Wednesday 11 July 2007 at 6.00pm



# **Scrutiny Committee**

#### **MEMBERSHIP:-**

Councillor MARSDEN (Chairman) Councillor SZANTO (Deputy Chairman), Councillors ELKIN (as substitute for Belsey), Mrs HEAPS, PURCHESE, Mrs SALSBURY and Miss WOODALL.

(An apology for absence was reported from Councillor Belsey).

#### 1 Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2007 were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

## 2 Declarations of Interest.

None were received.

### 3 Annual Programme and Monitoring report.

The Committee considered the report of the Scrutiny Co-Ordinator providing Members with information regarding the Scrutiny Committee's activities for 2006/07; in addition the report gave Members the opportunity to consider the Annual Programme for 2007/08.

Members were advised that at its meeting on 4 July 2005, Scrutiny agreed that an Annual report would be produced detailing the work of the Committee, the reviews conducted, the outcomes of each review and the work programme for the forthcoming year. The report provided a factual review of items that had been discussed over the past year. Furthermore, the report detailed changes to scrutiny which included the introduction of a monthly meeting for the Chair and Deputy Chair providing the opportunity to discuss the Forward Plan, performance indicators and 'hot' themes. The report also outlined ways to improve the process for the future.

Following the recent whole council elections in May 2007, Members were advised that it was now possible to have a rolling 3 year programme of reviews for the Scrutiny Committee. Task groups would usually commence in September of each year following approval of the Annual programme in July, and this considerably reduced the time available to complete reviews as most were expected to submit a final report to the Scrutiny meeting in March of the following year.

This was the first year that a rolling programme would be introduced and would allow task groups to start much earlier. The programme would still

remain flexible and Members would still have the opportunity to refer items or amend the programme at any point throughout the year. The programme would still be submitted each year to allow for any changes. A new rolling programme would also allow officers to schedule task group reviews according to workloads and other commitments throughout the year.

The development of the rolling programme would be delegated to the Chair and Deputy Chair with the final nine reviews being submitted to the next Scrutiny meeting in September 2007. Input and agreement would also be sought from Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team.

At the time of writing this report there were two suggested reviews for the programme which are detailed at appendix A and include Taxi Ranks and the motion referred from Council in April 2007 relating to Fisherman's Green.

Councillor Marsden advised that Councillor Taylor would sit on the Taxi Rank Task Group and Councillor Elkin would sit on the Wartling Road / Fisherman's Green Task Group. The scope for the Fisherman's Green Task Group would be delegated to the Chair and Deputy Chair. Councillor Szanto agreed to discuss nominations with his Group and advised the Scrutiny Coordinator as soon as possible. Members also agreed that they would discuss additional items that could be reviewed and included in the rolling programme. All suggestions should be submitted to the Chair, Deputy Chair or Scrutiny Co-ordinator by 23 July 2007.

**RESOLVED:** (1) That the monitoring report be noted.

- (2) That the future improvements outlined in 6.0 be agreed.
- (3) That the draft Annual Programme of routine work outlined at Appendix A be agreed.
- (4) That the development of a three year rolling programme outlined at 8.0 be agreed.
- (5) That the Chair and Deputy Chair discuss potential review items to be submitted to the Scrutiny Co-Ordinator by 23 July 2007.

#### 4 Benefits Review

The Committee considered the report of the Task Group on the outcome of the review into the work of the Benefits Team which sought the perspective of customers on service delivery, the level of take up and provided an overview of anti fraud measures within the Council.

At the first meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 2006; the task group comprising Councillor Marsden and Councillor Tester, the Benefits Manager - Mike Friel and the Interim Anti-Fraud Manager Iain Stewart; agreed that the Benefits Manager would;

- Present papers to the Review Group on the feedback from the BVPI Customer satisfaction survey and the feedback from the Customer Contact Centre exit poll conducted in October 2006.
- Contact stakeholders in writing and invite them to a workshop to gain their input on the 20 September and;

Conduct a review of publicity and advertising resources currently undertaken

The Task Group also agreed that the Interim Anti-Fraud Manager would;

 Provide Members with an up to date report on the progress of anti-fraud measures in place.

The report was divided into three sections covering Customer Care and public perception, maximising take up of Housing and Council Tax benefit and a fraud and intervention report.

Members were advised that from 2 April 2007, the intervention process moved from being managed as part of the fraud function to being managed by the Benefits Manager. Reasons for this included;

- The changes in intervention process introduced by DWP in 2006/07 and 2007/08 made it more reliant on benefit operations and therefore should be managed together, and
- The scope of the proposed East Sussex Fraud Partnership did not include the intervention function.

In relation to Counter fraud members were advised that it was unlikely that significant gains in efficiency and effectiveness would be achieved by remaining in present traditional delivery methods. However, through partnership working changes in quality and economy could be realised by drawing together skills and resources thereby providing the means for new and innovative approaches to counter fraud. Scarce resources and expertise could be maximised, specialisations developed and used effectively.

To this end, Eastbourne Borough Council, Lewes District Council and Wealden District Council displayed an interest in encouraging new ways in undertaking their fraud investigation function within its authorities. The possibility of partnership working was explored with the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) and later with the remaining East Sussex authorities, Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council. The findings contained within the draft Business Case suggested that a shared fraud service within East Sussex was an option worthy of consideration. The reasons for a shared fraud service were:

- To assist in reducing the levels of fraud and error entering and already within the East Sussex benefit systems by providing a more effective business.
- Efficiency savings driven by Gershon, increased pressure on authority budgets and a change in counter fraud financial dynamics.

It was therefore possible that improvements in the counter fraud function within Eastbourne would not be undertaken in isolation but as part of a partnership with colleagues throughout East Sussex.

The Review concluded that the Benefits service was a statutory requirement for Eastbourne Borough Council. The Customer Care surveys recently

undertaken showed that the service was valued and appreciated. Further changes and improvements were clearly available in the Customer Relationship Management Project which was being undertaken and this would be a good opportunity to improve matters further.

Take-up levels in recent years had clearly been very successful and attention to improving these levels must be continued with well placed advertising, and support provided to the services which the hard to reach groups call on for support.

The Counter Fraud & Interventions Team had worked to achieve high standards and it was recognised that in order to continue improvement, the Team must look outside the boundaries of the Borough and engage with other Authorities in a shared counter fraud service. Similarly, to fit in with fraud partnership working and the change in emphasis, the Interventions function should move and be managed as part of the benefits process.

Councillor Purchese conveyed Councillor Tester's thanks to all who took part in the review.

Members supported the suggestion of using Doctor's surgeries as a method of distributing publicity material. In addition, Members suggested that posters should also be displayed in supermarkets etc.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet be advised that the Scrutiny Committee supports the outcome of the Review Board's findings to the effect that:

- (1) That further investment in improving the customer experience be considered based on the feedback provided.
- (2) That a review of telephone access operates as part of the current review underway for the Customer Relationship Management software be carried out.
- (3) That improvements to the methodology of making a claim as part of the review which is underway for the Customer Relationship Management software be made
- (4) That the speed of processing claims be prioritised and be resourced accordingly.
- (5) That a review the Benefits award letters be completed to improve the level of understanding required.
- (6) That the Customer Liaison and Development Officer work with other agencies to help to improve take-up rates and access to the service.
- (7) That further funding and agreed service level agreements be negotiated with the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB).
- (8) That the distribution of publicity materials be reviewed, paying particular attention to information available to the CAB.
- (9) That the CAB be provided with training from the Benefits service training officer on key concepts of how claims are processed and advised on ways of gathering further information on the operation of the schemes for Housing and Council tax benefit via the DWP websites available.
- (10) That the advertising of the Benefits service be continued and that a review of the methods of advertising be carried out.
- (11) That the Scrutiny Committee support the action Plan shown at appendix 3.

## 5 Play Facilities Review.

The Parks and Gardens Manager updated the Committee on the work of the Play Facilities Task Group. Members noted that a questionnaire had been sent to schools and that the same questionnaire had been posted on the Council's website. The responses would be collated and included in the final report. The review had become more in depth than previously expected with visits to Hastings and Brighton still outstanding.

The Committee agreed that it was important that the review be completed in time for the September meeting so that any financial recommendations could be included in the budget and service planning process.

**RESOLVED:** That the Play Facilities Review be granted an extension, the final report being presented to the Committee in September 2007.

#### 6 Best Value Performance Indicators – Year End

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director – Strategy and Democracy informing Members of the Council's performance against local targets for 2006/07.

Members were advised that the Council reported on a number of statutory Performance Indicators (PIs) each year as set out by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and administered by the Audit Commission.

CMT and Scrutiny Committee monitor the quarterly performance of a selection of the PIs throughout the year in order to keep track of the Council's overall performance in key areas and to highlight any areas of concern as they arise. Most of the performance targets being used had been set locally taking into account past performance, national performance data, local issues and any statutory targets that the Council must strive to achieve.

It was noted that excluding the satisfaction PIs, of the 79 targeted performance indicators this year, 51 were reported as achieving or exceeding their target and 28 were reported as having missed their target. The full list is detailed at the appendix attached to the report.

Compared to the outturns of 2005/6, performance had improved in 41 indicators (including 6 that were reported as off target) and worsened in 21 cases with the remaining PIs showing no change (17 cases) or being non-comparable in this way.

This year, we conducted our statutory triennial satisfaction surveys (General, Planning, Benefits and Housing). These provide the outturns for 19 satisfaction based PIs detailed within the report. More detailed analysis of the survey results would be provided in a separate report by Bostock Marketing Group (BMG) who undertook the consultation on the Council's behalf.

Members agreed that the outturns of the Best Value Performance Indicators (excluding the satisfaction survey results) showed that almost two thirds

(65%) reached or exceeded the Council's locally set targets. There were some examples of excellent performance, notably absence management and action on abandoned vehicles. Unfortunately, the Council were unable to compare our performance against other councils or national quartiles until data had been submitted to (and subsequently published by) the Audit Commission.

### NOTED.

The meeting finished at 7.21 pm.

Councillor Marsden Chairman