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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 February 2008 – 6.30 pm

PRESENT:

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

Councillor Ames attended as a substitute for Councillor D Thompson.

Mr P Hardy (Executive Director - Economy and Environment), Mr R Hodds (Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer), Mr T Howard (Head of Regeneration and Environment), Mr C Rowland (Executive Officer), Miss H Speechley (Executive Officer - Strategic Projects) and Miss K Edmonds (Senior Member Services Officer).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Reynolds, D Thompson, and Weymouth.

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2008 were confirmed.

2. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee considered the Performance Indicators report for the first nine months of 2007/08 (1 April – 31 December inclusive) on an exception basis as follows:-

BV8 (The percentage of invoices for commercial goods and services that were paid within 30 days of being received) – It was reported that this Performance Indicator was below target due to staff within the department learning a new system. The performance was increasing and it was hoped that 97.25% of the target would be met.

BV9 (Percentage of Council Tax collected) – It was reported that the Council was 3% above last year's target with more than 96% of the Council Tax being collected so far. It was hoped that 97 to 97.5% would be achieved by the year end. Members asked if further information could be provided on these figures detailing how much had been collected in 2006/07 and the amount of Council Tax write-off.

BV10 (The percentage of non-domestic rates due for the financial year which were received by the authority) – The Percentage of Non-Domestic Rates due for the Financial Year which was received by the Authority. It was reported that the figure collected so far was above last year's figures and was just under the target and it was hoped that the year end figure would be near the target.

BV12 (The number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence) – Members discussed the number of working days lost due to sickness and were informed that measures were being put in place to tackle the sickness level. A Member queried if long term sickness was included in the figures and it was reported that long term sickness was classed as five days or over. A third of the current sickness is classed as one to two days absence. A Member pointed out that the press in Suffolk had recently reported that Waveney District Council had a 4% sickness level and the Chair asked for benchmarking information against other authorities.

BV78B (Average time for processing notifications of changes of circumstances) - The average time for processing notifications of change of circumstances had been reduced from 42 days last year to 14 days this year. It was noted that the Borough Council was still in the bottom quartile.

BV79A (The percentage of cases for which the calculation of the amount of benefit due was correct on the basis of the information available) – It was reported that although the third quarter was slightly down on target the results had not highlighted any areas of significant concern.

BV79B (Overpayment of Benefit) - It was hoped that this Performance Indicator would be met.

BV109A (Percentage of planning applications determined: 60% of major applications in 13 weeks) - It was reported that current performance was on target. Performance had dropped in the last two quarters mainly due to vacant posts within the department and that this issue was addressed.

BV199B (The percentage of relevant land and highways: from which unacceptable levels of graffiti are visible) – Levels of Graffiti. It was reported that this Performance Indicator had a tight target as graffiti would always be found within the Borough.

BV199C (The percentage of relevant land and highways: from which unacceptable levels of fly-posting are visible) – A Member asked if Great Yarmouth Borough Council had prosecuted any resident in the Borough for flyposting.

RESOLVED:

(i) That further information be sought from the Legal Department on how many residents in the Borough had been prosecuted for flyposting and flytipping.

(ii) That benchmarking information be provided from other authorities relating to sickness figures.

3. DECISION-MAKING AND ACTION TAKEN REPORT

The Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer's report on decision making and action taken was considered. The Committee's attention was drawn to the Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2007 where the Scrutiny Committee referred its concerns with regard to succession planning, meeting targets and capacity in the Planning and Development Department. This was referred to Cabinet which noted the Scrutiny Committee's concerns and the Head of Planning and Development stated that he had taken action to recruit staff, however two further members of staff were leaving due to retirement and leaving the council. Attention was also drawn to the Day-to-Day Housing Maintenance/Repairs Review along with the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations which were referred to Cabinet. The

Director of Community Housing tabled a document giving responses to the review recommendations from the Day-to-Day Housing Maintenance Repairs. The Chairman detailed each of the Director of Community Housing's responses to the recommendations listed:-

- (a) **That the Tenants'/Residents' Handbook be amended to include the same priority codes as detailed in the Director of Community Housing's presentation. That a summary of the Handbook be issued to Tenants to include the priority codes and the main names and contact details of Officers at the Council.**

The Tenants' Handbook is currently being comprehensively reviewed and revised. The priority codes and procedures for reporting repairs would be incorporated into this document and information would be included in the next Tenants' Newsletter.

- (b) **That an efficient logging system be introduced that allows residents to be issued with a Unique Reference Number to be used when accessing the records.**

It was reported that each job order currently has its own unique reference number and that this is included on the card sent to Tenants. However, the use of reference numbers by Tenants would serve no real purpose and could make the system more complicated for them. The records could be accessed simply by the property address.

Members discussed this issue and stated that they were unhappy with the response as they felt that this would be a practical system to introduce.

- (c) **That all jobs be logged electronically.**

It is reported that jobs are currently electronically recorded.

- (d) **That a system be introduced to ensure that 100% of priority times are achieved. The Council's priority times are the same as the Contractors and that the priority time starts as soon as the fault is logged:-**

The response to this was that there were various reasons why it would be impossible to achieve a priority time of 100% in each case. Examples could include inaccurate materials, difficulties in obtaining parts and peak workloads due to adverse weather difficulties. The current contract used specifies a 95% achievement and the contractor's performance is closely monitored and managed, to increase percentage targets would inevitably increase costs significantly.

The second part of the recommendation highlighted an issue that would need to be addressed. Completion times for repairs given to Tenants are the priority times included within the repairs contract. Provided a Tenant provides sufficient information when reporting a repair, an order will be raised immediately and sent electronically to the contractor. In such cases, the time for completion given to the Tenant will be correct. However, if the repair needs to be pre-inspected, the contractual priority time will be given when the order is raised following the inspection. Time scales should be set on completion of the pre-inspection and monitored against performance of these targets as a need to ensure that Tenants are properly informed and that this is done as part of the exercise proposed under (a)

(e) **Customer satisfaction surveys.**

It was reported that the Community Housing Department was currently in the process of re-tendering for the Responsive Repairs contract which could continue to be let on a partnership basis. It was intended to include a range of measures within the new partnership arrangements to improve customer feedback and would be addressing this particular issue as part of this exercise.

(f) **There is a need to ensure the 10% quality control checks are carried out to ensure that the Council is receiving value for money.**

It was reported that currently 5% post-inspections are carried out for responsive repairs and 100% for void repairs and electrical rewires. To undertake a higher rate of post-inspections would require an increase in staffing and would be difficult to achieve in the current budgetary situation and it was felt not necessary to carry out 10% inspections.

Members stated that they would like to raise this issue with the Director of Community Housing at a future meeting.

(g) **There is a need to ensure that there was better liaison between the Estate Managers and Tenants.**

It was reported that Estate Managers are not involved in repair works and that Tenants can report repairs on a dedicated line to the Council's Contact Centre or to the area offices. Repairs staff are based locally at the area offices as well as at Greyfriars House. They also attend Tenants and Residents Association meetings on request.

Members discussed this issue and could not see why Estate Managers were not involved with passing on information of repairs to the relevant Council department which would also involve better liaison with Councillors.

(h) **Sub-Contracting**

It was reported that the repairs contract does allow for the contractor to employ sub-contractors and Members discussed this issue and stated that sub-contracting should be monitored.

(i) **Out-of-hours and Bank Holiday cover.**

It was reported that Norfolk County Services provides both the day-to-day repairs service and the out-of-hours repair service at weekends and Bank Holidays. The out-of-hours-service deals mostly with repairs over weekends and with emergency and urgent repairs during Bank Holidays. The out-of-hours service is accessed via the Council's Control Centre at Wherry Way and Tenants are all provided with this telephone number. If they telephone the area offices or the main Town Hall switchboard when the offices are closed, a recorded message will provide the telephone number for Wherry Way.

(j) **There was a need to ensure that there was a system in place for elderly or vulnerable residents to be given a higher priority code.**

It was reported that it would not be realistic to give a blanket higher priority to all elderly or vulnerable people. Priority 1 and 2 orders for works to be completed within

four hours and 24 hours anyway. The other priority codes are for jobs of a less extreme nature. In any case it is not possible to hold dates of birth of all occupants of dwellings on the repairs computer system so higher priority would not be given automatically, however Reception staff had authority to put an order in a higher priority category in all cases where the Tenant or a family member has a frailty or vulnerability which would likely render them to be particularly adversely affected by a repairs defect.

In discussing the Director of Community Housing's responses to the above recommendations, the Committee did not accept the Director of Community Housing's reply and stated that 95% of the elderly residents living in the Borough lived in Council properties and it would be possible for the Council to have access to dates of birth of elderly residents which could be recorded on the system and would bring up a flag system to Call Centre staff, who would then be aware of the higher priority given to this resident.

The Committee was informed of the Performance Indicator BV109B and that the Head of Planning and Development was addressing the recent recruitment issues.

On 23 April 2007 the Scrutiny Committee referred the following recommendation to Cabinet:- The consideration of an establishment of a Cross-Party Working Group to look into the current Members' Structure and Fora. Cabinet approved the recommendation and, as a result, the Great Yarmouth and Gorleston Area Liaison Committees were created along with the State of the Borough Debate being deleted.

On 17 September 2007 the Committee discussed the Public Broadcasting Screens. Scrutiny Committee asked Cabinet to consider a number of recommendations and the Executive Director (Economy and Environment) stated that guidance had been produced for circulation to all Service Unit Managers which would be disseminated during March. There was a need to identify if the Borough Council was the accountable body when carrying out partnership working and the Head of Financial Services and the Executive Director (Economy and Environment) had discussed Government funding issues and it was ascertained that the Government was now giving more flexibility for funding and that the Borough Council did not want to send a negative letter to the Government but had verbally sent positive comments on the new flexibility arrangements. A Member asked if the parts had been received to repair the public broadcasting screen in the Market Place. The Head of Regeneration and Environment stated the screen was currently at the suppliers' laboratory undergoing a further fault diagnosis in order to determine the precise nature of required repairs. Following this, it would be necessary to determine whether the screen could be economically repaired and if so, whether the supplier should be instructed to carry out the repair or another company engaged to undertake the work. A final report would be presented to Cabinet when the diagnosis of the fault had been ascertained.

RESOLVED:

(i) That an update on the Market Place screen be provided at the next Scrutiny Committee.

(ii) That the Director of Community Housing be requested to attend the next Scrutiny Committee.

5. FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan for the period of 1 February 2008 to 31 May 2008 was noted.

6. CONSULTATION ON PETITIONS AND CALL FOR ACTION

The Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer detailed the DCLG Consultation document which related to Local Petitions and Councillor Call for Actions. It was reported that the DCLG Consultation document had been distributed to seek views on how the arrangements for local petitions could be strengthened and the details of how the new system might operate and the call for action introduced under the Local Government and Public Involvement and Health Act 2007. The Committee agreed that Ward issues and borough-wide issues should be accepted, however it should be noted that each issue should be taken on its own merit. Concern was expressed at the submission of false petitions. A Member pointed out that due to the Committee's cycle it could result in a delay in calls for action being placed on the agendas and it was also noted that this could result in additional resources being required for the Council's Scrutiny function.

The Member Services Manager and Scrutiny Officer reported that the Strategic Advisory Group had also considered the consultation document and had agreed that any petition should be signed by at least five percent of the electorate of any ward. The point was also made that any valid petition could be considered by either the meeting of Parish Liaison or by the Area Liaison Committees. With regard to the Calls for Action, the Advisory Group agreed that any matters relating to the naming of individuals/personal issues should be excluded. Comment was expressed that the guidance should be that issues should go through the normal consultation channels first before any matters were referred to Scrutiny Committee for consideration. The point was also made that there would need to be a strict monitoring of the Calls for Action initiative. The Advisory Group also agreed that the Government should provide detailed guidance on the operation of the Councillor Call for Action.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Committee agree in principle to petitions and calls for actions, and endorse the comments expressed by the Strategic Advisory Group, together with the Committee's comments detailed above.

7. GREATER YARMOUTH TOURIST AUTHORITY

The Chairman's suggested areas for consideration for the review into the Greater Yarmouth Tourist Authority were tabled. The Executive Director (Economy and Environment) stated that the Greater Yarmouth Tourist Authority is run through Norfolk Tourism which is a non-constituted organisation and suggested that he and the Executive Officer (Strategic Projects) would prepare a background report on the Greater Yarmouth Tourist Authority which would give a clear picture on the make-up of the Tourist Authority and how it worked.

RESOLVED:

That a report on the Greater Yarmouth Tourist Authority on the lines detailed above be presented at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee was informed the date of the next meeting would be Tuesday, 25 March 2008 at 6.30 pm and Members asked for the following items to be placed on the agenda:-

- Performance Data for GYB Services – The Director of GYB Services to attend.

- Director of Community Housing to attend to address the issues raised at today's meeting on Day to Day Housing Maintenance Repairs
- The Head of Regeneration and Environment to attend in order to discuss the progress of the Market Place Public Broadcasting Screen
- Update on Performance Indicators.

9. CLOSURE OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm.