



MEETING OF THE RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2006
9.30 AM

PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Brailsford
Councillor Joynson
Councillor Kerr
Councillor Kirkman (Chairman)

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

OFFICERS

Scrutiny Officer
Corporate Head of Finance & Resources
Service Manager, Assets and Facilities (note 78)
Interim Revenues and Benefits Service Manager
(note 77)
Service Manager, Finance & Risk Management
Service Manager, Performance Management &
Engagement (note 79)
Service Manager, Legal Services (note 80)
Facilities Officer (note 78)
Senior Quantity Surveyor (note 78)
CCTV Manager (note 78)
Premises Surveyor (note 78)
Scrutiny Support Officer

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Bryant – portfolio holder

DECISION:

That in accordance with section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining items of business because of the likelihood that otherwise exempt information, as described in paragraphs 1-4 of schedule 12A of the act, would be disclosed to the public.

74. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Conboy and Mrs Dexter. Councillor Joynson had also sent apologies in advance of the meeting for arriving late.

75. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

76. GATEWAY REVIEW 2: FINANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT

The Service Manager for Finance and Risk Management gave a presentation on each section of his draft service plan for 2007/08:

Section 1 – Setting the Scene: the remit of the service was now considerably broader, incorporating accountancy, risk management, internal and external audit, and exchequer services. The service was now a category A priority.

Section 2 – Where are we now?: internal and external customer consultation and proposed changes were outlined, as were key achievements and outcomes such as the closure of the 2005/06 accounts and initial results from benchmarking. The Use of Resources assessment action plan was being drafted and would be available for scrutiny. Members questioned why the service plan indicated that no market testing had been carried out in relation to outside providers.

Section 3 – Where do we need to be?: the ‘SWOT’ and ‘PESTLE’ analysis had been completed. It had been a turbulent year with loss of key staff in accountancy. Recruitment was ongoing but proving challenging due to a variety of factors, especially for a housing accountant as there was a national shortage. This was discussed the panel.

Section 4 – How do we get there?: an ambitious action plan had been presented with several objectives. The panel scrutinised the objectives relating to the Cedar system and the publication of customer-focussed publications.

Section 5 – Gershon & Efficiency: 2005/06 targets had been met and for 2006/07 the section was currently on target. Future efficiencies were identified in the plan. The danger of double accounting was addressed and the officer advised the panel that for its final gateway review it should oversee all plans to ensure that savings were correctly allocated.

Section 6 – Financial Summary: some growth had been identified for employees but this was mainly due to an amalgamation of services. New resource needs had been identified for risk, exchequer, accountancy and concessionary travel. A capital purchase would be required for a budget monitoring finance module for April 2007.

Section 7 – Risk: four areas of risk had been identified for the service: further loss of staff was a real threat; full details of the new concessionary travel scheme were not yet known; there was potential for a lack of corporate buy-in of the Cedar system; and corporate step changes would be required for implementation of a Use of Resources action plan. The panel particularly focussed on the staffing issue, as current salaries may not retain staff, and asked that its concern about current low performance in completing staff

performance development reviews (PDRs). A member asked if sufficient training had been provided on PDRs and it was agreed that this be reported at a future meeting.

Conclusions:

Having reviewed the 2007/08 service plan for Finance and Risk Management against the Gateway Review 2 checklist, the Resources DSP found that:

- 1. All budget figures for the current year and future years had been identified in the service plan.**
- 2. All staffing resources had been identified and costed in the service plan.**
- 3. All other relevant costs had been identified and included in the service plan.**
- 4. There was clear quantification of how the service contributed towards the council priorities.**
- 5. Any relevant inflationary increases had been absorbed.**
- 6. The balanced score card was complete and evidenced.**
- 7. Any relevant income streams had been reviewed and inflationary increases applied.**
- 8. Gershon efficiency savings had been identified and evidenced.**
- 9. Risks had been identified and actions for mitigation applied.**
- 10. Any major deviations to the current budget had been identified.**
- 11. Work on equality costs in relation to concessionary travel was continuing.**
- 12. Section 4 of the service plan had been adequately completed and resources costs identified.**
- 13. The SWOT analysis had been completed.**
- 14. The PESTLE analysis had been completed.**
- 15. The financial summary had been completed.**
- 16. The major procurement proposal for the next three years had been identified and costed.**
- 17. Service staff had been consulted on compilation of the service plan.**
- 18. There were no capital projects identified for the next 3-5 years.**

Other observations made were:

The awaited Internal Customer Satisfaction Survey results to be reported at gateway review 3.

The Resources DSP at its meeting on 18th January 2007 to scrutinise the effect of the council's salary levels and benefits on recruitment. The Chief Executive to be invited to this meeting for this item and to be asked to report on the reduction of risk using outside providers of financial services.

The Resources DSP to express its concern to the Service Manager for Human Resources about the low rates of completed staff PDRs. Training

provision on the completion of PDRs to be reported to a future meeting.

77. GATEWAY REVIEW 2: REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICES

The interim Revenues and Benefits Service Manager gave a presentation on each section of her draft service plan for 2007/08:

Section 1 – Setting the Scene: following gateway review 1, this section had been updated for all services and key partners had been expended to include internal stakeholders. The panel focussed on the element of the fraud & enforcement service relating to publishing results of benefit fraud detection. This would be achieved with press releases. One member commented that Sleaford press seldom published articles relating to the district, even though this would often be relevant. The portfolio holder offered to look into this.

Section 2 – Where are we now?: updates in this section were outlined and discussed by the panel. A seminar was being attended by officers in December on the pending legislation. Following questions at the last gateway review, the officer explained that information on ethnicity was not recorded and therefore it was not easy to monitor applications from migrant workers. Work on this, however, was being carried out county-wide. Service comparisons were discussed, although the panel found that the performance graphs lacked clarity.

Section 3 – Where do we need to be?: the SWOT analysis was complete and the service aimed to achieve “excellence” by the end of 2008/09. The service weaknesses and threats, and how the service intended to address these, were scrutinised by the panel.

Section 4 – How do we get there?: the action plan set out objectives relating to access/modernisation, the Welfare Reform Bill and the annual Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The officer clarified various related matters for the panel.

Section 5 – Gershon & Efficiency: the proposed savings, and the previously declared savings deleted or amended from the current year’s schedule, were identified and explained. The issue of double accounting was also raised here and members were reminded to ensure that this did not occur.

Section 6 – Financial Summary: an updated summary was circulated, although the officer explained that further work to finalise the revenue estimated was required. No capital spend was envisaged for the service.

Section 7 – Risk: several risk factors were identified relating to the Lyons review, the pending legislation and training resources.

Conclusions:

Having reviewed the 2007/08 service plan for Benefits and Revenues Services against the Gateway Review 2 checklist, the Resources DSP found that:

1. All budget figures for the current year and future years had been identified in the service plan.
2. All staffing resources had been identified and costed in the service plan.
3. All other relevant costs had been identified and included in the service plan.
4. There was clear quantification of how the service contributed towards the council priorities.
5. Any relevant inflationary increases had been absorbed.
6. The balanced score card was complete and evidenced.
7. Any relevant income streams had been reviewed and inflationary increases applied, although there may be an increase in NNDR collection due to economic growth, although this income was passed on to central government.
8. Gershon efficiency savings had been identified and evidenced.
9. Risks had been identified and actions for mitigation applied.
10. Any major deviations to the current budget had been identified.
11. No issues requiring equality costs had been identified.
12. Section 4 of the service plan had been adequately completed and resources costs identified.
13. The SWOT analysis had been completed.
14. The PESTLE analysis had been completed.
15. The financial summary had been completed, but further refining was required for the revenues estimates.
16. The major procurement proposal for the next three years had been identified and costed.
17. Service staff had been consulted on compilation of the service plan.
18. There were no capital projects identified for the next 3-5 years.

Other observations made were:

The portfolio holder be tasked with looking into the forwarding of press releases to media in Sleaford.

The portfolio holder be asked to report on why there had been no progress made with partnership working.

The Resources DSP to receive an update on awaited legislation at its meeting on 18th January 2007.

78. GATEWAY REVIEW 2: ASSET & FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

The Service Manager for Asset & Facilities Management gave a presentation with his colleagues on each section of the draft service plan for 2007/08:

Section 1 – Setting the Scene: the service provided multi-discipline professional advice, a wide range of services and predominantly contributed to the council's priorities on Use of Resources and Asset Management.

Section 2 – Where are we now?: the officers explained how customers were regularly consulted and how the service met its objectives. The key achievements and outcomes were identified and scrutinised by the panel. Benchmarking results were still awaited.

Section 3 – Where do we need to be?: four key themes had been identified with proposed actions: customer focus; communications; performance management; and joined up service provision. In relation to customer focus, the proposed actions were scrutinised and the panel found that there were risks in the lack of a corporate database for stakeholder consultation and one for council-owned property. The completed SWOT and PESTLE analyses were scrutinised and matters clarified by officers.

Section 4 – How do we get there?: several objectives were outlined in the action plan. The resources identified for training were questioned and the need to observe the difference in service and corporate training costs identified.

Section 5 – Gershon & Efficiency: full calculations and evidence for identified savings were included in the plan.

Section 6 – Financial Summary: the financial summary was appended to the plan and further total budget figures were circulated at the meeting, although these were still being refined.

Section 7 – Risk: areas of risk were identified as being: sickness absence; misuse of buildings; contractors going out of business; and inability to appoint cash collection contractor.

Conclusions:

Having reviewed the 2007/08 service plan for Finance and Risk Management against the Gateway Review 2 checklist, the Resources DSP found that:

- 1. All budget figures for the current year and future years had been identified in the service plan.**
- 2. All staffing resources had been identified and costed in the service plan.**
- 3. All other relevant costs had been identified and included in the service plan.**
- 4. There was clear quantification of how the service contributed towards the council priorities.**
- 5. Any relevant inflationary increases had been absorbed.**
- 6. The balanced score card was complete and evidenced.**
- 7. Any relevant income streams had been reviewed and inflationary increases applied.**
- 8. Gershon efficiency savings had been identified and evidenced.**
- 9. Risks had been identified and actions for mitigation applied.**
- 10. Any major deviations to the current budget had been identified.**
- 11. Equality costs had been identified but these were not in addition to**

the service cost.

- 12. Section 4 of the service plan had been adequately completed and resources costs identified.
- 13. The SWOT analysis had been completed.
- 14. The PESTLE analysis had been completed.
- 15. The financial summary had been completed but budget figures were still being refined.
- 16. Major procurement proposals for the next three years had been identified and costed.
- 17. Service staff had been consulted on compilation of the service plan.
- 18. Capital projects identified for the next 3-5 years.

Other observations made were:

Benchmarking results for the council's car parking policy to be scrutinised by the Resources DSP at its meeting on 18th January 2007.

The Engagement DSP be recommended to review the need for a corporate stakeholder consultation database.

The portfolio holder be recommended that a corporate property database be standardised and made fit-for-purpose.

79. GATEWAY REVIEW 2: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

The Service Manager for Performance Management and Engagement gave a presentation on each section of her draft service plan for 2007/08:

Section 1 – Setting the Scene: the service covered three main areas: performance management, communications & PR and consultation.

Section 2 – Where are we now?: details were given for each area of the service. Because the council lacked a performance management strategy and there was low awareness of performance management, resources for a dedicated officer were included in the plan. In relation to consultation, there was concern that there was not enough cross-section working on consultation and that results of public consultation were not always fed back to participants.

Section 3 – Where do we need to be?: the completed SWOT and PESTLE analyses were explained. Various related matters were raised by the panel and answered by the officer.

Section 4 – How do we get there?: objectives in the action plan were explained and resource estimates circulated. One of the objectives was to achieve improved corporate identification on signage. The panel was concerned that there had been little member consultation on the new corporate identity. It was agreed that the Chief Executive be contacted about this. The panel also considered the object to improve the intranet for staff.

Section 5 – Gershon & Efficiency: figures were circulated at the meeting.

Section 6 – Financial Summary: updated figures were circulated at the meeting.

Section 7 – Risk: identified risks were circulated at the meeting.

Conclusions:

Having reviewed the 2007/08 service plan for Finance and Risk Management against the Gateway Review 2 checklist, the Resources DSP found that:

- 1. All budget figures for the current year and future years had been identified in the service plan.**
- 2. All staffing resources had been identified and costed in the service plan.**
- 3. All other relevant costs had been identified and included in the service plan.**
- 4. There was clear quantification of how the service contributed towards the council priorities.**
- 5. Any relevant inflationary increases had been absorbed.**
- 6. The balanced score card was complete and evidenced.**
- 7. Any relevant income streams had been reviewed and inflationary increases applied.**
- 8. Gershon efficiency savings had been identified and evidenced.**
- 9. Risks had been identified and actions for mitigation applied.**
- 10. Any major deviations to the current budget had been identified.**
- 11. Equality costs were not relevant.**
- 12. Section 4 of the service plan had been adequately completed and resources costs identified.**
- 13. The SWOT analysis had been completed.**
- 14. The PESTLE analysis had been completed.**
- 15. The financial summary had been completed.**
- 16. The major procurement proposal for the next three years had been identified and costed.**
- 17. Service staff had been consulted on compilation of the service plan.**
- 18. There were no capital projects identified for the next 3-5 years.**

Other observations made were:

The Engagement DSP be recommended that it requests the Chief Executive to ensure that all public consultation exercises are coordinated with the Business Management Officer.

The Chief Executive be asked to write to all members of the Resources DSP explaining how the new corporate identity was decided and how much it cost the council, and the intentions for district signage and how members would be consulted on this.

The Access and Modernisation Working Group be asked to consider a

survey for staff on the content of the council's intranet.

80. GATEWAY REVIEW 2: LEGAL SERVICES

The Service Manager for Legal Services presented each section of her draft service plan for 2007/08:

Section 1 – Setting the Scene: this had been updated since the first gateway review and. Upon questioning from the panel, the officer indicated that whilst staffing levels in the service were adequate, current salary levels would not provide a sustainable staffing levels. Information on comparisons with other authorities was now available and this was provided to the meeting.

Section 2 – Where are we now?: customer satisfaction survey results were still awaited and objectives had been achieved, although one judicial review had been undertaken in the current year. Key achievements and outcomes were identified and the officer explained that there was sufficient internal capacity to cover Monitoring Officer duties during investigations.

Section 3 – Where do we need to be?: the completed SWOT and PESTLE analyses were scrutinised.

Section 4 – How do we get there?: because of the nature of the service, the action plan contained one objective and this was discussed.

Section 5 – Gershon & Efficiency: savings were identified in the plan.

Section 6 – Financial Summary: figures were circulated at the meeting and explained.

Section 7 – Risk: several risks were identified, all being recorded as “high”. It was suggested that the likelihood of the risk to professional staff retention and insufficient management training and expertise be re-allocated as “medium”.

Conclusions:

Having reviewed the 2007/08 service plan for Finance and Risk Management against the Gateway Review 2 checklist, the Resources DSP found that:

- 1. All budget figures for the current year and future years had been identified in the service plan.**
- 2. All staffing resources had been identified and costed in the service plan.**
- 3. All other relevant costs had been identified and included in the service plan.**
- 4. There was clear quantification of how the service contributed towards the council priorities.**
- 5. Any relevant inflationary increases had been absorbed.**
- 6. The balanced score card was not yet complete and evidenced.**

7. Any relevant income streams had been reviewed and inflationary increases applied.
8. Gershon efficiency savings had been identified and evidenced.
9. Risks had been identified and actions for mitigation applied.
10. Any major deviations to the current budget had been identified.
11. Equality costs were not relevant to this service.
12. Section 4 of the service plan had been adequately completed and resources costs identified.
13. The SWOT analysis had been completed.
14. The PESTLE analysis had been completed.
15. The financial summary had been completed.
16. There were no major procurement proposals for the next three years.
17. Service staff had been consulted on compilation of the service plan.
18. There were no capital projects identified for the next 3-5 years.

Other observations made were:

For Gateway Review 3, the Corporate Head of Finance and Resources to provide a “what ifs” summary spreadsheet for all items of exceptional variation in all services.

The portfolio holder be recommended that due to the large number of high risks identifies in many cases, preventative measures be taken to ensures that these do not materialise.

81. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 4.15p.m.