

PERFORMANCE, RESOURCES AND ASSETS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5th April 2007 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Titmuss (Chair); Councillors P Chapman, Mead and Siederer.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Pedersen and Strange

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Harris and Simmons.

19 MINUTES (REF: 2.1)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1st March 2007 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20 UPDATE ON CUSTOMER SERVICES (REF: 9.1)

The Customer Services Manager updated the Committee on the continued improvement of the performance of customer services. The Customer Services Centre (CSC) call centre had been operational since January 2003 and the CSC service centre since February 2004. The Service had been expanded and included 12 front line service areas that were continually monitored which ensured that the best possible service was delivered to customers within the resources available.

There had been a few problems with staff sickness and maternity leave. Absences due to staff sickness had recently shown a marked improvement.

The Customer Services Manager explained that a backlog of work within the Revenues Section had brought down performance figures for the CSC Centre, the department recognised that it needed to work rigorously with Revenues to address this.

A customer satisfaction exit survey had been undertaken in conjunction with a number of London Boroughs, the overall results indicated that 94% of customers were satisfied with the service provided, 55% of these customers indicated that the service provided was excellent or very good. One mystery shopper exercise was undertaken with a number of London Boroughs, and provided evidence that 86% of the mystery shopping criteria was being achieved by the CSC centre; this

placed the Council mid point in comparison with other authorities. It also highlighted the areas that needed improvement such as exact appointment time frames.

The Chair requested confirmation that Housing Benefit was money paid from the Council to the customer and that Council Tax was income for the Council.

The Customer Services Manager replied that was correct although Housing Benefit and Council Tax were both part of the Revenues Section.

The Chair enquired how long the average waiting time was for customers and what was the longest time a customer could be kept waiting.

The Customer Services Manager replied that the average waiting time was approximately 20 minutes although some homeless cases customers were waiting for up to an hour due to the complexity of their case and that specialised staff were needed to deal with those cases. The figures up to March for the year 2006/2007 indicated that the average waiting time for customers was 20 minutes.

Resolved: That the report (Ref: 9.1) be noted.

21 UPDATE ON BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP (REF: 9.2)

The Head of Corporate Finance and Procurement reported on the progress of workstreams associated with the Business Partnership with ATOS Origin.

He explained that the Business Partnership was one important element of the Council's Efficiency Programme, along with the Gershon Agenda that forecast £4m of savings in 2006/07. The Council was also in the process of developing an Efficiency Strategy that pulled together all existing efficiency initiatives as well as identifying new areas of focus that delivered significant savings.

The Head of Corporate Finance and Procurement further explained the difference from September 2006 of the projected savings of the Business Partnership.

- Transport – (-£177,125) it had been established that it would not be possible to achieve the level of savings originally anticipated. Other savings opportunities were being considered. The Head of Corporate Finance and Procurement reported that this saving was

a non-cashable one, so had no impact on the total cashable savings that the Council estimated it would make.

- Property Maintenance – (-£536,074) it had been decided that some contracts available should be ring-fenced to Building Work Division (BWD) and this meant that the possible savings from this project were reduced. Ring fencing these contracts to BWD is estimated to provide a net improvement in the BWD's financial position by £280,000 a year, and hence over 3 years would provide a greater benefit than the £536,074 that was lost from the partnership programme. This £280k was fully incorporated into the Council's 2007-08 budget (without it, the BWD would have been showing a small loss).
- Supported Living – (-£98,509) reduction to a realistic target agreed with Benefits Realisation Group based largely on the fact that 'people dependent' factors were taking longer than anticipated to resolve leading to delayed start date. People in supported living were reluctant to move between houses and they had exercised their right to refuse.

The Chair asked why it had not been taken into account that people were reluctant to move.

The Head of Corporate Finance and Procurement replied that it was hoped that people would want to move as it was in their best interests but that had not proved to be the case.

A Member enquired if the reduction in predicted savings from the Business Partnership had impacted on the budget for 2007/08.

The Head of Corporate Finance and Procurement stated that the reduction in the predicted savings from the Business Partnership had not impacted on the budget set for 2007/08.

Resolved: That the report (Ref: 9.2) be noted.

22 APPLICATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES, PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES - SCOPE (REF: 9.3)

The Director of Scrutiny reported that at the last meeting Members had decided to scope the Application of Human Resources Policies, practices and procedures as their next topic.

Members agreed the scope was not the Human Resources policies themselves the issue was whether they were applied consistently. They were also of the opinion that the Committee needed to define the scope of the topic so that it was manageable. The Scrutiny Officer was instructed

to conduct research into unfair discrimination against Black Minority Ethnic (BME) employees in the first instance with particular reference to the following:-

- Recruitment and appointment
- Promotion
- Training and Development
- Appraisal – Individual Performance Meeting

It was pointed out that the scoping of this topic was not an investigation into any particular instance of malpractice

The topic review form below detailed the scope of the topic.

SCRUTINY TOPIC REVIEW

Committee	Performance, Resources and Assets Scrutiny
Review Topic	The application of Human Resources Policies, Practices and Procedures
Working Group of Members	? Subject to membership in new municipal year
Senior Support Officer	Chris Goulding
Scrutiny Support Officer	Bert Siong
Reasons for the review	Not about the policies – the issue is about whether they are being applied consistently.
Key Questions	What training do managers receive to discharge their departmental HR responsibilities? To what extent is the application of the Council's HR Policies and Procedures monitored and quality assured? Whether compliance is being monitored and whether, when non-compliance is discovered, it is dealt with effectively?
	Unfair discrimination against BME employees in relation to: Recruitment and appointment Promotion Training and development Appraisal – individual performance meeting Not an investigation into any specific malpractice (to be referred)

Methodology/Approach (What methods of investigation should be used to gather evidence, e.g. questionnaire, comparison with authorities, focus groups, witnesses etc)	Desk/Literature research – reading review approach Personal Interviews – selected officers and managers across all directorates Intranet publicity/questionnaire inviting feedback from staff. Lessons learnt from the Community Development Service investigation. Interviews with Head of Corporate/Departmental HR Interview with Manager Training and Development Comparison with ‘best practice’ authorities (as appropriate) Staff survey – Focus groups Questions and answer sessions Subject to review after desk based research Lessons learned from the Community Development review.		
Written evidence required	LBC HR Policies and Procedures		
Specify who the committee would like to contribute to the review (who to see and when, and who are the stakeholders)	Head of HR Representative focus groups Training and Development Manager Investigators (Hilary Beaumont/Lorraine Issacs) – Community Development Service Investigation (December 2006)		
Other forms of evidence/consultation	Unison Black Workers Support Group Legal Service		
Site visits required (Where and when)	Observe delivery of relevant HR training Sit as observer on a number of recruitment/selection interviews.		
Barriers/dangers/risks (Identify any weaknesses or pitfalls)	Possible non-co-operation by some managers Scope of review too wide Capacity within Performance, Resources and Assets Scrutiny Committee Work Programme Capacity within Scrutiny		
Level of publicity required (What level is appropriate and what method should be used)	As in internal matter, only internal publicity, via intranet, ‘Inline’ Newsletter, inviting relevant information/issues/feedback from staff.		
Project start date		Draft report deadline	
Meeting frequency		Projected completion date	

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref: 9.4) be noted.

(ii) That the Scrutiny Officer carry out a review of the application of Human Resources policies in particular recruitment and appointment,

promotion, training and development, appraisal (individual performance meeting) for Black Minority Ethnic workers and report the findings back to the Committee on a date to be determined at its meeting on 31st May 2007.

23 BALANCING THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL POSITION – FINAL REPORT (REF: 9.4)

The Director of Scrutiny presented the final report on Balancing the Medium Term Financial Position following the conclusion of the of the 6 stage scrutiny process on this topic. The Committee concluded the review at their meeting on 30th November 2006 and agreed the recommendations set out in the report. The conclusions and recommendations had been referred to and accepted by the Executive.

Members of the Committee were satisfied with the report and instructed the Director of Scrutiny to report progress throughout the year.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref: 9.4) be noted.

(ii) That the Director of Scrutiny report regularly to the Committee progress on Balancing the Medium Term Financial Position throughout the year.

(Note: The meeting ended at 7.05 p.m.)