performance and actions being taken to remedy matters.

Helen Mylan, Alex Watson and Steve Carey, Resources Department, and Heather Pinches and Paddy Clarke, Chief Executive's Department, were present at the meeting and responded to Members' queries and comments. In brief summary, the main points of discussion were:-

- PI BP-09 - % of complaints responded to within 15 days – the report indicated that the target figure of 76% was unlikely to be met this year; PI BP-10 and BP11 - % of letters and e-mails responded to within 10 days – did this mean merely acknowledged, or a substantive reply received? Was 10 days for a reply to an e-mail an acceptable target? Officers reported that all these issues were currently the subject of monitoring and discussion by an inter-Department 'Customer Strategy Board' of officers established to drive forward improvement. This was a complicated area, with incomplete data in respect of some Departments, which perhaps did not have the same high levels of contact with the public as others, therefore data collection was not perceived as being a priority or adding value to the service. Finding suitable resources to perform the data collection and monitoring was also an issue in some cases.

The Customer Strategy Board was attempting to take a pragmatic approach in respect of this area, on a service by service basis, with deminimus reporting being looked at where Departments did not have a huge interface with the public. Although useful, this PI could also sometimes be misleading as an indicator of a particular level of performance – say, for instance, in respect of the Benefits Service, where the priority might be to concentrate on and shorten the amount of time taken between a claim being received and benefit being paid.

The 10 and 15 days referred to a full response, not merely an acknowledgement, but even this could mask problems. For example, if it related to a housing repair issue, or could still be a considerable time before an order was placed and the work carried out. Customer Services were working closely with the ALMO's to improve customer service, 10 days was now the standard to which ALMO's were working, and could well become the norm across the Council. The point regarding a 10 day response to an e-mail was accepted, and it was rare that this would in fact be the case.

Members instructed that their comments and concerns be relayed directly to the Customer Strategy Board, and that the situation be reviewed again critically in March, when the Quarter 3 PI's are submitted, by which time Members would require to see improved

figures and further information on action being taken to address this issue. Direct Member involvement in this area was one possible option which the Board could exercise.

- Staff training and empowerment – In response to Members' queries and comments, officers accepted that empowerment of front-line customer service staff, to enable them to resolve issues at first point of contact, was crucial to improving service delivery and customer satisfaction, and this was the whole thrust of their approach to customer services.

Staff at the Customer Contact Centre were fully trained, had appraisals and personal development plans, and 32% of current staff had either been promoted or taken advantage of career development opportunities. This was now being rolled out across customer service staff in other Departments. The Centre also participated in the 'Academy' scheme operated by the Council, which targeted getting people back into work, and had been successful in participants obtaining NVQ Level 2 in Customer Services. The aim was that in at least 80% of cases, the customer was dealt with and a solution found at first point of contact, even if this was just an appointment for a follow-up visit. All training was geared to the 'One Council' initiative, and aimed at encouraging staff to take ownership of the problem and equipping them to deal with it. Where matters had to be referred on, the Customer Strategy Board was looking at ways of monitoring those issues and improving response rates.

- NI 179 - % cash releasing efficiency savings (cumulative total over 3 years) – it was explained that this was linked to the Council's obligations to find year-on-year savings under the national scheme following on from the Gershon review. The predicted year end savings of £24.3 m was against a target of £27m. The indicator related to the Council's overall expenditure, and some savings were one-offs for a particular year and others represented savings of varying degrees over the lifetime of a scheme or project;
- BP30 and BP31 – Number of major projects not receiving independent project assurance and the number of major projects independently assured by the independent in-house Project Assurance Unit. These PI's related to the 'healthcheck' assurance work in respect of major projects, to ensure they were on-track, as part of the Council's 'Delivering Successful Change' initiative. More work needed to be done in this area, but the Council now had greater independent monitoring and accountability procedures in respect of major projects;
- 'Improve Our Understanding of Customers'. Reference was made to several issues under this generic heading (Agenda Page 31 refers) –
 - Concern was expressed regarding the statement that Children's and Young People's Social Care was only now just in the process of conducting segmentation analysis to identify areas

with a high proportion of vulnerable children and young people, and trends across the population such as deprivation, ethnicity and disability, to assist in developing targeted and preventative services. Members were surprised that this work had not already been done, and also questioned whether most of the required information should not already be at the Council's disposal, principally via Education Leeds? Members requested to be supplied with further information at the earliest possible opportunity;

- The Housing Solutions Programme work currently being undertaken. It was explained that the Housing Solutions service now operated out of Great George Street, but analysis had shown that, remarkably, 65% of all enquiries relating to homelessness had originated at the Dewsbury Road One Stop Centre, therefore action had been taken to enable enquiries to be dealt with at that Centre, at first point of contact, rather than have to refer people on. This area also covered the on-going discussions with the ALMO's to improve the customer service experience of their tenants. Members requested to be advised of the outcome of these discussions, and, in particular, all Ward Members affected needed to be aware of the outcome in respect of the East North East Homes ALMO;
- Further explanation was provided regarding the proposed pilot collaboration between the Revenues and Benefits Service and Experian in relation to recovery of customer arrears. It was explained that if the system failed to produce benefits to the Council, it would be at no cost to the Council. Members requested to be supplied with the cost to the Council of the previous unsuccessful joint collaboration with Experian;
- Streetscene Services – ACORN market analysis system - Any dangers of postcode discrimination? Further information to be provided to Members in writing;
- Museums and Galleries 'Audience Development Plan', to identify 'customers' and 'non-customers'. Further information to be provided to Members in writing;
- Sport and Active Recreation – Community consultation – examples of lessons learnt being put into action? Further information to be provided to Members in writing.
- Possible prosecution for residents found to be falsely claiming single persons Council Tax discount? It was reported that the Audit Commission was looking at this issue nationally. The Council was keeping its options open pending the outcome of this national review, and was currently concentrating its limited resources on recovery and repayment, rather than prosecution;
- Members also requested to be advised of the outcome of current discussions between the Council and its partner agencies on the issue of better ways to tackle customer problems which affected more than one agency.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance, and the manner in which they had responded to Members' queries and comments. He also made reference to the currently unscheduled report on the Corporate Call Centre performance contained in the Board's work programme.

RESOLVED – That subject to the above comments and requests for further information, the report be received and noted.

63 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a copy of the Board's work programme, updated to reflect decisions taken at previous meetings, together with a relevant extract of the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st December 2008 to 31st March 2009 and the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Board held on 3rd December 2008.

Reference was made to the proposed scrutiny of electoral matters, currently unscheduled, and in particular the way in which the distribution and return of Registration Form 'A' was monitored, and it was agreed to establish a Working Group to look into this area.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report and updated work programme be received and noted;
- (b) That a Working Group on Electoral Matters, comprising all Members of the Board, be established, and the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development canvass dates for and arrange a meeting, in consultation with the Chair.

64 Cancelled Call-In Meeting, 22nd December 2008

Councillor Atha wished to place on record his severe disquiet at the cancellation of the scheduled Call-In meeting on 22nd December 2008, called to look into a delegated decision of the Director of Resources in relation to the A660 Woodhouse Lane/Clarendon Road Proposed Inbound Bus/Cycle Lane and Junction Improvement Measures.

Whilst he understood the reasons for the cancellation i.e. the subsequent decision by the officer of the Called-In decision, nevertheless the incident did raise serious constitutional matters of principle and precedent, not least concerning Members' rights to have an issue of concern raised and debated in public, and he intended to pursue the matter with the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance). It might be a matter which the Governance Committee should look into.

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development explained the circumstances surrounding his decision, on advice, to cancel the Call-In meeting, as circumstances had changed, and effectively there was no longer a decision to

be Called-In. The Highways aspects of the matter were now due to be considered by the Scrutiny Board (City Development) on 13th January 2009.

65 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday 6th January 2009, at 2.00 pm (Pre-Meeting 1.30 pm).

The meeting concluded at 11.57 am.