

IMPROVEMENT PANEL

21st December 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Whyman M.B.E. (Chair) and Councillors Carroll, Harrington and Taylor.

Conservative Group

Councillors Atkin and Ford.

APOLOGY

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Murphy (Labour Group).

IP/10. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th October 2005 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

IP/11. **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2005**

The Improvement Panel received its first performance report following the Council's adoption of a revised performance framework "Achieving More". In accordance with the framework, the report was divided into four sections on the 2005/08 Corporate Plan Milestones, CPA Improvement Plan Milestones, Community Strategy Milestones and Best Value Performance Indicators. This compendium report included a "traffic light" assessment for each section and the Panel was reminded of the assessment criteria. Each section included a summary of progress and performance that was broken down into subsidiary themes or sections where appropriate. For all targets or milestones that were not on track, a remedial measure was proposed and where necessary these would be reported to the relevant policy committee.

The Chair felt that this exception report was useful and there was a need to focus on those milestones at risk or predicted to fail. Under the key aim of Caring for the Environment, the Panel discussed the milestone to increase the uniformed patrolling presence throughout the District. The Chair reminded Members of the funding sought, the background to this initiative and the approach now being taken to utilise available resources. With reference to a specific milestone under the key aim of economic development, Members were reminded that performance could be affected in some areas by a lack of clear guidance from the Government. Councillor Ford commented about the external factors that were beyond the Council's control. However, it was noted that the objectives had been agreed by the Council, with milestones set accordingly.

The Director of Community Services spoke about the milestone on developing a Section 17 Action Plan. He gave further information about the external

agencies involved and the meetings that had taken place. The Chair reinforced his scepticism and concerns over Local Area Agreements, the potential adverse affect for South Derbyshire in its partnership working and possibly for the Local Strategic Partnership. The Chief Executive explained that the Council's position had been presented in a robust way by Councillor Wilkins at a recent meeting on Local Area Agreements. This Council was an exemplar in its approach to crime and disorder and it would lose out under the revised arrangements, through a "top slicing" of funding and the redirection of resources to areas with greater problems like the north-east of the County. The Chair asked that this message be repeated at every opportunity and he was concerned at the potential redirection of resources to the north-east of the County. The Chief Executive added that this view was shared by several other local authorities in Derbyshire.

There was a discussion on the key aim of improving services, particularly relating to rural issues and the development of an action plan to tackle inequalities. The Chair sought further information about "rural proofing" and the Deputy Chief Executive responded with information on the policy-based approach and actual service delivery issues. He spoke about the data available from the Council's current systems. He gave information on a postcode based system and explained the potential costs of such a system. The Chair used an example to show the difference in service levels between the urban core and rural parishes.

Other milestones under this key aim were at risk of failure because of slippage. The Director of Corporate Services provided further information on progress with the IEG 4 statement, that some aspects within this milestone could not be achieved. However, overall this Council would be one of the better performing authorities. The Director also updated on the project plan for Gershon and the shifting of resources. On the Procurement Strategy it was noted that the Procurement Officer would commence employment with the Council in February 2006.

In response to a question from the Chair, there was a discussion about a milestone on Best Value Performance Indicator targets, which would not be achieved. The Director of Community Services provided further information on the Key Aim of good quality homes and the reasons for failing to achieve an indicator, to work with partners to deliver Year 3 of the Homelessness Strategy. In the main, this was because not all housing associations had participated in the initiative. There was a capacity issue responsible for the failure to achieve a key aim of supporting the National Forest, by establishing a partnership for the management and development of the Swadlincote Woodlands Forest Park. In response to a question from Councillor Ford on a partnership working milestone, it was confirmed that the recent fire at the Pingle School in Swadlincote would not impact on the project to provide an artificial turf pitch on this site. The Chief Executive confirmed the revised approach being taken to assist the Council's representatives on outside bodies and organisations.

The Working Panel then considered Section 2 of the document on the CPA Improvement Plan. It focussed on the improvement priorities agreed with the Audit Commission after the CPA. All the 2005/06 milestones were within the Corporate Plan, but it was important to manage, monitor and report on performance from this perspective. The Panel focussed on the summary of performance, noting the proportion of milestones on track, those at risk and

those likely to fail. The Chair referred to the recent report from the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to Council, which demonstrated slippage issues and the remedial action being taken.

Section 3 of the document reported on the Community Strategy. Performance management of the Community Strategy was the responsibility of the Local Strategic Partnership and in particular the LSP Board. To ensure that the Council was a reliable partner, there was a need to deliver the milestones that were the Council's responsibility. The responsibilities of the various partners were detailed in the Community Strategy Action Plan 2005/06. Under the theme Creating Opportunities for All, an update was provided about the action to develop and adopt a South Derbyshire Compact. Further reference was made to the uniformed presence project under the theme of Safe Communities. The industrial facelift scheme was also discussed and the Director of Community Services spoke of the work being undertaken with Groundwork. The Chair sought information about the relationship between the Corporate Plan and the Community Strategy. A section of the document was referred to, to show how the Community Strategy issues were linked to the Corporate Plan or Service Plans. It was important for the Council as a lead partner in the LSP to achieve its milestones.

The final section of the document looked at Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI). The Deputy Chief Executive explained that where milestones were not achieved in the first quarter, it was often difficult to achieve the desired level of performance over the remainder of that year. The Chair sought further information on the Performance Indicators relating to the percentage of top earners from an ethnic minority or those that had a disability. Reference was also made to the number of working days lost due to sickness absence. Performance against this Indicator was better than for the previous year and upper quartile, but it would still fail because of the stringent target set. It was noted that for some areas, there was a need for more realistic targets.

The Director of Corporate Services provided further information on the indicators relating to benefit fraud and she explained that the section had been working on a number of high profile, large cases. There was the potential to review the way that the benefit fraud section worked, particularly given the verification framework which could reduce the need for personal visits. Councillor Harrington referred to the BVPI on access to public buildings. He was concerned at the original target set and expressed disappointment at the failure to achieve this target. He questioned what measures were being put in place. The Director of Corporate Services confirmed that £100,000 of funding was provided each year to improve access to public buildings and that all works were prioritised.

Reference was made to the BVPI on the Planning Service checklist. An explanation was given of the reasons why this indicator had not been achieved. Primarily this was around urban design advice and the need for the current post holder to have a specific qualification. Options were being considered on how to meet this requirement. A further example was the need for a live interactive land based system on the local plan, to show the relevant policies in place for each site. There was a discussion about the software requirements and costs, together with the measures being put in place.

IP/12. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next Improvement Panel Meeting would be confirmed in due course.

B. WHYMAN

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 2.00 p.m.