

IMPROVEMENT PANEL16th August 2006**PRESENT:-****Labour Group**

Councillors Bell, Carroll, Lane and Wilkins (substitute for Councillor Whyman M.B.E.).

**Conservative Group**

Councillor Mrs. Wheeler (substitute for Councillor Harrison).

IP/8. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING**

In the absence of the Chair, it was agreed that Councillor Carroll be appointed Chair for the Meeting.

**APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillor Whyman M.B.E. (Chair) and Councillors Atkin, Ford and Harrison (Conservative Group).

IP/9. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Improvement Panel Meeting held on 14th June 2006 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

IP/10. **"ACHIEVING MORE" - PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FIRST QUARTER REPORT 2006/07**

The first quarter Performance Management Report for 2005/06 was submitted. It summarised the Council's performance in relation to the Corporate Plan, the CPA Improvement Plan, contributions to the Community Strategy and the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPis). The report provided an overall summary, together with summary performance in each of these areas. Charts showing the detailed breakdown of performance on a "traffic lights" basis were attached. The overall conclusions that had been made were:

- There had been ongoing improvement across the board in performance in delivering the Council's plans.
- Overall, the Council was on track to achieve 87% of its targets, which compared with an outturn figure of 71% in 2005/06.
- Over 90% of Corporate Plan targets and 100% of Improvement Plan targets are "on track".
- The final position (at July 2006) for the Community Strategy Year 1 Action Plan was achievement of 77% of the targets, that the Council was responsible for. 19% of targets had been partially achieved, which meant that only one target (4%) was not achieved.

- 83% of BVPIs were on track with only 2 “priority” indicators expected to fail their targets.

The ongoing improvement in performance was extremely encouraging and reflective of the continued, effective performance management. The performance culture was now becoming embedded through the whole organisation. Policy Committees would be satisfied to receive the reports on this high level of performance, but should continue to manage and review targets that were not “on track”. They should also satisfy themselves that remedial measures for those targets “at risk” were satisfactory. There was a need to scrutinise those areas not on track, but the Council should not lose sight of the sustained and significant improvements reported. The Corporate Management Team recognised that these improvements were the product of the focus and hard work of employees and Members of the Council and this had been raised at recent staff meetings. The performance management framework would need to be developed further if the Council was to maintain this emphasis. There were a number of actions within the Improvement Plan for the current year, which would improve the approach to performance management further.

In response to a question from Councillor Wilkins, the Deputy Chief Executive gave further information on the self assessment process. This related to the likely achievement of targets, who was responsible for them and the need for remedial measures to be put forward, where targets were not projected to be achieved. The Director of Corporate Services added that monthly reports were submitted to members of the Corporate Management Team, which enabled responsive action to identified problems. Councillor Wilkins clarified that his enquiry related to the forecast position for 2006/07. Officers explained that those targets projected to be achieved were currently on track, but it was noted that some of the actions being monitored were of a project type, which might not yet have commenced.

Members were referred to the key measures of success and the position at 30th June 2006. With regard to the Improvement Plan, this was an area of significant progress and all indicators were on target. The Chief Executive added that this area had been highlighted in the last audit inspection.

Councillor Mrs. Wheeler referred to an entry in this part of the report and asked whether it reflected the increase in levels of sickness absence. Officers clarified that this issue was reflected in the BVPI statistics. A detailed report had been submitted to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and it would now be reporting to the Finance and Management Committee on this issue. It was noted that changes to the relevant personnel policy were planned. The Chief Executive added that when the policy was first introduced, there was a step change in levels of sickness absence. The policy now needed refreshing and this area of concern had been raised at the current round of staff meetings.

Consideration was given to the Community Strategy section of the report. Reference was made to the 1st Year Action Plan and the milestones that the Council was responsible for. There were issues associated with partnership working and the Council should not be too self-critical about non-achievement of some milestones. There was a discussion on the relative level of achievement of milestones by the Council and other partners. Recommendations had been made to the Local Strategic Partnership to

ensure a consistent way of recording the achievement of milestones. The Chief Executive added that the Government was looking for district councils to perform well in their functions for the local strategic partnership.

Section 4 of the report concerned BVPIs. The Deputy Chief Executive reminded that this area had been highlighted by the District Auditor in the last Audit Letter. Members gave consideration to a table which showed a summary of the BVPI position and where action should be considered. In particular, it referred to priority indicators that were predicted to fail, those at risk of failure and non-priority indicators that were predicted to fail. Particular reference was made to the violent crime statistic, where there seemed a judgement on district councils, but this was part of a regional and national trend. Councillor Bell referred to the expected outturn on the sickness absence indicator and given that this was the 1st quarter report, he questioned why the projection was so negative. In reply Officers confirmed that this was actually an optimistic target, as the revised policy had not yet been introduced and a period of consultation would be required. However, staff were aware that this was an issue and Managers were applying the current policy strictly. It was acknowledged that small numbers of long-term sickness absence had a significant impact on the statistics.

Consideration was given to the priority indicator on Council buildings that were accessible to disabled people. The Director of Corporate Services explained that £100,000 of funding had been allocated for the previous and current financial years, to improve performance in this area. The requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) were discussed. Councillor Bell understood that the requirements only concerned public buildings and specifically the sections where the public had access. It would be difficult for the Council to achieve 100% compliance with the DDA and Officers explained the detailed assessment process required. Councillor Bell questioned which buildings were involved. The Director of Corporate Services offered to supply a list and the information used in calculating the DDA requirements. The Chief Executive confirmed that the legislation was unforgiving and the Council was striving for compliance with the DDA. To provide a context, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that there was no quartile information for this area. Alterations to building regulations also made it difficult to achieve DDA compliance. He understood that the Act required access for disabled people to all parts of public buildings and in some cases there was a cost/benefit analysis to be undertaken. He gave an example related to the squash courts at a Council Leisure Centre to demonstrate this.

It was proposed to circulate similar reports to all policy committees, suggesting that they celebrate the good performance and look at those areas projected to fail or at risk of failure.

Councillor Wilkins asked where remedial actions were proposed, whether there was any assessment of resource needs. Remedial measures were on the basis of existing resources and if supplementary expenditure was needed, the indicator would be recorded as a probable failure. Councillor Lane asked whether policy committees would be asked to report back on proposed remedial measures and this suggestion was supported. The role of the scrutiny committees was questioned, particularly as Corporate Scrutiny had looked at the issue of sickness absence. It was suggested that a summary of all policy committee discussions be brought back to the Improvement Panel.

The Chair found the report very pleasing. She had questioned whether the targets set were challenging, had been assured that all targets were hard and Officers were striving for efficiencies. Members appreciated what staff had achieved. The Chief Executive, on behalf of Members had and would feedback Members' appreciation to the staff. This provided a tool for further improvements. Councillor Carroll was concerned that the absence statistics might be the result of work related stress. There was an HSE stress management process being undertaken throughout the Authority. Where work related stress was identified, managers reacted quickly to this, to seek to address problems. A cultural change was happening throughout the Authority. This was a key issue which would be examined by the Audit Commission during its next review. An outline was given of the way that this review was likely to be conducted and there was evidence of a culture change. Councillor Wilkins noted that all local authorities would be striving to improve their performance.

Councillor Mrs. Wheeler sought further information on the detail of the Corporate Plan Monitoring Report, to establish a rolling programme of local Community Plans. The Deputy Chief Executive provided further information, including examples of how some parish councils were achieving their Community Plans. Councillor Mrs. Wheeler spoke about related issues, such as the disregard of Community Plans for planning purposes and she also asked about the arrangements for the urban core. The Chair disagreed, feeling that the Community Plans were valuable and she discussed their merits. There was the opportunity for community feedback through the current consultation "Getting Your Ideas Into Action".

**It was agreed:**

- 1) That the ongoing improvement in the Council's performance be noted.**
- 2) That the Improvement Panel asks the relevant policy committees to review those targets that are not "on track", to satisfy themselves that any proposed remedial measures are appropriate and adequate and then to report back their proposals to this Panel.**

J. D. CARROLL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.00 p.m.