

Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 30 January 2007

Present: Councillor Geoffrey Russell (Chair) and Councillors Peter Baker, Henry Caunce, David Dickinson, Doreen Dickinson, Catherine Hoyle, Hasina Khan, Keith Iddon, Margaret Lees, Thomas McGowan, Miss June Molyneaux, Edward Smith, Mrs Joyce Snape and Mrs Stella Walsh

07.CCS.01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Andrew Birchall, Alan Cain and Magda Cullens.

07.CCS.02 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest by Members relating to the items on the agenda.

07.CCS.03 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 28 November 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

07.CCS.04 BUDGET SCRUTINY FOR 2007/2008

Members received the report of the Director of Finance entitled "Budget Scrutiny for 2007/2008". The Chair explained that the objective of the item was to consider the aspects relating to Corporate and Customer starting at paragraph 27 of the report and to formulate any questions on the report to the Executive Cabinet. The report also contained information for consideration by the Environment and Community Panel.

The Director of Finance highlighted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had determined that the budget scrutiny exercise should concentrate on Value For Money (VFM) and the provision of quality services.

The Panel examined Table 7 that updated the information considered by the Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel last year on Revenues and Benefits compared with the Council's family group (similar Council's in terms of demographics and population). This area had been considered high cost although on further analysis showed that the way costs were recorded included recharges for other services, such as ICT and Human Resources affected the overall costs significantly. It was noted that benchmarking information on the basic cost of the services was not available for comparison from other Local Authorities, although it was hoped that comparative information of this nature would be available in the future.

The Panel considered Table 8 showing the relative performance indicators within the 2004 and 2005 VFM profiles, relative to our nearest neighbours. It was noted that performance had, in the main improved.

Table 9, set out the budget savings and efficiency proposals and the Panel considered the impact of these on service delivery and the Council's ability to deliver the

Corporate Plan. It was noted that some efficiencies arose due to the Housing Stock Transfer and the closure of the Gillibrand Street offices.

There would be a restructure in local tax and benefits. Officers explained that the Contact Centre had reduced the volumes of work in the back office, that a new procedure for Council Tax recovery could produce efficiencies and supervision would be reduced to an industry average.

It was noted that the Finance Unit would be restructured, creating a central team to concentrate on efficiency. Previously the focus had been eGovernment.

Members queried the reduction of Helpdesk support. Officers outlined a new, self-service approach with a more technical Helpdesk. The Housing Stock Transfer and current Thin Client testing and implementation enabled this reallocation of resources. A further discussion on replacement technology for Members would be subject of further discussion.

Questions to the Executive Cabinet:

What will be the impact of the disestablishment of one of the Executive Director posts, in particular, relating to the important work on Equality and Diversity?

How will the reduction of ICT Helpdesk support affect Members? How and what will be different?

A number of the proposals include outsourcing functions (Health and Safety and Property). How will these arrangements work and what will be the impact on the day-to-day operation of services?

Satisfaction with some services appears low. Is this being measured regularly and if not, how can we monitor this and take appropriate action?

What can be done to collect information on the costs of the Central and Democratic Core and Revenues administration to enable comparison in the future?

How will the impact on Members of the removal of the Yearbook and Diary be mitigated?

07.CCS.05 CONTACT CENTRE EFFICIENCIES AND PARTNERSHIP WITH LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL INQUIRY

The Chair invited the Chair of the Partnership Sub-Group, Councillor Peter Baker, to update the Panel. He advised that the Group had visited the Red Rose Hub at Lancashire County Council, received feedback from representatives from Pendle and Ribbles Valley Borough Councils and received feedback from Councillors Dennis Edgerley and John Walker. The Group would formulate their recommendations at the next meeting and report back to the Panel.

The Chair invited the Chair of the Efficiency Sub-Group, Councillor Stella Walsh, to update the Panel. She explained that information had been requested from Partner districts in the County, with a limited response. There was a lot of complex information considered and being collated. The findings and recommendations of the Group would be reported to the Panel.

The Chair thanked everyone involved for their contributions to the ongoing Inquiry, in particular the two Chairs.

07.CCS.06 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel received and noted the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2006/2007 and in particular the items relating to the Panel.

07.CCS.07 ANY OTHER ITEM(S) THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES IS/ARE URGENT

It was noted that some Members had not received their “to follow” papers that had been distributed at the Council meeting. It was AGREED that if papers were distributed at the Council meeting that the Mayor be requested to highlight this to Members.

Members highlighted the issue of receiving large colour documents electronically and having to print them at home. Officers undertook to come back to Members with a more efficient solution.

Chair