



MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 11 JANUARY 2007 2.30 PM

PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Robert Conboy
Councillor Mrs Joyce Gaffigan
Councillor Mano Nadarajah (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Norman Radley

Councillor Robert Murray Shorrock
Councillor Michael Taylor (Chairman)
Councillor Thomas John Webster
Councillor Avril Williams

OFFICERS

Strategic Director
Service Manager, Business Transformation & Information Management (notes 139, 140 & 141)
Service Manager, Democracy
Service Manager, HR & Diversity (note 139)
Acting Service Manager, Customer Services (notes 139 and 140)
Service Manager, Finance & Risk
Management
Scrutiny Officer

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Bryant (Assets & Resources Portfolio Holder)
Councillor Mrs Cartwright (Housing & Organisational Portfolio Holder)

136. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

137. ACTION NOTES

The notes of the meeting held on 17th November 2006 were noted.

138. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The Portfolio Holder for Assets & Resources commended the assistance of the panel in helping to maintain a low level of growth having regard to the Council's position on the 2007/2008 budget.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

It was resolved that in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded because of the likelihood, in view of the nature of the

business to be transacted, that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Act.

139. GATEWAY REVIEW 3: HUMAN RESOURCES & CORPORATE EMPLOYEE SERVICES

The Service Manager, Human Resources introduced her presentation by emphasising that the service plan was not seen as a static document. Since the Gateway 2 stage, there had been a significant change to the plan to reflect the council tenants' "no vote" to stock transfer. This had removed an area of work from the service plan. However, the council's various statutory duties remained and, given the level of resources within the section, it would be necessary to alter the approach to delivering those obligations by streamlining the work within the section.

The Service Manager explained that anomalies identified during the Gateway 2 stage had been addressed and figures within the plan updated accordingly. Going through the Gateway 3 checklist, the Service Manager drew attention to the improved position regarding sickness absences and that the current figure of 7.18 days absence averaged out per employee was a favourable comparator against benchmark figures. However, she warned that these figures would not generate Gershon savings in the future.

In relation to check list point 10 (whether support services had been challenged with service areas in order to evidence value for money), the Service Manager for Finance & Risk Management stated that managers will be tasked to challenge these figures in terms of the service they received. These charges would be made on a monthly basis instead of yearly in order to add transparency to the process. It was too early for some managers to evidence this ahead of the complete introduction of time recording for their service areas and this was the case with the HR service at present.

During discussion, several points of concern were raised: a member referred to the risk posed by workloads exceeding capacity. He expressed strong concern that the potential impact could be very high on employees' health and stress levels which could, in turn, impact on sickness absences. The service manager was asked what steps were being taken to manage this risk and monitor it. The Service Manager explained that individual's workloads were managed through supervision to ensure the section was delivering what it needed to. Through structured prioritisation, workloads were being streamlined. The section would always need to respond to critical areas of work, such as disciplinary cases. Efficiency measures were being explored and cited, by way of example, the introduction of an on-line recruitment system.

In response to a point raised about the outcome of the recent restructure creating an extension of certain services, the Strategic Director acknowledged that any change required the monitoring of outcomes. Service Managers needed to be clear on where their focus should be. It necessitated looking across the whole council to ensure we have the capacity to deliver, knowing

what to deliver, and increasing the skills of managers and their teams accordingly.

A question was also raised on the budget provision in relation to the unions. The Service Manager explained what this cost covered, and in response to concerns expressed about the rising cost, she agreed to keep this under review.

Conclusion:

Having reviewed the 2007/08 amended service plan for Human Resources and Corporate Employee Services against the Gateway 3 checklist, the Engagement DSP found that:

1. All comments from Gateway 2 had been taken into account and outstanding issues resolved.
2. All budgetary information had been completed.
3. All performance development reviews had been undertaken with staff and any cost implications arising from these had been incorporated into the service plan.
4. The service plan now identified Value for Money (balanced scorecard) and benchmarking information.
5. Gershon efficiency savings in relation to improved sickness absence figures had been reflected in the budget.
6. The service plan had not been amended to take into consideration the proposed changes to the 2007/08 budget but that the service manager would be addressing this.
7. Review of fees and charges was not relevant to this service area.
8. Small areas for incremental savings had been identified and incorporated into the service plan.
9. There were no major procurement proposals for inclusion in the service plan.
10. Challenging support service charges in order to evidence value for money had not yet taken place.

140. GATEWAY REVIEW 3: CUSTOMER SERVICES

The Acting Service Manager, Customer Services informed the panel on what action had been taken on outstanding issues arising from the Gateway 2 process and that the budgetary information updated accordingly. The Gershon savings originally identified had been taken out of the service plan but once all service areas were channelled through the Customer Record Management system, efficiency savings would then accrue.

During its deliberations, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman referred to very positive comments they had been made aware of from the public about the new customer service centre. A question was raised on the back scanning of documents and the use of in-house training. It was suggested that out sourcing training provision could sometimes be more cost effective.

Conclusion:

Having reviewed the 2007/08 amended service plan for Customer Services against the Gateway 3 checklist, the Engagement DSP found that:

- 1. All comments from Gateway 2 had been taken into account and outstanding issues resolved following consultation with the CSC staff.**
- 2. All budgetary information had been completed.**
- 3. The majority of performance development reviews had been undertaken with staff, with outstanding pdr's now scheduled and any cost implications arising from these had been incorporated into the service plan.**
- 4. The service plan now identified Value for Money (balanced scorecard) and benchmarking information.**
- 5. Gershon efficiency savings had been taken out of the service plan to be reflected once all service areas were channelled through the customer records management system.**
- 6. The service plan had been amended to take into consideration the proposed changes to the 2007/08 budget.**
- 7. Review of fees and charges would be reflected in other service area service plans.**
- 8. There were no potential savings identified and incorporated into the service plan for 2007/08.**
- 9. There were no major procurement proposals for inclusion in the service plan.**
- 10. Challenging support service charges in order to evidence value for money had not yet taken place.**

141. GATEWAY REVIEW 3: BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION & INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

The Service Manager, Business Transformation & Information Management gave a presentation during which he referred to the outstanding issues from Gateway 2 and what steps had been taken to address them. Budgetary information had been consequently updated to reflect the changes to the service plan resulting in a £50,000 reduction. The Service Manager, acknowledged that more benchmarking was required for his service area in order to evidence value for money. Non cashable savings had been identified, and potential cashable savings could accrue from moving to longer term contracts.

He was also investigating the potential of income generation by providing services for other local authorities. In common with the other service areas, the support service charges had yet to be challenged.

A question was raised on the staffing figures in section 6 of the service plan: the Service Manager explained that the figures reflected the merger of the former IT service and the modernisation team and agreed to make this change

clearer in the plan.

Conclusion:

Having reviewed the 2007/08 amended service plan for Business Transformation & Information Management against the Gateway 3 checklist, the Engagement DSP found that:

- 1. All comments from Gateway 2 had been taken into account and outstanding issues resolved.**
- 2. All budgetary information had been completed.**
- 3. All performance development reviews (pdr) had been undertaken with staff and incorporated into the service plan.**
- 4. Further work was still required on identifying Value for Money (balanced scorecard) and benchmarking information.**
- 5. Gershon efficiency savings had been identified in non cashable form and further work was ongoing with regard to cashable savings.**
- 6. The service plan had been amended to take into consideration the proposed changes to the 2007/08 budget.**
- 7. Potential for income generation by implementing fees and charges for service provision to other authorities was under investigation.**
- 8. Potential savings had been identified and incorporated into the service plan for 2007/08.**
- 9. There were no major procurement proposals for inclusion in the service plan.**
- 10. Challenging support service charges in order to evidence value for money had not yet taken place.**

SHORT ADJOURNMENT

A short adjournment took place, whilst clarification was sought on the status of the Democracy Service Plan as it had not been circulated with the agenda for this meeting.

Pending the information, the Chairman decided to bring forward the next agenda item.

142. FEEDBACK FROM THE DEMOCRATIC REVIEW WORKING GROUP

Having been asked by the Engagement DSP for further comments on each of its recommendation, the Democratic Review Working Group had met on 15th December 2006 to consider the responses from the DSP. The views of the working group had been set out in tabular form alongside each original recommendation (numbered 1 to 21) and the DSP response. A copy of this document was circulated with the agenda and is also appended to these notes for reference purposes.

Councillor Shorrock presented he views of the working group who had concentrated on those recommendations not supported by the DSP:-

Recommendation 3: It was felt that consideration should be given to parish council involvement as a matter of course, for example including parish Councillor nominees on district council working groups.

Recommendation 4. A set of criteria for a citizens engagement fund would enable this to operate on a consistent basis.

Recommendation 5. The working group urged the council to participate in national initiatives to promote democracy; Councillor Shorrock advised that there were often funded programmes available that the council could access. He cited recent promotional activities undertaken by North Kesteven District Council to engage young people in the democratic process. Whilst acknowledging that external funds could be available, the Panel expressed some concern that running these activities would inevitable impact on officer time and that aspect did represented a “cost”.

[Action point: The Scrutiny Officer was asked to make enquiries with colleagues at North Kesteven District Council to ascertain the amount of officer time involved on their recent youth engagement event.]

The Strategic Director advised the panel that a new youth co-ordinator post had been created (pending recruitment) whose remit would include involvement with young people and outreach work in the community. It was suggested that this post holder come support these kind of initiatives and link into the working group's recommendations 6 and 7.

Recommendation 9. Whilst acknowledging the concerns of the DSP, the working group strongly supported members' direct involvement in the democratic and political engagement part of the school curriculum. The training aspect would require resources and an associated cost if this was out sourced, however, Councillor Shorrock advised that external resources were available.

Recommendation 11. Councillor Shorrock informed the panel that schools preferred to make the involvement in citizenship education “real” for their students and this could be addressed by the provision of internships at the council. This would have resourced implications in terms of support time. The panel was asked to look at this recommendation more broadly, suggesting that the council would work with the Council for Voluntary Service to progress this.

Recommendation 12. The working group urged the panel to support the provision of funds for an annual school representative assembly, although it would need to be included within the next budget round. The Strategic Director suggested that this type of activity could potentially be supported by sponsorship from businesses and other organisations.

Recommendation 13. The working group asked that the provision of a citizen

pack be reconsidered, particularly as the law had changed to permit a person to stand as a candidate from the age of 18. The Service Manager, Democracy briefly advised the panel of the new legislative changes which came into force from 1st January 2007. This Act placed greater statutory obligations upon the Electoral Registration Officer to be more proactive in ensuring the electoral register was complete and encouraging greater democratic participation.

Recommendation 14. This recommendation had stemmed from the analysis of evidence that turn out for elections was greater in rural areas than in urban wards, particularly where there was a strong sense of community. Where people were more involved in community activities, this provided a platform for decision-making and greater engagement in the democratic process. The working group had suggested the exploration of funding to support a particular area or ward.

Recommendation 15. The working group asked the panel to support an invitation being extended to the South Lincolnshire CVS to attend a meeting of the DSP to give a presentation.

Recommendation 16. Regarding pre-election awareness campaigns, the working group's point was that it was about making information available in a more accessible way and to build on the good practice that already existed. Some concern was expressed by members of the panel that the onus was on political groups to find candidates to stand for election. It was not the remit of officers of the council.

Recommendations 17 to 21. In response to the panel's rejection of these recommendations, the working group asked for consideration to be given to a presentation by Rutland On Line and another local authority.

Conclusion:

Having considered the feedback from the Democratic Review Working Group, the DSP agreed to:

- **Recommendation 3 – to note and accept**
- **Recommendation 4 – acceptance in principle stands**
- **Recommendations 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 – support these recommendations being pursued subject to investigation of training costs and involvement of new Youth Co-ordinator**
- **Recommendation 11 – support in principle and approach being made to the CVS**
- **Recommendation 12 – support principle for reconsideration at next budget round**
- **Recommendation 13 – note new statutory requirements on Electoral Registration Officer.**
- **Recommendation 14 – support in principle if external funding could be accessed**
- **Recommendation 15 – support presentation to the DSP by the South Lincolnshire CVS in the next municipal year**

- **Recommendation 16 – to not support this activity being undertaken by council staff**
- **Recommendations 17 to 21 – support an invitation to RoL and another authority (such as Preston) to make a presentation to the panel in the next municipal year.**

143. GATEWAY REVIEW 3: DEMOCRACY

The service plan for Democracy Services was circulated at the meeting. Members were advised that there had been no substantial change in the plan since Gateway 2 other than the deletion of the bid for half a post to add to an exiting half post vacancy to create a full time trainee post for committee support.

The Service Manager, Democracy reminded the panel that the main issue of concern raised at Gateway 2 was the low level of staffing of the section as evidenced by benchmarking figures and the consequent risk this posed if numbers fell below the existing establishment. Since Gateway 2, the post of scrutiny support officer had become vacant and this was currently impacting on the capacity of the section pending recruitment of a replacement. The service manager also referred to the increased workload on the section during the run up to the district and parish elections in May 2007. This would involve committee support staff as well.

The bid for a temporary electoral services assistant (6 months) to cover the additional workload generated by the new Electoral Registration Act that came into force on 1st January together with the election preparations had been allowed to remain in the budget and the process of recruitment for this post would begin as soon as possible.

The panel sought clarification from the service manager on the number of full time equivalent staff in the section. Some concern was expressed over the existing capacity of the service having regard to the impact of the current vacant post and the new statutory requirements imposed by the new electoral registration law. The panel agreed that the number of posts in the section should at least be maintained and that favourable consideration be given to allowing the additional half post to create a full time trainee committee support officer.

Conclusion:

Having reviewed the 2007/08 amended service plan for Democracy Services against the Gateway 3 checklist, the Engagement DSP found that:

1. **All comments from Gateway 2 had been taken into account and outstanding issues resolved.**
2. **All budgetary information had been completed.**
3. **All performance development reviews has been undertaken with staff and any cost implications arising from these had been**

incorporated into the service plan.

4. The service plan identified Value for Money (balanced scorecard) and benchmarking information.
5. Gershon efficiency savings had been reflected in the budget. Non cashable savings had been identified by the same number of staff covering an increased number of meetings.
6. The service plan had been amended to take into consideration the proposed changes to the 2007/08 budget.
7. Review of fees and charges was not relevant to this service area.
8. Potential savings in relation to reduction in printed agendas had been identified and incorporated into the service plan.
9. There were no major procurement proposals for inclusion in the service plan.
10. Challenging support service charges in order to evidence value for money had not yet taken place.

144. REPORTS FROM ACCESS & MODERNISATION WORKING GROUP

The DSP received and noted the notes from the meeting of the Access & Modernisation working group held on 21st December 2006. The notes contained a recommendation to refer a matter to the Access & Engagement Portfolio Holder.

Conclusion:

To support the request that the Access & Engagement Portfolio Holder be asked to ensure there is better co-ordination between the Street Scene Service and the Customer Services Centre.

145. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Scrutiny Officer presented the best value performance indicators. The panel noted with concern that BVPI SK22 (% of application for service transactions that are dealt with by the CSC) was still "red" despite assurances at the last meeting by the service manager that this would be addressed.

Conclusion:

That the Service Manager, Business Transformation & Information Management be asked to review BVPI SK22 as to whether or not this was a realistic target.

146. WORK PROGRAMME

The panel noted the updated work programme. The Scrutiny Officer advised that the draft Forward Plan to be published on 16th January 2007 provided for a number of changes and revised dates. The Strategic Director gave reasons for some of the revised decision dates.

147. FINANCIAL REPORTS

The Service Manager, Finance & Risk Management circulated the budget information for the service areas under the DSP for the remainder of the year. He pointed out that budget profiling was not in place for 2006/07. The DSP was advised that the figures for travel had been updated but there was still a significant under spend which would be put back into the working balances.

The DSP noted the report and commended the clear presentation of the information.

148. REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There was nothing to report under this item.

149. URGENT BUSINESS: LINCOLNSHIRE PCT CONSULTATION ON SHARING ACUTE SERVICES

The Chairman agreed to take this as an urgent item having regard to the receipt of a consultation paper from the Lincolnshire PCT and the timeframe within which responses were invited.

The Strategic Director circulated details of a consultation exercise by Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust in which stakeholders' views were sought on any issues in relation to the provision of acute hospital services for this locality.

Whilst this subject did come within the remit of the Healthy Environment DSP, she considered it appropriate that this DSP also had an opportunity to comment if it so wished. Any views by the DSPs would be fed back to the Cabinet to prepare a corporate response.

Conclusion:

To refer the consultation paper to the Healthy Environment DSP for comment but that the Engagement DSP be apprised of the outcome.