

CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 25 October 2007 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present	Cllr M. Nazir (chair) Cllr M. Bird Cllr J. Cook Cllr J. Rochelle Cllr J. Phillips Cllr H. Sarohi Cllr C. Towe Cllr D. Turner Cllr M. Micklewright
Portfolio holders present	Cllr A. Griffiths – Finance and Personnel Cllr M. Arif – Procurement, Transformation and performance management
Officers present	Rob Flinter – Assistant Director – Performance Management Sarah Homer – Assistant Director – Strategic Transformation Vicky Buckley – Head of Corporate Finance Ian Jones – Welfare Rights Manager David Stephens – Revenues and Benefits Business Support Manager Andy Field – Principal Performance and Information Officer Angela Walker – Performance Officer (Information) Craig Goodall – Scrutiny Officer

18/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor M. Longhi.

19/07 SUBSTITUTIONS

The following substitution(s) to the panel were submitted for the duration of the meeting:-

- Delete: Councillor M. Longhi
- Substitute: Councillor C. Micklewright

20/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

21/07 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS

Craig Goodall informed Members that the following changes had been made to the minutes from those circulated with the agenda. They were:

- Minute Item 15/07, Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation, penultimate paragraph first sentence amended to read: 'Ian Jones commented that Sandwell had restructured their welfare rights service to deal with work similar to that at Walsall'.
- Minute Item 16/07, Update from Procurement Working Group, delete Turner to replace with Towe in resolution (b).
- A number of minor editorial changes.

Resolved

That the minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 30 August 2007, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

22/07 FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan as at 10 October 2007 was submitted.

(annexed)

In response to a question it was clarified that the forward plan item 63/07, 'Print and design future configuration', was going to be considered at the next meeting of the Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Members voiced strong concern about the current format of the forward plan. It was essential that the format was altered so that further details about each decision could be included. It was felt essential that a date for each decision to be considered by scrutiny should be included on the forward plan.

Councillor Arif commented that Cabinet valued the contribution scrutiny made to the decision making process.

Resolved

That the Panel recommend the Forward Plan be amended to include:

(a) further details about each decision and what it entails;

and;

(b) a date for when each item on the forward plan will be presented to the relevant Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

23/07 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The panel noted the training opportunities as previously circulated.

(annexed)

24/07 REVENUES AND BENEFITS – ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Panel was updated on the implementation and performance to date of the revenues and benefits electronic document management system (EDMS).

David Stephens informed Members that the EDMS procurement and implementation process has been completed in 41 days. This was the fastest time taken in the UK. All the project objectives had been met and it closed on 31 September 2007.

As a result a significant number of improvements had been achieved around:

- customer service – as evidence by feedback
- staff morale
- overall management
- access to documents

In response to a question it was confirmed that the welfare rights service did not use EDMS but the potential was there for them to use along with other council departments. Members felt that due to the similarity of work completed by the welfare rights service then it would benefit from engaging with EDMS. Following another question it was confirmed that the cost of the Institute of Revenues Ratings and Valuation report on the welfare rights service had cost £15,000. Vicky Buckley agreed to establish which budget the cost had been met from.

The Panel congratulated the revenues and benefits staff for the successful implementation of the new system. It was added that this was a good example of scrutiny having a positive influence on council services.

Resolved

That (a) the electronic document management system be considered for use by other council departments including the welfare rights service;

and;

(b) Members be informed of the budget where the £15,000 cost of the Institute of Revenues Ratings and Valuation report on the welfare rights service was met from.

25/07 PERFORMANCE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND DATA QUALITY

The Panel received a presentation from Andy Field and Angela Walker informing them of the performance information management system (PIMS) used by the council and how data quality was maintained.

(annexed)

Rob Flinter informed Members that Walsall Council was currently ranked the 7th most improved Council from 388 Councils in 2006 for improvements in a ???performance measures used by the Audit Commission as part of the Corporate Performance Assessment process.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing question session:

- PIMS was mainly used by Performance Management Officers and Performance Boards.
- PIMS was available to be used by Members and could be accessed in each group room.
- Performance Information was mostly updated quarterly. Some data was available monthly but it was important to balance the time it took to collect the information alongside the need to have monthly data.
- Members felt that the more often the data was updated the more useful it would be.
- Budgets were not monitored as part of PIMS. Budget monitoring was undertaken via Oracle.
- Financial data was currently collated by the Oracle system which was being upgraded. This could allow an interface with PIMS.
- The need for financial data to be available to Members was emphasised.
- The possibility of constantly live data being available on PIMS was being investigated. A trial was currently taking place by interfacing PIMS with the Trent system to monitor sickness absence across the council. However, this was not a straightforward process and required assistance from the software providers.
- Members thought it would be beneficial if the automatic email system could be used to inform people when data had been updated.

Councillor Arif informed the Panel that the possibility of monthly performance data was an issue that he wanted to work towards.

26/07 QUARTER ONE BEACON INDEX AND BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATOR OUTCOMES

Members considered overall quarter one performance of the beacon index (BI), best value performance indicators (BVPIs) and performance actions plans (PAPs) for those indicators not on target as referred to the Panel from Cabinet.

The Chairman noted that the PAPs for BVPI 12 and BVPI 16 on pages 31 and 33 respectively of the agenda were the responsibility of Councillor Griffiths and not Councillor Arif as listed in the reports.

Andy Field and Angela Walker gave Members a live demonstration of PIMS and how it was possible to locate areas of poor performance and PAPs in those indicators in the Panels remit. PAPs were signed off by Executive Directors and reported to Cabinet and the Strategic Leadership Team.

In considering the PAPs the following principal points were made:

BVPI 8 – Percentage of Invoices Paid on Time

- This was a statutory corporate measure. Every local authority was targeted to reach 100%.
- Problem areas could only be identified at a directorate level rather than through PIMS.

BVPI 12 – Working days lost due to sickness absence

- Directorate analysis was received by performance boards to identify problem areas.
- Meetings with Human Resources and Development (HRD) were taking place to consider now to increase the role of PIMS in monitoring sickness absence.
- It was noted that problems with sickness in specific service areas were being addressed by council wide policies and an action plan was being developed by HRD.
- The Strategic Leadership Team were monitoring sickness levels and compliance within the sickness policy on a monthly basis.

27/07 DRAFT BRIEFING NOTE FOR COUNCIL ON THE PANELS CONSIDERATIONS OF THE WELFARE RIGHTS SERVICE

The Panel considered a briefing note to council reporting on the Panels considerations of the Welfare Rights Service (WRS) during the last year.

Ian Jones informed Members that the briefing note contained details of all the key actions that had taken place during the Panels investigations. In terms of the business case requested by the Panel at its last meeting this was currently 75% complete and was currently being considered by Heads of Service. A detailed approach was being taken including investigating numbers of staff, how performance would be measured and what potential budget allocations would be. It was hoped that it would be complete by 31 November 2007.

Members expressed their disappointment at the slow progress that had been made with the issue. It was noted that council had initially requested for plans for a Trust to be in place for April 2007 and the current deadline of April 2008 was now approaching. It was important that this issue was not further delayed though some Members feared that not enough work had taken place for this date to be achieved.

In response to a question Ian Jones informed the Panel that potential board Members for the Trust were being considered as part of the business case. It was anticipated that elected Members would sit on the board alongside individual experts. Articles of Memorandum could be 'bought off the shelf' but it was anticipated that the council's legal team would have some input into this process.

The Panel discussed the staff currently employed by the WRS and felt that they should be given assurances of their future. This was especially true for those staff on fixed term contracts that were scheduled to end on 31 March 2008. Any delay with the proposals for a Trust could mean that the WRS lost valuable and experienced staff.

It was suggested that the Panel make a recommendation to council to consolidate and ring fence staff currently employed in the Welfare Rights, Fairer Charging and Financial Assessment Benefits Teams and second them to the Trust as from 1 April 2008. Once the details of the Local Government Pension Scheme had been addressed the

seconded staff would be transferred to the Trust under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) legislation.

Once this phase was complete Neighbourhood Community Officers would also be transferred into the Trust using TUPE. This should happen before 30 September 2008.

Following this a scoping exercise would be undertaken to establish if there were any other staff that existed that could be transferred into the new Trust. It was suggested that this process be complete by 31 December 2008.

Craig Goodall advised the Panel that it would be inappropriate at this time for the Panel to make recommendations to council before they had considered the business case. The suggested recommendations to council appeared to be issues that could be addressed in the business case so it would be more appropriate for the Panel to recommend that the suggested approach be considered as part of the draft business case. This could be as an alternative option.

Councillor Griffiths explained to the Panel that until it was proved that funding was available for a Trust then it would not be possible to outsource the work of the WRS. It was important that the WRS was not placed in any difficulties by becoming a Trust.

A Member commented that the work of the WRS benefited the whole of the borough, even affluent areas. Another Member thanked Ian Jones and the WRS Team for the assistance they provided to elderly residents in their ward.

The following Members requested that their vote in favour of the Panels resolution be recorded:

Cllr M. Nazir (chair)
Cllr M. Bird
Cllr J. Cook
Cllr J. Rochelle
Cllr J. Phillips
Cllr H. Sarohi
Cllr C. Towe
Cllr D. Turner
Cllr M. Micklewright

Resolved

That the following issues be investigated as part of the business case formulation process currently being undertaken investigating the possibility of the Welfare Rights Service becoming an independent trust:

(a) that the staff under the management of the Welfare Rights Service at the moment be consolidated for consideration of them going into a Trust from 1 April 2008, these staff being:

- 1. 12 Welfare Rights Staff plus 7.5fte Neighbourhood Renewal funded contracts that end on 31 March 2008;**
 - 2. 10 Fairer Charging staff, and;**
 - 3. 2 Financial Assessment Benefits staff.**
- Total 31.5 fte staff**

- (b) that the staff under the management of the Welfare Rights Service at the moment be consolidated together with all of their budgets and to ring fence them in preparation of a Trust Body status coming into effect from 1 April 2008 and all of these staff be seconded in the first instance from 1 April 2008 until such time as the admitted body status for the Local Government Pension Scheme is agreed and then TUPE would then be applied to these staff in the new trust;**
- (c) that the second phase target to include the Neighbourhood Community Care Officers to be TUPE transferred into the new Trust no later than 30 September 2008, and;**
- (d) that a scoping exercise be undertaken in the third phase of consolidation of staff to establish similar staff that might be considered for transfer into the new Trust. This to be completed by 31 December 2008.**

28/07 BUDGET SCRUTINY PROPOSALS AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel considered budget scrutiny proposals from the Scrutiny Working Group and confirmed the date of their next two meetings.

Craig Goodall explained that the scrutiny working group was recommending that a Member of each scrutiny panel attended the second decision conference meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel to inform the Panel of their individual Panels recommendations. The Panel would then take these recommendations into account during its consideration of the whole council budget.

Some Members expressed concern that scrutiny was looking at the budget too late and questioned whether or not there was a better way of getting involved with the budget setting process.

Councillor Griffiths informed Members that draft budgets were not yet finalised, for example, the salary budget was currently being reviewed on a daily basis. He accepted that scrutiny needed to get involved earlier in the process and noted that scrutiny was getting involved with the budget earlier than it did last year.

Vicky Buckley reported that the settlement from Government was still awaited but budgets were being drafted with the assumption of a £6m shortfall. There were additional issues outstanding regarding external funding. In response to a request it was confirmed that details of services and staff dependant on external funding were being drafted for consideration by each scrutiny panel.

The date of the next two meetings was confirmed as 26 and 18 November 2007.

Resolved

That, the proposed approach to budget scrutiny suggested by the scrutiny working group be agreed.

The meeting terminated at 8.20 pm.

Chair:

Date: