

IMPROVEMENT PANEL

25th May 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillors Carroll, Harrington, Taylor and Bell (substitute for Councillor Whyman M.B.E.)

Conservative Group

Councillors Atkin, Ford and Harrison.

In Attendance

Councillor Stone (Labour Group)

IP/44. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

It was agreed that Councillor Whyman M.B.E. be appointed Chair of the Improvement Panel for the ensuing year. In his absence, it was agreed that Councillor Carroll be appointed Chair for the Meeting.

IP/45. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Murphy and Whyman M.B.E. (Labour Group).

IP/46. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th May 2005 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

IP/47. **MATTERS ARISING - 2005/06 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (BVPI)**

Further to Minute No. IP/43, there was a discussion on Member feedback on the BVPI priorities. Councillor Taylor highlighted a number of Performance Indicators that were not currently designated as a priority. In particular, he referred to BVPI 156, which concerned accessibility to buildings. The determination of priorities was a matter for Members. Officers explained that BVPI 2, which concerned the equality standard for local government, was considered as a priority. It was felt that this impacted on other issues like accessibility to buildings. There was a discussion about BVPI's for private sector housing. The Director of Community Services explained that Council had approved £1 million of funding for a private sector housing programme. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration felt that local indicators might be more useful for private sector housing, possibly equivalent to the Decent Homes Standard. The Deputy Chief Executive agreed that such an indicator for this area would be useful.

Councillor Taylor then referred to the Waste and Cleanliness section of the BVPI Priority Report. He questioned the significance of certain indicators and particularly the percentages and tonnages of waste collected. Reference was

made to BVPI 199 concerning litter and detritus. This was an issue of concern to local people and he sought clarification on whether the Council was achieving the required standards. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration explained how this priority list was prepared to show Government priorities and local priorities. Councillor Taylor asked whether there were BVPI's for the Environmental Health Service area. Whilst there were new indicators from this year, it might be difficult to gather sufficient data. However, this area could be made a local priority. In response to a further question from Councillor Taylor, there was a discussion around BVPI's relating to racial incidents.

IP/48. **BACKWARD LOOK EFFICIENCY STATEMENT (GERSHON)**

It was reported that part of the process for showing efficiency gains in the current financial year involved the submission, to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, (ODPM) of a "Backward Look" Statement. This had to account for efficiency measures taken in 2004/05 that had an impact in 2005/06 and which would be maintained through to 2007/08. When taken together with those efficiency gains included in the Forward Look Annual Efficiency Statement (AES), they set out how the Council would achieve its 2005/06 efficiency target of £240,000.

The technical note issued by the ODPM classified how efficiencies could be achieved. These were set out within the report and translated into "cashable" and "non-cashable" gains. Demonstrating non-cashable gains could be more difficult. The guidance stipulated that qualitative cross checks must be undertaken. They included reference to national BVPI's, or in the absence of these, local qualitative indicators had to be established. A copy of this statement was appended to the report and there were quality cross-check criteria for each efficiency area. The use of these cross checks was to ascertain overall performance of the service to create a context for the efficiency claim.

The ODPM areas for efficiency gains included in the Council's Backward Look AES were local authority social housing, procurement and productive time. The report explained the approach adopted to establish the potential efficiency gains in 2004/05 that could be included in the Backward Look Statement. Each proposed efficiency gain had been verified by reference to supporting evidence, capable of clearly demonstrating achievement of the efficiency. More guidance on measuring efficiencies had recently been issued by the ODPM together with "Toolkits" on how to cater for efficiency gains related to procurement and transactions. This information had been taken into account when assessing the efficiency gains, which were set out within the report.

Councillor Harrison referred to the productive time efficiency gain that related to the reduction in sickness absence. He felt that the value of this gain should reflect the extra staff productivity. Officers explained that this had been factored in, but it was difficult to quantify. Members were reminded of the recent guidance received from the ODPM on productive time.

Councillor Ford noted that many of the saving areas were qualified. Officers explained that an honest approach had been taken and whilst the Backward Look Plan was factual, the caveats related to future achievement. For example if the BVPI relating to sickness absence changed, it would impact on future savings. The Deputy Chief Executive referred to the quality cross check and the potential impact on poor performing authorities, to have elements of their Gershon savings discounted. In response to a question from Councillor Atkin, it

was confirmed that the procurement savings from the purchase of a new telephone system would continue into future years. The transfer of the system to a new supplier had resulted in reduced contract costs.

IP/49. **CORPORATE PLAN 2004/07 – PROGRESS ON YEAR 1 MILESTONES**

A report was circulated which gave information on the year end milestones for 2004/05 that were completed, partially completed or where little or no progress had been made. The milestones were categorised by each of the Council's key aims, under the headings of Caring for Environment, Economic Development, Crime and Disorder, Improving Services, Good Quality Homes, Leisure Activities, Supporting the National Forest and Community Leadership.

Members considered particular milestones and took the opportunity to ask questions. On the key aim of Caring for the Environment and with regard to milestones where little or no progress had been made, it was confirmed that the resource constraints related to staff rather than finances. There was a discussion about the restructuring of the grass cutting service. Members discussed the key aim of Improving Services, where a number of partially completed milestones were prioritised for implementation/delivery. The Director of Corporate Services explained the progress being made in the Contact Centre and with regard to the Pericles computer system for the Revenue and Benefit Service. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration confirmed the staffing resource constraints and other priorities for some service areas, which had resulted in the delay in delivery on some milestones. The Chair was concerned over the staffing resource constraints. There were two new posts for the Policy and Economic Regeneration Division and it was hoped that this would help to resolve the difficulties experienced. The Deputy Chief Executive commented on the equivalent time lost through vacant posts and the impact on delivery of milestones.

Councillor Atkin referred to the Risk Management Strategy and asked when this would be rolled out. The Director of Corporate Services explained the approach being taken and advice was being sought from Zurich Municipal. Members would be involved in this process with appropriate training provided. There was an expectation that Risk Management would be embedded throughout the organisation. Levels of awareness within the Council were good and there was a need to formulate this awareness into a tight Risk Management process.

With regard to the key aim on Good Quality Homes, Councillor Harrison asked about milestones relating to responsiveness of repairs. There was a new Best Value Performance Indicator for this area, but to date, the key issues had been around fitness for purpose and the stock options process. Milestones could now focus on such issues as repairs. The Director of Community Services added that the imminent Best Value Review of Housing would look at this area. In response to a further question, he confirmed that the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan would be submitted to Members for approval, before being sent to the Government Office for the East Midlands in August of this year.

On the key aim for Leisure Activities, Councillor Harrison noted there was no reference to activities for older people. It was suggested that this issue be considered in the seminar which followed the meeting, on the new Corporate Plan. Under the Key Aim of supporting the National Forest, Councillor Taylor asked about the application of specific National Forest guidelines and he felt that these might not be interpreted accurately. Councillor Atkin noted that the

Rosliston Forestry Centre had featured in a recent television programme. Under the Community Leadership Key Aim, Councillor Atkin reported on the progress made by Aston-on-Trent Parish Council with regard to its Parish Plan.

The Deputy Chief Executive provided a summary on the report and clarification about the progress made in certain areas. This was a self-assessment process by Heads of Service, who might at times be self-critical. Overall, he considered that the achievements made were greater than the report reflected.

IP/50. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the next Improvement Panel Meeting be held on Wednesday, 8th June 2005 at 5.00 p.m.

J.D. CARROLL.

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.10 p.m.