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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**14 November 2005 – 6.30 pm**

**PRESENT:**

Councillor Williamson (in the Chair); Councillors Ames, Barker, Burroughs, Cook, Cunniffe, Hacon, Hudson, Plant, Reynolds, Walker and Weymouth.

Also in attendance were: Councillors Lawley and Shrimplin, Mr M Barrow (Corporate Director - Environment & Economy), Mr M Burns (Head of Housing Needs and Welfare Services), Mr S Ford (Housing Needs Manager), Mr R Hodds (Member Services Manager), Mr J Hemsworth (Head of Environmental Services), Mr A Harrison (Senior Member Services and Scrutiny Officer) and Ms M Bennett (Head of Occupational Therapy Services PCT) and Mr P Cox (Portfolio Manager, Legal and Democracy at Waveney District Council).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Easter, Giles and Wainwright.

**1. SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor Plant for Councillor Giles, and Councillor Barker for Councillor Wainwright.

**2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2005 were confirmed as a correct record.

**3. CONSIDERATION OF CALL-IN (APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTANTS/WAIVING OF STANDING ORDERS – ENV17)**

The Chairman introduced this item and gave a brief history referring to the original report and recommendations which were endorsed by the Executive at their meeting of 21 January 2004.

Councillor Shrimplin (Cabinet Member – Environmental Services) asked for clarification of the constitutional legitimacy of a call-in for the waiving of Standing Orders. The Member Services Manager confirmed that the decision of the 18 October 2005 regarding the seeking of tenders and waiving of Standing Orders was a legitimate call-in under the Constitution, and reminded Members that the focus of the call-in should relate to those decisions.

Councillor Shrimplin gave his response to the four key points raised in the call-in:

- He clarified the role of a single Cabinet Member as detailed in the Constitution with regard to placing consultancy contracts

- Several management issues had had to be considered and addressed subsequent to Executive approval in January 2004
- Progress required liaison and time consuming partnership working with other agencies such as PCT and Waveney District Council
- Information was not complete and there was a need to await the survey on leisure services to include Marina Centre issues.

The Chairman referred to the 2004 decision to develop a needs based strategy and asked why provision for this had not been made in the previous two years budgets. He emphasised his concerns about the delay of 22 months between the Executive meeting of January 2004 where the recommendations were endorsed and the Cabinet Member decision taking place on 18 October 2005.

There was a detailed debate centred around the 22 month delay at which the following issues were highlighted and discussed:

- Marina Centre seen as a focal point on the seafront, therefore requiring time to ensure correct action
- Marina Centre Liaison Committee and Executive Advisory Group were evaluating the prospects for the future and were waiting for the contractor to take action. (It was noted that three EAG and one Liaison Meeting had taken place over the last 22 months)
- 'Waiting' was considered by some to be a sound management technique to ensure full discussion
- There were confidential issues relating to staffing, and commercially sensitive issues were being discussed
- It was suggested that the Borough Council were well aware of the contractor's intentions and could have put contingency arrangements in place
- The Contractor had still been generating plans for the future until comparatively recently.

The Chairman referred to the expectation of urgent action nearly two years ago and asked when the 'needs assessment' was requested.

The Corporate Director (Environment and Economy), referred to the EAG looking at the long term aspirations of the Marina Centre within the requirement for sports provision across the whole Borough, and their looking at all options at their May 2005 meeting. He confirmed that development work on the strategy had been carried out over the interim period and that 'mapping work' of all facilities within the Borough was to be carried out. He confirmed that the contractor's intention had been to hold onto the Marina Centre as long as possible. He also stated that work was being carried out by Officers to look at alternatives and information would be made available to Members around Christmas.

Members further discussed the suggestion that contingency plans would have alleviated the problems currently faced and that budget provision could have been made available early.

It was stated that the contractor had intended to take its option to retain the Marina Centre until 2008.

The Chairman emphasised the need for cross-party transparent plans.

The Chairman stated that there were no objections, however reminded the Committee of the 'time related' issues and the need for updates of information to Council, to help explain the delays.

RESOLVED:

That the decisions of the Cabinet Member (Environmental Services) as recommended in report ENV 17 be implemented.

**The Chairman (Councillor Williamson as Chairman of the PCT), declared a prejudicial interest in Item 1 of the following item and left the room during the debate.**

#### 4. HOMESELECT

The Head of Housing Needs and Welfare Services introduced the items as recommended to the Executive following the Scrutiny review of Homeselect. The Member Services Manager confirmed that the Executive had agreed that the recommendations be held in abeyance pending further consideration by Overview and Scrutiny.

The Head of Housing Needs and Welfare Services referred to recommendation (i) –

That the Occupational Therapists be required to be involved early in the process and be asked to view selective properties with disabled/vulnerable people prior to the property being allocated.

He stated that this was a partnership arrangement and hence outside the direct control of Great Yarmouth Borough Council. He presented a report and introduced Mareth Bennett (Head of Occupational Therapy Services PCT) who gave a brief history on the work of Occupational Therapy in partnership with Lettings and Homeselect. She stated that there was strong liaison with Homeselect and they considered a large number of medical applications. She also reported on an unsuccessful NRF bid for funding to support an additional member of Occupational Therapy staff.

The Head of Housing Needs and Welfare Services presented three options for consideration:

1. The Head of Occupational Therapy Services to discuss potential for changes within existing resources.
2. Primary Care Trust and Great Yarmouth Borough Council General Fund agree to jointly fund a specialist post (circa £38,000 per annum).
3. Failing agreement with Primary Care Trust, the Great Yarmouth Borough Council undertakes to fund the total sum of £38,000 per annum from the General Fund.

Members debated the options in some detail having consideration for the financial sum involved and whether they should defer making any decision pending receipt of further information from the Primary Care Trust and Homeselect teams.

The Head of Occupational Therapy Services stated that there were successful models of partnership funding elsewhere in the Country and offered to provide further information on those arrangements.

The Head of Housing Needs and Welfare Services referred to the other recommendations and described the work done so far and proposals for the future.

Recommendation (ii) The need to instigate a more proactive Homeselect system that encompasses both the private and public sectors.

- To start the process for setting up of a private Landlord Forum in Spring 2006.

Recommendation (iii) The production of a flow diagram to assist people with choices/decisions they would need to make in respect of the system.

- To produce a flow diagram to be included on the website by 31 March 2006.

Recommendation (iv) The need to improve feedback which could include further consultation with the Community Empowerment Network/Clip Offices and to develop the Homeselect website in order to provide more realistic feedback.

- To train CLIP and CEN to give signposting advice etc and provide access through website to information/publications to CLIP/CEN.

Recommendation (v) The need to develop the IT system more clearly in order to assist people using the Homeselect system.

- To continue development in line with housing advice and housing options.

Recommendation (vi) The ability to make more than two bids.

- To monitor IT improvements and purchase a package "off the shelf" when cost is attainable.

Recommendation (vii) The ability to provide individual feedback.

- Currently too expensive in terms of staffing costs, however to monitor IT improvements with a view to purchasing a package when cost effective/attainable.

Councillor Lawley recommended that the Homeselect Partnership Board minutes be distributed to Council Members for information.

The Chairman thanked the Homeselect Team and Mareth Bennett from the Primary Care Trust and Councillor Lawley for their advice and information.

RESOLVED:

That recommendation (i) of the original report to Executive be replaced by Option 1 (above) pending receipt of further information from the Primary Care Trust and Homeselect teams on partnership arrangements.

## 5. REVIEW OF MEMBER SERVICES

The Chairman referred to the on-going review of Member Services and proposed that comparative data be gathered from other Local Authorities in the region of a similar size to that of Great Yarmouth.

The Member Services Manager presented his report highlighting specific issues as follows:-

- list of work allocations and capacity issues
- schedule of meetings for 2004 and 2005 which showed little change to the total number of meetings despite structure changes within Overview and Scrutiny
- organisational structure of the teams within Great Yarmouth and Waveney
- services to Members and support to Committee Chairman
- the level of Civic and Ceremonial work carried out by staff at Great Yarmouth since 2000
- the current level of Scrutiny support
- changes to the Constitution which had been intended to reduce the number of meetings.

There was some debate as to whether the review was premature, given that Great Yarmouth Borough Council had agreed to a six month trial for partnership working with Waveney District Council. The Chairman stated that there was some concern amongst Officers and Members about capacity issues within the Member Services Team and felt that an on-going review might help to resolve these issues. He also stressed that in light of the Audit Commission's report on the Scrutiny function that the Committee should look at issues in a proactive manner in order to inform any changes and improvements to Members services.

Members also discussed the large number of partnership bodies serviced by Great Yarmouth Borough Council when several other agencies were involved, and the level of and cost of hard copy distribution of all papers.

The Portfolio Manager (Legal and Democracy) at Waveney District Council referred to the trial period and potential benefits that could accrue from the partnership, such as specialist working in three main areas – Council/Executive, Overview and Scrutiny, and Development Control. He stated that no cost savings had been identified, however, a possible enhanced service could result from the partnership.

The Chairman summarised the discussion and listed topics for future research and discussion: staffing levels/structure, scrutiny support, level of printing and cost, rationalising meetings, further use of IT in preference to 'hard copy', Civic duties, time taken for preparation of meetings, Member feedback on 'how much is actually read', and the level of partnership support.

### RESOLVED:

That the Member Services Manager submit a report detailing 'comparator data' with Democratic Services teams for other similar sized Local Authorities in the region.

The Chairman thanked Peter Cox (Waveney District Council) and Robin Hodds (Member Services Manager) for their input and reports.

**6. FORWARD PLAN**

RESOLVED:

Members received and noted the Forward Plan.

**7. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

RESOLVED:

Members requested further detail and clarification of the following Performance Indicators to be discussed at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

BV 9, BV 12, BV 66, BV 78a, and BV 156.

**8. CLOSURE OF MEETING**

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.

AH/MJG  
16 November 2005