



MEETING OF THE RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2005 2.00 PM

PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Conboy
Councillor Mrs Dexter
Councillor Fines
Councillor Kirkman (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Lovelock M.B.E. (Chairman)
Councillor Moore
Councillor G Taylor
Councillor Wilks

OFFICERS

Scrutiny Officer
Director of Finance and Strategic Resources
Corporate Manager Human Resources &
Organisational Development
Scrutiny Support Officer

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Bryant
Councillor Mrs Cartwright
Councillor Hewerdine
Councillor Joynson
Councillor M Taylor

21. MEMBERSHIP

It was noted that Councillor O'Hare had, with immediate effect, resigned from all committees and panels of the Council.

22. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Craft, as a member of the Budget Working Group.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

24. ACTION NOTES

Noted.

25. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

Nothing to report.

26. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2006/07 ONWARDS

The Resources DSP welcomed Councillors Bryant, Joynson and Mike Taylor from the Budget Working Group for this item.

Working Group Notes

The notes of the two working group meetings held on 15th August 2005 and 12th September 2005 had been circulated with the agenda. The group was concerned that there had not been feedback on the conclusions from the meetings. They acknowledged that the group was only advisory but members considered communication important and therefore requested that this be improved. The Corporate Director of Finance and Strategic Resources and the Portfolio Holder informed the Committee on progress with each conclusion from the working group.

The group proceeded to discuss progress with submission of senior managers' service plans. Members wanted assurance that the new deadline of 14th October 2005 would be met. The Portfolio Holder was confident that this was achievable and discussed briefly with the group methods of monitoring progress.

Conclusion:

Feedback on conclusions be circulated with meeting agendas where possible.

Value for Money Trend Analysis

An updated copy of the Chief Executive's Cabinet Briefing Paper on this issue had been circulated previously. A few minor alterations were suggested and these were noted. Clarification was sought on paragraph 4.9 concerning the council's low level of expenditure not correlating with its score on the deprivation index. The Corporate Director explained that this could indicate that there was insufficient investment in reducing deprivation. Members were encouraged, however, by paragraph 4.6, which evidenced that success could be achieved without excess expenditure. Members focussed on the waste collection and recycling comparison analysis with other similar authorities. The performance rating was not high, especially as the cost per head was above mid-point. Members were sure, however, that the service delivered at the current cost given the rurality of the district was good. It was noted that members received good feedback from residents on the waste management service. The limitations of comparisons with other authorities were discussed, as expenditure was not a measure of effectiveness, but it was noted that comparison analysis could be used as a good starting point for service improvement.

The Value for Money assessment would take place shortly with initial draft feedback expected in December and a formal submission included in the Auditor's management letter in March 2006. Members were concerned that

customer satisfaction, which was paramount to service delivery, was not considered in the assessment. Low council tax, prioritisation and capping were discussed in the context of the assessment.

Budget Preparation

In addition to the previous discussion on service plans, the Portfolio Holder reminded members that his intention was still to delegate scrutiny of service plans to all members to be submitted to the DSP for final recommendation to the Portfolio Holder. It was noted that DSP meetings may be split up to undertake this work.

Conclusion:

The DSP to scrutinise service plans at future meetings.

Lincolnshire's Missing Millions Campaign

The Corporate Director of Finance and Strategic Resources had circulated a briefing paper on the ODPM consultation paper for Lincolnshire Local Authorities. This had been commissioned from Rita Hale & Associates for Lincolnshire as part of the Missing Millions Campaign. This was being considered by a meeting of the Lincolnshire Finance Officers Group and a member meeting the following week. Relevant to South Kesteven were the Environmental sections of the paper. It had been suggested that there should be a separate section of the Revenue Support Grant for waste management and Corporate Director stated his support for this. He explained, however, that the Missing Millions campaign was a joint effort of district councils, the county council and the Lincolnshire Police Authority to pursue the benefits for Lincolnshire; separate campaigns may jeopardise an overall benefit for residents throughout Lincolnshire.

A few specific sections of the briefing paper and issues including macro-economic and council tax revaluation were discussed. Members were very pleased with the work of Rita Hale & Associates.

Conclusion:

To support the joint approach undertaken by the Lincolnshire's Missing Millions Campaign.

Internal Audit Final Report 2004/2005

One member noted that the DSP had recommended to Cabinet at its last meeting to investigate the number of outstanding recommendations documented in the previous internal auditor's final report for 2004/2005. The Chairman agreed to speak with the Leader on this matter. The Corporate Director added that the current internal auditors would be meeting with this DSP later in the year and that this may be an appropriate issue to raise with them.

27. DRAFT SCRUTINY HANDBOOK

This had been circulated with the agenda. It was suggested that subtitles should be larger for the section on Balancing Inquiry and Advocacy to reflect the meaning of the subsections. The section on Types of Questioning was commended and it was thought that questionnaires produced by the Council should embrace a questioning approach without leading, closed or double-headed questions.

Conclusion:

To recommend acceptance of the Draft Scrutiny Handbook subject to the change in subtitle size for pages twenty-two to twenty-five.

28. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Updated figures had been circulated with the agenda. There were indicators identified as below target. The Corporate Manager of Human Resources and Organisational Development was present to explain the indicator concerning the number of leavers from the organisation. He first clarified that the number was cumulative and therefore only two members of staff had left in August. This was below the target suggested by CPA. The Corporate Manager explained the theory behind monitoring staff turnover within tight and loose labour markets. The market was presently tight and therefore low turnover was not detrimental to the organisation. These comments received a mixed reaction.

It was suggested that quality of staff, not quantity, was important and therefore a judgement could not be made on the performance indicator as submitted.

The Revenues Manager was present to speak on the indicator for the collection of Non-Domestic Rates, which was also below target. He explained that the August result was only 1.55% down on the target and that this was an improvement from the previous month. He also explained that as payments could be large, it may only take a few large accounts to fall behind and the collection rates would sway significantly. He then gave specific reasons for the performance. The revaluation and a system error had created a backlog of work. The officer explained the proactive approach undertaken for collection and he was confident that the target would be met by the end of the financial year.

Members were concerned that the system error had not been noticed earlier. It was stated in response that this had only caused a delay in collection, not a failure of collection. Revaluation appeals was an issue raised by members and the officer stated that it could take a number of years for these to resolve. There were a number of other issues raised and the Revenues Manager agreed to submit a report on Non-Domestic Rate collection at the next DSP meeting.

Conclusions:

(1) To request that the performance indicator for staff turnover be no

longer submitted as a target but an indicator of percentage turnover compared with the national average.

- (2) To request the Revenues Manager submits a report on Non-Domestic Rate Collection to the next meeting of the DSP.**

29. WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer presented the work programme. Items to be added were Non-Domestic Rates and a six-monthly visit from Pricewaterhousecoopers. He added that the DSP should expect regular reports on Stock Option Appraisal and that this was being raised at the forthcoming Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group. The Portfolio Holder commented that Grants to Outside Organisations was currently being considered by the Council's Legal Services, because it may require a dispensation from the Standards Committee for those members on outside bodies.

30. NEW COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

The Panel considered report CEX299, presented on behalf of the Chief Executive by the Corporate Director of Finance and Strategic Resources. The options for the next Comprehensive Performance Assessment for district councils were set out in the appended consultation document from the Audit Commission.

Members were concerned that Group A options, which included re-categorisation of all Councils, would be costly and impact on the tax-payer unnecessarily. Group B options, however, would not necessarily provide an inspection as fair and equitable for this authority as those under Group A. There was no consensus on the consultation document and it was agreed that more time was required for its consideration.

Conclusion:

- (1) Given the financial implications of the Audit Commission's proposals, the Budget Working Group be delegated authority from the DSP to make recommendations direct to Cabinet on the framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment for District Councils.**
- (2) The Budget Working Group meet on Wednesday 26th October, 2pm to consider report CEX299 by the Chief Executive.**
- (3) The Chief Executive be required to attend the meeting.**

31. REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

The Chairman spoke on his attendance at the Lincolnshire Local Government Association, which had put a lot of work into the Lincolnshire's Missing Millions Campaign. There was an article in the County News magazine, which may have been of interest to members. The Association had also considered a paper by the County Council of Supporting People. A representative from the Council for this was an item on the next district council agenda.

Councillor Gerald Taylor spoke about his attendance at the Lincolnshire Council for Protection of Rural England, on behalf of Councillor Bryant. He requested support from the DSP for the Council's grant to this organisation.

Councillor Bryant informed the panel that Kesteven Blind Society had merged with the Boston Society. The panel supported Councillor Bryant's continued membership of the merged society. For information, he also spoke about current progressions with the South Kesteven Citizens' Advice Bureau. A new budget report had been produced and the service improved.

Conclusion:

To request the Chief Executive to submit a report on funding for the South Kesteven Citizens' Advice Bureau at the next meeting.

32. LINCOLNSHIRE "MEALS ON WHEELS" SERVICE

One member requested the DSP to consider whether or not it take any action to help re-instatement of the meals on wheels service within the district. Members sympathised with the situation and this was discussed. It was concluded that the issue would be better considered via submission of a motion at the next full Council meeting.

33. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 4.35p.m.