

IMPROVEMENT PANEL

8th November 2006

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Whyman M.B.E. (Chair) and Councillors Bell, Lane and Taylor.

Conservative Group

Councillors Atkin, Ford and Harrison.

APOLOGY

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

IP/11. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Improvement Panel Meeting held on 16th August 2006 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

IP/12. **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT 2006/07 – SECOND QUARTER REPORT**

The second quarter Performance Management Report for 2006/07 was submitted. It summarised the Council's performance in relation to the Corporate Plan milestones, Improvement Plan targets, the Community Strategy milestones that the Council had responsibility for and Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's). As with previous reports, a "traffic light" assessment of likely achievement had been made by the responsible manager. Each section summarised progress and performance, comparing this with the predicted out-turn and the previous year's achievements. The summaries of performance would be reported to relevant policy committees together with comments and recommendations from the Panel. Policy committees would receive a more comprehensive report of service level performance data for their services.

Officers presented the summary position for the whole Council at September 2006. Whilst the position was broadly the same as reported at the end of the first quarter, there had been a slight change relating to the Community Strategy Action Plan. The Chair reminded Members of the actions, milestones and targets being monitored. It was confirmed that the Council's performance overall continued to improve. This was demonstrated in a table showing performance against each of the key sections. There had been some slight slippage from the first quarter, but no significant movement. By the end of the second quarter, there was more certainty on the likely achievement of targets associated with projects.

Consideration was given to the Corporate Plan 2006/09. Officers confirmed that there had been some slight slippage, but the projected out-turn was still

higher than that achieved last year. The Chair questioned how the Council could ensure that no further slippage took place. It was planned to report performance data to each of the policy committees, where appropriate with suggested remedial measures, to address issues of concern. Policy Committees would be asked to approve such measures and to report back to the Improvement Panel. Councillor Atkin sought further information about the likely cause of projected failures. These tended to be schemes of a partnership nature or where external funding bids had been unsuccessful. Councillor Bell pointed out some errors in the table of Corporate Plan performance by theme and these were acknowledged.

Officers then referred to the key measures of success and in response to a request from the Chair, a definition of these key measures was provided. Eighteen key measures of success had been included within the Corporate Plan and a further table reported the position on each of these key measures at the end of September 2006. There was a discussion about the measurement of increased satisfaction and from an external assessment, it appeared that satisfaction was growing. It was questioned when this data from the Department for Communities and Local Government would be available. Councillor Atkin referred to the key measure on completing housing needs surveys and asked if there would be a further survey of affordable housing need. The Director of Community Services explained the nature of this target and the future areas to be considered, once the Housing Needs Survey had been completed.

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the conclusions for Corporate Plan performance. The overall position showed continuing improvement on projected performance, but a slight slip in the achievement of targets. Four targets indicated a probable failure and the reasons for this prediction were reported. A further seven targets were “at risk”, but had remedial measures identified to bring them back on track. In terms of the key measures of success, only one performance measure was at risk. In summary, the projections evidenced that the approach to performance management was continuing to improve overall performance levels.

With regard to the Improvement Plan and the Community Strategy Action Plan, it was still projected that all targets would be achieved. There was a discussion on the likely future format of performance reports for the Community Strategy Action Plan and how this would be viewed externally if the Panel monitored only those targets that the Council was responsible for. Reference was also made to the Government White Paper and its potential impact for both the District Council and its partners. A comparison was made between the operation of the South Derbyshire Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the operation of other LSP's in the County. From an external source, it had been considered that the South Derbyshire LSP was more advanced in terms of its performance management arrangements.

Consideration was then given to the Best Value Performance Indicators section of the report. The summary table showed a “firming up” of the position, with more targets predicted to be achieved and some of the “at risk” indicators were now more likely to fail. The Chair referred to discussions with the external Auditors, who felt it unrealistic to achieve every target. He considered that the overall performance at 84% was phenomenal. Officers agreed that there was a need to focus on priorities and Members were

referred to a table showing the summary of performance for priority indicators. A subsequent table showed those priority indicators that were predicted to fail or at risk of failure, together with non-priority indicators that were predicted to fail.

The Director of Corporate Services referred to the priority indicator at risk of failure, for the time taken to process new benefit applications. This was used as an example to show the difficulties in achieving the section's own stringent target and yet performance was still considerably ahead of other upper quartile authorities. The impact of sickness absence was explained, together with the remedial measures taken to seek achievement of this target. However, as this performance measurement was averaged over the year, it was predicted to fail. It could be achieved by providing additional resources, but given the relative level of performance, it was questioned whether this was appropriate. In response to a question from Councillor Atkin, it was confirmed that all new benefit applications were assessed using a verification framework, which included anti-fraud mechanisms.

The Deputy Chief Executive referred to another priority indicator that was predicted to fail. This concerned violent crime and it was acknowledged that the Council had little influence on such indicators. For others, the Council could improve performance by devoting additional resources, but there was a cost/benefit analysis to be undertaken. Councillor Taylor provided a context and considered that some service areas were more important.

Councillor Bell referred to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee review of sickness absence and reported the latest figures. These showed a downward trend for the first six months, but with the winter period to come, he considered the expected out-turn of 9.5 days of sickness absence per employee was realistic. This level of performance was comparatively good to other local authorities, but in excess of that for employees in the private sector. The Director of Community Services reported that negotiations had been completed with the trade unions, to reduce the "trigger points" in the sickness absence scheme. Councillor Harrison reminded that he was still awaiting a breakdown of absence statistics for the DSO and the remainder of staff.

The Chair, as Leader of the Council had been in discussions with the Chief Executive and his Deputy, about how the statistics could be utilised to stimulate Officers or hold them to account. From his discussions with the Council's auditors, they perceived that senior members and management were enthusiastic about performance management. It was questioned whether this applied to all other Members of the Council and to all staff. Performance information could be displayed throughout Council buildings and in the public areas. An example was used to demonstrate this, relating to details of missed bin collections being displayed at the DSO.

The Chief Executive confirmed that an action plan had been approved by the Corporate Management Team. Performance information was already displayed in certain areas and a corporate approach would now be taken to inform staff. He referred to staff meetings and the improvements made in the housing service over recent years. Corporate Notice Boards were being erected this week and he explained how performance information would be displayed throughout Council buildings. This information would be updated as frequently as possible.

The Chief Executive also referred to the changing culture throughout the Council. The Chair summarised the efforts to embed this cultural change. He then reminded of the opportunity for local authorities to request a re-assessment of their rating under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The Chief Executive had met with Andrew Blackburn of District Audit and discussed the “building blocks” of evidence required to show an improvement in performance. Reference was made to the Council’s Best Value Performance Indicator data and to the importance of timing if an application for re-assessment was made. It was suggested that a detailed paper on this issue be submitted to a future meeting of the Improvement Panel. There was also a need to be mindful of the Council’s position relative to other local authorities and to look at issues where resources needed targeting.

The Improvement Panel received the second quarter Performance Management Report for the period 1st April to 30th September 2006.

IP/13. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next scheduled meeting of the Improvement Panel would take place on 24th January 2007. A further meeting of the Improvement Panel would be arranged prior to that date, if required.

B. WHYMAN M.B.E.

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.30 p.m.