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**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**15 January 2008 – 6.30 pm**

**PRESENT:**

Councillor Williamson (in the Chair); Councillors M Coleman, Collins, Cook, Easter, Field, Reynolds, D Thompson, Wainwright, C Walker and Weymouth.

Councillor Ames attended as a substitute for Councillor Burroughs.

Mr R Hodds (Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer) and Miss K Edmonds (Senior Member Services Officer)

The Service Manager (Culture, Sport and Leisure), the Marina Centre Manager and the Service Manager (Environment) attended for Item 2.

The Service Manager (HR) and the Development Control Manager attended for Item 3.

The LSP Officer attended for Item 4.

**1. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 26 November 2007 were confirmed.

**(Councillor Easter declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in Item 2 as he was a Member of the Great Yarmouth Sport and Leisure Trust and in accordance with the provisions of the Members Code of Conduct was allowed to speak and vote.)**

**2. THE GREAT YARMOUTH SPORT AND LEISURE TRUST ACCOUNTS**

The Service Manager (Environment) gave an introduction into the Great Yarmouth Sport and Leisure Trust Accounts and reported on the creation of the Trust. Members were asked to consider the original budget action plan put forward for the Trust and compare their subsequent performance figures against this criteria.

The following points were raised by the Committee:-

- \* Asking who paid the £160,000 management fee figure detailed in the finances was.
- \* The low income figure for the bar and functions.
- \* Secondary Income was greater than initially estimated.
- \* Operational losses.

The Service Manager (Environment) stated that it was not costing Great Yarmouth Borough Council any more in real terms to run the Marina Centre than it did under the previous management arrangements with Leisure Connection. A Member stated that they were originally informed that there would be no cost for Great Yarmouth Borough Council running the Leisure Centre via the Trust. Reference was also made to the assumption that the rate relief received from the charitable status would mean that the Centre would break even. A Member asked if the management fee would be greater if the Trust took over the running of the Phoenix Swimming Pool and the Service Manager (Environment) stated that the current Management Agreement with Waveney District Council included the payment to Waveney District Council of a Management fee for the running of the Phoenix Swimming Pool. A Member pointed out that the 20% discretionary of NNDR is paid by Great Yarmouth Borough Council and so would be an additional cost. It was reported that the secondary income related to the ice-cream kiosk rental, water recharges for the seafront and vending machine sales. The other dry income included the Sports Hall, Squash Hall and Piazza Room hire. The Committee were informed that the Indoor Bowls Club currently runs the upstairs bar and that the Marina Centre runs the Piazza bar. A Member stated that if the Trust did not exist Great Yarmouth Borough Council would then save £160,000 management fee. The Service Manager (Environment) stated that this would not be the case as the Trust would have to pay for another contractor to run the Leisure Centre and that a soft market testing exercise had been carried out and had shown that this fee would be more than £160,000 and would be liable for NNDR on the building.

The Vice-Chairman asked what the professional and finance services included and they were informed that this was a charge by Norfolk County Services for HR, finance and health and safety advice. The Marina Centre Manager reported that similar operational costs would occur again next year but did note that he had spent £40,000 on refurbishment work to the Centre. A Member asked for a professional finance fee breakdown asking what this covered and asked why Great Yarmouth Borough Council could not carry out the HR, finance and health and safety functions. The Service Manager (Environment) stated that advice had been received that Great Yarmouth Borough Council should not be seen to be having undue influence and that these functions should be procured separately by the Trust. The Chairman asked if a tendering process was carried out before the services were implemented. The Service Manager (Environment) stated that tendering was not carried out for these services and the report by the previous Chief Executive of the Trust recommended that Norfolk County Services should be used. A Member stated that without carrying out the tendering process it was unclear if these services could be carried out cheaper. The Marina Centre Manager stated that he had carried out an IOSH course and would be carrying out a NEBOSH course in the next year and that the health and safety functions would be able to be carried out in-house. The point was made that there was a need to ensure that savings that could be made were possible and that the commercial side of the business should be investigated further. The Marina Centre Manager informed the Committee that 60% profit was taken on the bar with 50% profit on food and 40% profit on vending machines sales.

It was noted that the Scrutiny Committee currently supports the Trust in their activities and it was the Committee's wish to look at the figures in order to help the Trust look at certain areas that could be enhanced.

The Service Manager (Culture, Sport and Leisure) stated that the Trust had been operating for twenty months and that a small surplus had been achieved which had been reinvested into the Centre and that usage of the centre had increased along with customer satisfaction.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their presentations and comments on this issue.

### 3. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

#### (i) MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Service Manager (HR) reported that since the commencement of her employment last October 2007, she had been tasked with looking at sickness levels at the Borough Council. As a result this had found that due to Job Evaluation and restructuring of the Council staff stress had increased. This had all contributed to staff having an average of 13.2 days per employee away from work sick. A number of initiatives had been proposed to address these issues, these take a two pronged approach of firmer management of sickness absence and secondly the promotion of good health to prevent people being sick. It is proposed that the initiative to reduce sickness absence be called "the Year of Good Health" and will be launched on the 1 April 2008.

Investigation into other organisations which had reduced their sickness absence rates significantly had found that one way was by using a sickness absence management company. Further exploration of such a service is currently underway and if it is concluded to be worthwhile a paper will be presented to the Council in future.

It was reported that sickness absence improvement would be measured against the BVPI figure to see what quartile Great Yarmouth Borough Council would be in at the end of the year. It was reported that the Borough Council was currently in the bottom quartile and the aim next year would be to get sickness absence levels below the local government average.

It was also reported that a Behaviours and Attitudes proposal had been agreed which it is hoped will, when implemented, improve staff morale.

A Member suggested that phone calls from Line Managers and HR to check on staff's welfare may have an impact and the Service Manager (HR) stated that this would be carried out and that an Occupational Nurse would also ring the employee to offer any health advice. A Member asked if there were reasons why staff in certain departments were reporting sick and had the reasons why been investigated. The Service Manager (HR) stated that they were currently looking at the patterns of sickness and were investigating the data. The Chairman asked if sickness data would be electronically recorded and available regularly. It was reported that this issue was being investigated and that Service Unit Managers would be asked to complete a weekly Excel spreadsheet. In response to a query as to how an Occupational Nurse contacting a member of staff who was away from work sick would help in reducing sickness figures, the Service Manager (HR) stated that this would help by the employee being given health advice which may speed their recovery and their return to work. It was asked that if employees were able to self-certificate for three days would an Occupational Nurse still ring within three days. The Service Manager (HR) stated that this is the case as the Occupational Nurse may be able to offer support and speed the recovery to work. The Committee asked how this new scheme would be funded and the Service Manager (HR) reported that if it was decided that this approach would be appropriate funding would be sought to use an external sickness absence management company, however the costs of other initiatives would be absorbed by HR and other departments. A Member pointed out that this system currently is in place in many schools in the Borough and works well.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Service Manager (HR)'s report be noted.

(ii) **PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PERFORMANCE AND RECRUITMENT ISSUES**

The Development Control Manager detailed measures in place to address recruitment difficulties stating that in the summer his department had been short of three members of staff. One member of staff had been recruited, although another member of staff was about to leave. It was reported that this was not just a Great Yarmouth Borough Council problem but was also a national problem. Waveney District Council currently has the same problems and had added a £6,000 market supplement in order to try and recruit staff. This had still only resulted in one person being recruited. A Member asked if consideration would be given to relocation fees and it was reported that consideration would be given to this.

The Development Control Manager had also reviewed the grading level of the Assistant Development Control Manager's post to convert it into a "career grade" structure to allow experienced but as yet not qualified candidates a career profession opportunity.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Head of Planning and Developments report be noted.

**(Councillor Williamson declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in Item 4 on the agenda on the grounds that he is an employee of the Primary Care Trust and in accordance with the provisions of the Members Code of Conduct was allowed to speak and vote.)**

**4. PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

The LSP Officer gave a presentation on the Local Strategic Partnership and Partnership working. He introduced himself to the Committee and stated that he was a Great Yarmouth Borough Council employee who worked from Havenbridge House but was part funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, Norfolk County Council and the PCT. A structure diagram of the LSP was tabled and the Committee were informed there were four main forums which included the Learning Forum, Environmental Forum, Social Forum and Economic Forum, with sub-groups feeding into the Forums. The sub-groups included the CDRP, Sports Partnership and the Cultural Partnership. An annual community conference is held which is similar to an Annual General Meeting. Members were informed of the Working Neighbourhood Fund allocation of £7.1m over three years, which would bring it up to March 2011. The Working Neighbourhood Fund would allocate this money for three years which could be spent from April, but has a narrower aim than the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

Members were informed that the percentage of the working age population in employment in Great Yarmouth is less than the Government target of 80% with less than 40% of the people in one lower level super output area in Great Yarmouth area working, as 60% are on benefits. Of those 60% on benefits, 20% are on Job Seekers Allowance, with 40% on Incapacity Benefit. The main percentage on Incapacity Benefit are on this as a result of mental health issues which include depression and anxiety. It was reported that the Working Neighbourhood Funds are to be spent on encouraging people into work and a Member asked how this would be achieved. The LSP Officer reported that schemes such as the Fit to Work, Confidence Building Classes and Exercise Classes would be used. Members were informed that the accountable body for the Working Neighbourhood Fund is Great Yarmouth Borough Council. The Working Neighbourhood Fund would be paid direct to Great Yarmouth Borough Council. It was suggested that Elected Members should be encouraged

to be more involved in the LSP. It was reported that issues such as three generations of unemployment in one family needed to be addressed.

The LSP Officer reported that the Local Area Agreement principles are for partners to focus on areas that matter to establish more relationships with regional and local partners and that there was a need to move away from the one size fits all solution to problems.

The LSP Officer reported that the Local Area Agreement is a three year agreement where priorities are set by local government and its partners, with indicators to monitor the progress of targets and to secure improvements. Area based grants for the Local Area Agreements to Norfolk are approximately £200-£300m a year. It was reported that there can be up to 35 targets selected from 198 possible targets. The Chairman reported that the comprehensive review would now include the performance of the area, which would include the Police, the Primary Care Trust and many other agencies.

The LSP Officer reported that Job Centre Plus had joined the LSP and that the creation of an Employment Skills Action Group were all as a result of trying to increase the employment rate. A Member pointed out that in order to reduce the number of people on Incapacity Benefit they would need to be pointed in the right direction of agencies and schemes to address this issue and not just be told of what they should do. The LSP Officer reported that Health Trainers were employed by Community Connections in order to address issues such as this.

A Member expressed concern at offering short-term funding as a scheme or service is provided and then taken away when funding stops. The Committee expressed concern at the LSP being outside the control of elected Members, stating that elected Members are not aware or understand what tasks and actions are being carried out in the Borough, but receive the public queries. It was pointed out that any elected Member can be as involved as they wish in the LSP and the Committee asked for details of who attends each LSP Forum and what organisation they represent.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the LSP Officer's presentation be received.
  
- (ii) That the Member Services Department be requested to provide a report detailing which Members attend Forums and the organisations they represent and to forward to all Members of the Scrutiny Committee.

**5. FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan for the period of 1 January 2008 to 30 April 2008 was noted.

**6. DECISIONS MADE AND ACTION TAKEN**

It was agreed that this item be deferred to the next meeting.

**7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Committee were informed that the date of the next meeting would be Monday, 25 February 2008 and the following meeting would be Tuesday, 25 March 2008.

**8. CLOSURE OF MEETING**

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm.