

LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES DIVISION SERVICE PLAN 2002/2003

MONITORING REPORT

SERVICE DESCRIPTION

1.1 The Division is responsible for:

- **Democratic Services**
The management and administration of the Council committee process. It also includes support for the chief executive, members and the civic functions of the Council, particularly the Chair.
- **The Elections Service**
Maintains and updates the register of electors annually and on a rolling basis and administers parish, district, county, parliamentary and European elections and referenda.
- **Land Charges**
Ensures that the Local Land Charges Register is maintained and provides searches on request for residents of the District when they purchase new property. A fee is charged for this service.
- **Legal Services**
To advise the Council on all legal matters e.g. contractual arrangements, employment matters and to represent the Council in courts and tribunals. It also advises on human rights issues, the provision of information and ensuring that the new constitution is followed and kept up to date.
- **Public Relations**
To oversee the public relations and media relations functions of the authority.

ACHIEVEMENTS

2.1 The Division achieved the following:

- **Governance**
The new political management arrangements were implemented with effect from July 2001 and reviewed by the Council in May 2002. The new Ethical Framework was implemented, including training sessions for district and parish councillors on the new Members' Code of Conduct - adopted by the Council in March 2002 - and all members have signed to observe the Code.
- **Customer Satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction questionnaires on Legal Services demonstrated a rating of 82.5% as excellent or good, while those from participants in internally provided Member Training gave a rating of 100% as very good or good.

□ **Prosecutions**

Successful Magistrates' Court prosecutions were carried out for a number of offences, including dog fouling, health & safety breaches and public nuisance.

□ **Members' Allowances**

An independent remuneration panel was established to assist in the process of determining members' allowances.

□ **Electoral Registration**

A rolling register of electors was successfully introduced, as were systems to effect the entitlement of any person to have a standard postal vote.

□ **E-Government**

Good progress has been made in the provision of information via the Internet and email on democratic services, including Council membership, committee decisions, timetables and deadlines.

□ **Ombudsman**

There have been no complaints over the year resulting in a finding by the Local Government Ombudsman of maladministration by the Council.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

3.1 The following are areas where there is scope for possible improvement in the delivery of the Division's services:

- Not all staff within the Division have benefited from Personnel Development Review (PDR) interviews, owing to two senior management staff vacancies. This is currently being addressed by a recently-appointed interim manager, pending the appointment of permanent replacements.
- Few members of the public have attended open Council and committee meetings. It is hoped that public interest in the democratic decision-making process can be increased by additional publicity on access rights.

SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS

4.1 The following service development was introduced:

- A rolling register of electors and standard postal voting arrangements - £6,000.

BUDGET REDUCTIONS

5.1 The following budget reductions were achieved:

- Net savings on Civic Car - £900.
- Reduction in various consumable budgets - £900.
- Reduction in distribution list for committee papers - £8,000.
- Reduction in part-time support for Register of Electors - £2,110.

NEW/EMERGING ISSUES

6.1

- National Land and Property Gazetteer – working with other departments within the Council and our software provider to ensure that the Land Charges System is integrated with Planning and Building Control.
- Partnerships and Procurement – looking at closer working partnerships with other Councils and the private sector to share knowledge, expertise and potential.
- Proposals in the Local Government White Paper are likely to have a significant impact on the work of the Division. As mentioned previously, changes have been introduced to the Best Value regime and there are plans to conduct Comprehensive Performance Assessments of all Councils. This will place additional emphasis on performance management and review.
- Respond to District Audit Report on Democratic Renewal.

REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE

Best Value Reviews

Review	Completion Date (show revised date in bold italics)	Status and Progress to Date
Democratic renewal	March 2004	Democratic services, the Council's civic role and elections
Legal services	March 2005	Legal services

Corporate Key Tasks

CSF Ref. No.	Proposed Action	Timescale	Progress to 31 March 2002	Revised Timescale
A1	<p>Put in place arrangements for good corporate governance</p> <p>Revise the existing codes of conduct for employees and members in the light of the new ethical framework for local government, and provide professional support in their implementation.</p>	Apr 2002	<p>Members' Code of Conduct adopted by Council 21 March 2002. All members have signed up to observe the Code and have completed a register of interests. Two training sessions held for district council members and two for parish councils, supported throughout adoption and declaration process. Currently awaiting guidance on National Code of Conduct for Employees to be issued.</p> <p>Once employees' Code issued, protocol to be adopted by Council and incorporated into Constitution.</p>	Oct 2002
	Develop a protocol covering employee/member relationships	Apr 2002		Oct 2002

	Monitor and revise (if necessary) the new political management arrangements	Apr 2002	Overview Committee has reviewed implementation of new political management arrangements and action plan for Constitution completion approved by Council on 16 May 2002.	-
C4	Establish training and development plans for members Modern member development programme	May 2002	Preparatory work undertaken to identify members' training needs. In-house and regional already training courses undertaken up by some members. Four members are regular users of the Open Learning Centre within the Personnel & Development Division.	Ongoing
H1	Public relations Redefine the role of the Public Relations Officer to become more pro-active in relation to press/media coverage	Oct 2001	Achieved. Press coverage targets exceeded.	Ongoing

Service Key Tasks

Key Aim	Proposed Action	Timescale	Progress to 31 st March 2002	Revised Timescale
B1	Implement new departmental and service planning framework Service plan to be in place Improve on current levels of customer satisfaction questionnaires to service users	Nov 2001 Nov 2001 - Aug 2002	Achieved Legal Services customer questionnaire produced overall rating of 82.5% good or excellent, 17% satisfactory. 100% of member feedback on internally provided training was	- Nov 2002

					“very good” or “good”. Other services still to be tested.	
CE6	Establish training and development plans for employees All staff within Legal & Democratic Services Division to have received a PDR interview and have an individual training & development plan	Mar 2002			Not all yet achieved owing to staffing vacancies within Division.	Jul 2002
G2	Implement absence management policy Reduce overall level of absence within the Division as a whole	Mar 2003			Absence level 1.5%, well within Government guidelines (3%)	Mar 2003
I	Managing service delivery To make key performance and financial management information available on a regular basis	Nov 2002			Such information has been the subject of regular reports to the Finance and Management Committee	Nov 2002
D2	E-government Implementation of e-government in service delivery	Mar 2003			E-mail access to available members via Council's website. Decision notices and action sheets from Committees distributed by e-mail. Various information available to available members. Information available on Public Folders relating to committee timetable, committee report deadlines, committee compositions, chairs/clerks to parish councils, county councillors. Minutes Retrieval system in the final stages of completion.	Mar 2003
G1	Improving morale Improving communication with employees at service level To take responsibility in assisting with	Continuous			To be addressed within current PDR interview process	Oct 2002
		Continuous			- ditto -	Oct 2002

	improving staff morale					
H2	Promote a right first time ethos Ensuring people are treated fairly and equally Ensuring service delivery is compliant with corporate equality guidance	Continuous	- ditto -	Oct 2002		
CE1	Modernisation of local government – improvements to member services To develop, implement and maintain modern systems, procedures and techniques to meet the administration needs of the authority in the areas of the civic functions, committee administration and members' services To implement a programme of structured training to meet members' needs To implement an effective minutes retrieval system	May 2002	Owing to staff vacancies within Division, work still required in undertaking equalities audit and reviewing current practices.	Oct 2002		
		Jun 2001	Ongoing, subject to reviewed on appointment of Legal and Democratic Services Manager.	Oct 2002		
		Jun 2001	See C4 above	Ongoing		
		Oct 2001	System in the final stages of completion – implementation due shortly.	Jul 2002		
CE2	Land Charges To ensure further efficiencies in the operation of the Local Land Charges service To increase awareness of members in the Land Charges system	Feb 2002	Although this has been delayed owing to staff sickness absences etc, the proposed rationalisation of electronic land & property gazetteers should lead to notable improvements	Oct 2002		
		Feb 2002	Cllr Harrington, E-Champion, has already attended and actively contributed to the GIS Working Party and has also been invited to visit Local Land Charges section with a view to raising member awareness	Oct 2002		

CE3	Elections and electoral registration To provide increased support for elections and electoral registration	Feb 2002	Increased support currently under review	Oct 2002
CE4	Legal Services To perform council house sales legal work effectively from within the team	May 2002	Paralegal support being developed within team with a view to bringing legal work into in-house legal service	Oct 2002

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND TARGETS

Best Value Performance Indicators

BVPI No.	Title	Government Target	Target 2002/03 (bold italic if new/revised)	Actual 2001/02	Estimate 2001/02	Target 2001/02	Actual 2000/01	Top Performing District Councils 2000/01
	The number of complaints to an ombudsman classified as maladministration	Local	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
	The %age turnout for local elections	Local	35.00 (May 2003)	As 1999	As 1999	N/A	32.79 (1999)	37
	The %age of standard searches carried out in 10 working days	Local	90	84.36	90.00	90	94.09	100

Local Performance Indicators

Local Indicator	Target 2002/03 (bold italic if new/revised)	Actual 2001/02	Estimate 2001/02	Comments
Democratic Services				
%age no. of items/reports not available 5 clear days before relevant meeting	5	15	5	
%age member attendance at meetings	95	95	90	
No. of members of the public speaking at member meetings	10	3	10	More publicity required.
No. of member training days provided	150	94	110	
The overall satisfaction %age immediately after internally provided members training	90	100	60	Although only 30% return, all received rated training as "very good" or "good"
No. of attendance by Chair and Vice Chair at non civic organised functions	280	250	300	
%age of events where the Chair arrives punctually	100	100	100	
%age of replies to invitations to the Chair prepared and sent out within 3 working days of the invitation being received	90	95	85	
Elections				
%age of households returning the Form A1	99	98	99	
Land Charges				
%age of standard searches carried out in 10 working days	90	84	90	The actual figure quoted would have exceeded 90% for the year, were it not for sickness absences during the 4 th quarter.
Legal Services				
%age completion of LEXCEL accreditation	75	75	50	
%age of written communications responded to within 10 working days	97	96	95	

Public Relations Increase press/media coverage of the services/functions undertaken by the Council to average 4 press releases per week	4	5	N/A	
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