

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
PERFORMANCE, AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

**Meeting held at the Council Offices,
Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City, on Thursday 20 July 2006 at 7.30 p.m.**

PRESENT: *Councillors: J. Cunningham (Chairman), D. Miller (Vice-Chairman),
Monica Bloxham, A.F. Hunter, Bernard Lovewell, L. McNamara,
Deepak Sangha, Derek Sheard and Mrs C.P.A. Strong.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Chief Executive, Strategic Director of Customer Services,
Head of Financial Services, Head of Strategy and Support Services,
Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance,
Head of Human Resources, Performance Manager,
Consultation Officer and Member and Committee Services Officer.*

Note: Councillor Bernard Lovewell joined the meeting at 19.50 p.m.

OBSERVERS: *Uttlesford District Council
District Councillor Alan Dean – Chairman Performance Select
Committee.
Tracy Turner - Executive Manager – Strategy and Performance.*

29. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, and particularly the observers from Uttlesford District Council.

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors: Marilyn Kirkland, David Levett, Lawrence Oliver, Diane Proudlove and M.E. Weeks.

31. MINUTES – 22 JUNE 2006

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2006 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

32. SUBSTITUTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Chairman confirmed that there were no substitutions.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP DIRECTIONS

No Declarations of Interest had been made.

No Party Whip directions had been made.

34. PERFORMANCE, AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2005 - 2006

The Chairman offered his profuse apologies as to the non-presentation of the Annual Report 2005 - 2006 for the Performance, Audit and Review Committee. The Chairman advised the Committee that he would present his report to the next meeting of PARC to be held on 7 September 2006.

35. THE NHDC CORPORATE PLAN

The Chief Executive (CE) confirmed that since the meeting of PARC held on 26 April 2006 (Minute 115 (5) refers) the Corporate Plan sub-group had met on 31 May 2006 and 26 June 2006. The sub-group covered many broad themes, and a key issue discussed was the striking of a balance between keeping the Corporate Plan high level and strategic, and the delivery of the vision for North Herts and the NHDC Strategic Objectives. The CE advised that the sub group would continue to discuss these issues.

The CE advised the Committee that another important consideration was a measurement of success (Appendices 1,2 and 3). The Committee noted that the sub-group had considered the actions to refine the measures of success which could be under direct control as opposed to the measures which could be influenced with partners but not in direct control. The CE confirmed that two important surveys would be conducted in 2006 viz. The biennial NHDC district wide survey and the triennial BVPI survey which will provide data to measure success via customer satisfaction and perception.

Following this short summary the Committee reviewed Appendix 1 which detailed the completed actions against the six strategic objectives that would remain in place for the life of the Corporate Plan (subject to refinement), make the Corporate Plan vital and fit for purpose, and reviewed annually to ensure that short, medium and long term actions were moved forward.

The Committee were pleased to note that in addition to the inputs from citizens panels, district wide survey and service questionnaires the NHDC communications team would promote the need for feedback from residents, community groups, minority ethnic groups, older people and people with a sensory or physical disability. The Committee noted that this authority had to publish its first Disability Equality Scheme by December 2006.

The Committee reviewed the Service and Financial Planning Table for 2006-2007 as presented at Appendix 4, including the Corporate Plan. Of particular interest was the integration of Service Plans into the Corporate Plan which covered short term aims for each service, legislative requirements, outcomes of service reviews, risk implications and performance improvement.

The Committee reviewed Appendix 5 which indicated the process of monitoring the high level actions within service plans and delivery against Corporate Plan actions, and the target dates for sub-actions, a progress report and measurement of achievement.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for the updating report on progress with the Corporate Plan and advised the Committee that the two meetings of the sub group had been productive and successful. The Chairman on behalf of the Committee wished to comment on one particular aspect of the Corporate Plan by way of three examples: Appendix 1: 2. 'Safer Communities' 1. Establishment of an Anti-Social Behaviour Task Group, 2. Work closely with the anti-social behaviour officer at North Herts Homes and 3. Fund the installation of five CCTV cameras. These issues cum objectives were important in their own right but in order for PARC to perform its review and scrutiny function specific targets had to be set alongside these issues. e.g. What would five new CCTV cameras achieve? How many ASBOs had been issued, for what reasons and what improvements could be measured? and what targets could be set when working with officers at North Herts Homes?

The Chairman referred the Committee and officers to Appendix 3 which highlighted targets that NHDC could not influence at all e.g. Equal 19 – A reduction in the longer term, in the percentage of the population claiming benefits. The Committee agreed that this and the other items listed under 'Equal' were worthy targets, but could NHDC influence the results? The Committee noted that of the 31 Measures of Success listed in Appendix 3, 14 were listed under control, 16 listed under influence and one was joint.

The Committee were of the opinion that although a lot of progress had been made it had to be constantly recognised as a 'living' document, must be linked the vision for NHDC and must measure success. The Chairman advised the Committee that the sub group would welcome any comments and/or suggestions for targets to be included in the Corporate Plan that could be attached to issues raised in the current document.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the work undertaken by the Corporate Plan sub-group be noted;

- (2) That the actions completed in the first full year of the Corporate Plan be noted.
- (3) That the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance be requested to remind each Portfolio Holder of the need for their inputs into drawing up the actions in the Corporate Plan for 2007-2008 and beyond.
- (4) That each Member of PARC be invited to submit to the Chairman any further thoughts or comments on the Corporate Plan that would be considered by the sub – group at its next meeting.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To allow PARC undertake a review of the progress to date with the Corporate Plan.

36. 2005 STAFF SURVEY – KEY FINDINGS AND PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

The Consultation Officer (CO) reminded the Committee that Staff Surveys had been held in 2003 and 2005 and that the data presented referred to the 2005 survey. The Committee noted that the same methodology had been used in each survey and that the 2005 survey included the majority of the same questions as in 2003. The CO referred the Committee to Appendix B which provided a sample of the questions and multiple choice answers used in the 2005 survey.

The CO advised the Committee that there had been progress in the following: Overall satisfaction with job (up 9 per cent); Satisfaction with the 3Cs procedure (well run-up 8 per cent, understanding-up 6 per cent and meeting customer needs up 5 per cent); Satisfaction levels with immediate line manager (up 11 per cent); Satisfaction with opportunity for career development (up 8 per cent); Satisfaction with basic pay (up 15 per cent); Satisfaction with training and development (up 9 per cent and 10 per cent respectively); Receiving annual appraisals (up 11 per cent); and Receiving praise for good work (up 11 per cent).

However, the CO confirmed that there had been four areas of concern within NHDC that responding staff highlighted in their replies; Communication between Directorates: 22 per cent of respondents considered that inter-Directorate communication had not improved from 2003. Office accommodation: Levels of satisfaction had fallen in 11 of the 17 elements in the workplace, satisfaction with meeting rooms fell by 19 per cent, satisfaction with quiet working areas fell by 4 per cent and satisfaction with the provision of filing and storage facilities fell by 5 per cent. Handling difficult customers: 28 per cent of respondents requested more training.

The CO referred the Committee to Appendix A which was the corporate action plan prepared in response to the areas of development listed at Paragraph 3.3 to the report and the Committee noted that each Head of Service had prepared local service area action plans where more than 10 members of staff had participated in the survey.

The CO confirmed that the corporate action plan and local area action plans would be closely monitored through a combination of Corporate Management Team (CMT), Joint Staff Consultative Committee (JSCC), Staff Consultation Forum (SCF) and PARC, six monthly by CMT, annually by PARC and at regular intervals by JSCC and SCF.

The Committee were pleased to note the areas of improvement but requested that the issues and solutions as set out for areas of development (Paragraph 3.3) in the Action Plan (Appendix A) should be enhanced with targets and target dates to allow PARC continue with a monitoring review of the Action Plan. The CO emphasised that the key corporate actions would be publicised to staff using: NHDC News, Team Talk, feedback via JSCC and SCF and extensive use of the Intranet.

In addition to the request for targets, members of the Committee expressed concern that several proposals had budget implications. The CO and HHR were requested to identify and include in the Action Plan such items which were covered under the current 2006-2007 budget or were to be a growth item in the Service and Financial Planning Process for 2007-2008. Members also queried the link between the cost of re-decorating offices and the office accommodation strategy especially if there was to be a move of the Council offices to a new location in Letchworth Garden City. The Committee noted that the Office Accommodation Strategy would be presented to Cabinet on 25 July 2006.

Two other results of the 2005 Staff survey were discussed by the Committee: Communications between each Directorate and the link between Members and 'Putting People First Standards. The Strategic Director for Customer Services (SDCR) responded to both items and advised the Committee that the next staff survey could re-phrase the question on Communications and that it was clear that not all staff had to know specific details of each Directorate's activities. The HHR advised the Committee that each Directorate provided an update on activities to all staff in each issue of Team Brief. The SDCR advised the Committee that many staff did not have contact with Councillors in their normal duties and consequently the low figure should not be taken as evidence that NHDC Councillors were not participating in 'Putting People First'.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the 2005 Staff Action Plan be presented to the next meeting of PARC to be held on 7 September 2006 incorporating the following actions:
 - (a) That officers be requested to prepare specific targets for the areas of development listed at paragraph 3.3 e.g. Customer Care. 'Improved level of awareness and understanding of customer service good practice';
 - (b) That officers be requested to draw up specific actions to meet the objectives and issues currently listed throughout the Action Plan;
 - (c) That officers be requested to discuss with the Head of Financial Services the allocated budgets associated with works under Office Accommodation e.g. 'Introduction of office re-decoration programme' and confirm that such expenditure is included either in the 2006-2007 budget or will be included in the Service and Financial Planning Process for 2007-2008 and beyond.
- (2) That the monitoring procedure for the 2005 Staff survey as presented at Paragraph 4.2 to the report be agreed, with PARC receiving an annual report on progress.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To allow the implementation of the Action Plan (Appendix A with amendments) which will maintain engagement with all staff.

37. HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – MAY 2006

The Performance Manager (PM) advised the Committee that this was the second High Level Indicators report for 2006-2007 with 19 high level performance indicators including sub sets. The Committee noted that at 31 May 2006, 11 indicators were at green status, four indicators at amber status and four indicators (BV 12, BV 170c, LPI 24 (L59) and LPI 19 (PE1)) at red status. The PM confirmed that there had been one change where LPI 15 (LC 15) had moved from amber to green status, with the figure for May 2006 now confirmed as 1299 (previously given as 1228), following correction of a technical fault.

Of particular concern to the Committee was the very low figure at 31 May 2006 for LPI 24 where only 39 staff (from a total of 407) had completed an appraisal and processed the paperwork. The Head of Human Resources advised the Committee that there was a short period for appraisals and paperwork to be completed. She assured the Committee that much work had been done to encourage managers to complete appraisals promptly and that it was expected that this would significantly improve the situation.

The Chairman proposed and the Committee agreed that as the move from green to amber status for BV 109c in April and May 2006 might indicate a trend in the wrong direction that the concern of the Committee should be made known to the Head of Planning and Building Control Services. The Committee noted that an updating report on the BV 109 Performance Indicators was currently in the PARC timetable for the meeting to be held on 12 October 2006.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the status of the High Level Indicators for May 2006 be noted;
- (2) That the areas of under-achievement and good performance be noted;
- (3) That officers be requested to present an updating report on LPI 24 (L59) 'Percentage of Staff receiving an appraisal within the allowed time-scale' to the next meeting of PARC to be held on 7 September 2006;
- (4) That the Head of Planning and Building Control Services be made aware of the concerns of PARC with reference to BV 109c 'Percentage of planning Applications determined in line with development control targets to determine: 80 per cent of other applications in 8 weeks' currently at amber status;
- (5) That a vote of thanks be recorded in respect of Sarah White, Performance Manager for her hard work, diligence and professional duties during her time with this authority and with every best wish for success in her new career.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

The recommendations made at Paragraph 9 had been made in accordance with the declared policy of North Hertfordshire District Council.

The meeting closed at 8.32 p.m.

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Chairman