

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SCRUTINY  
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2007**

**MEMBERS**

\* Cllr S M Fairman - Chairman

\* Cllr B C Evans - Vice-Chairman

\* Cllr G J Fielden

\* Cllr P W Hitchins

∅ Cllr C M Pannell

\* Cllr J T Pennington

\* Cllr G Rothwell

\* Cllr J W Squire

\* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman:

Cllrs D W May, M F Saltern, I P Steer, D W S Thorning, R J Tucker and R O Yonge

Officers in attendance:

Items 6, 7 and 8 (Minutes SC.55/06, SC.56/06 and SC.57/06 below refer) – Health and Safety Advisor;

Item 6 (Minute SC.55/06 below refers) – Strategic Director (Operations), Head of Business Development and Head of Operations;

Item 7 (Minute SC.56/06 below refers) – Head of Improvement and Corporate Improvement Officer.

**SC.52/06 WELCOME**

The Chairman welcomed Darryl White to his first Scrutiny meeting since the reallocation of duties within Member Support Services.

**SC.53/06 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny held on 18 January 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**SC.54/06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but none was made.

**SC.55/06 REVIEW OF CHANGES – WASTE COLLECTION**

Scrutiny considered a report which updated it on the progress of changes to household waste collection services within the South Hams.

The report concluded that the waste collection service had been changed dramatically over the past three years to accommodate changes in customer expectation and legislation imposed on councils. Clearly, the residents of the South Hams wished to recycle and compost their waste and it was for the Council to determine how best it enabled them to do so within the confines of a limited budget resource.

The Council and its residents were achieving huge results in the field of recycling which put the South Hams in the top ten councils in the UK for recycling and composting. However, it was important to not lose sight of the householder in this achievement and ensure that future waste services were as reliable as possible. To recognise the major shift change in service which had taken place, further work would be undertaken to streamline collections and further embed new policies and procedures.

Prior to the debate taking place, the Chairman and Members welcomed the honesty of what was a comprehensive and fully detailed report, which it was felt should be used as a guide for future subject reviews.

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- (a) the current service operating at 9.3% over budget. Officers advised that this was largely as a consequence of: the employment of additional agency staff and payment of overtime rates; increased repair and maintenance costs; an expansion to the vehicle fleet; increased fuel costs and the temporary use of additional resources from a neighbouring area; and the costs of publishing leaflets and educating residents. Officers stated that the current situation was not insurmountable and they intended to work hard to address the current budgetary position during the first quarter of 2007/08.

Members noted that the projected overspend of approximately £190,000, had begun to be redressed through the releasing of temporary staff and reductions in overtime. In operational terms, officers were currently evaluating whether it would be beneficial to establish a pool of staff resource to ensure adequate cover for issues such as holidays and illness;

- (b) comments made at the Business Board (Operations Team) meeting held on 21 February 2007. The Group noted that some Board Members were disgruntled that the report had not been considered in the first instance by the Board. In response, officers advised that the primary remit of the Board was to monitor and analyse performance against budget, other indicators and business plans on a quarterly basis and not to examine policy or procedures;

- (c) the re-organisation of refuse crews. Members cited examples where problems in the re-organisation of refuse crews had resulted in a number of instances where waste had not been collected. In response, the Executive Member for Clean Environment acknowledged that in hindsight, whilst training was given to refuse crews, he felt it was apparent that this was not sufficiently adequate. A Member felt it to be understandable due to the enormity of the re-organisation in such a rural area, that there would be an initial increase in the number of missed collections;
- (d) the amounts of household waste collected. It was noted that the weight and volume of household waste collected had exceeded original estimates and was causing operational difficulties, as it was evident that the capacity of the existing recycling collection vehicles was inadequate;
- (e) the in vessel / process plant. Officers confirmed that the composting process plant at Heathfield, Newton Abbot was in operation to serve both Teignbridge and South Hams District Councils. The Executive Member for Clean Environment extended an invite to any Scrutiny Members who were interested in visiting the process plant;
- (f) the role of the Customer Services Team (CST). A Member questioned whether it would have been more appropriate for enquiries to have been directed to the Operations Team, instead of the CST during the initial roll-out stage. In response, officers advised that if the Operations Team had been handling the volume of calls received, the system would have failed and the vetting system administered by the CST had been beneficial during the roll-out. However, officers did accept that there was a need to improve the link between the software used by the CST and the Operations Team and also between each depot, with the current lack of broadband at Torr Quarry being a hindrance. Officers also advised that work was being undertaken to improve the links and anticipated that short-term improvements would be in place within the next 6 months;
- (g) the conflict between the districts and Devon County Council with regard to the obligations under section 51 of the Environmental Protection Act. Members were provided with an update on the current position and noted that a joint paper was currently being compiled, which it was hoped would present a number of potential solutions, with conclusions being reached in the ensuing weeks. Officers provided assurances that Members would be kept informed of the situation;

- (h) communications during the process. It was noted that the incorrect delivery of information leaflets in some parts of the district regarding the new collection days, was attributed to a sorting problem with the selected company. This problem had not been apparent until householders had begun to receive the leaflets. Members were informed that as soon as officers had become aware of the problem, the Council had sent out revised publications and would now negotiate a reduction on the initial fee with the company.

With regard to informing town and parish councils, officers acknowledged that they had under-estimated the scale of the holiday close down during August. This had resulted in a perception amongst town and parish councils that they had been informed about the changes late in the project. In addition, there was only a short time span to undertake crew training, during what was the peak tourist season;

- (i) procedures for preventing contamination. Officers provided details to Members of the current policy for contamination and stated that it was not considered to be a significant problem. The approach of educating and co-operating with residents, as opposed to being confrontational, was welcomed by Members;
- (j) the South Hams being in the top 10 councils in the UK for recycling and composting. A Member reminded those in attendance that the overall quality of the service should not be lost sight of. A Member also emphasised his belief that the Council should lead on this service, should it be deemed appropriate for a shared service initiative with Teignbridge to be embarked upon in this service. The Executive Member for Clean Environment advised that he had requested that officers undertake an extensive review of the household collection service and stated his belief that in the long-term, a far better service would be offered at a more efficient cost to the Council;
- (k) feedback obtained from refuse crews. It was noted that a meeting had recently been held as part of the review of the roll-out and feedback from crews was currently being collected. Officers emphasised the importance of crews having sufficient local knowledge to ensure in the future, that 'missed collections' be solely as a consequence of either refuse not being out at the right time, not sited on the kerbside, or being contaminated.

## **RESOLVED**

That the Group notes the progress made in the introduction of the waste changes and supports further investigation to streamline the service.

**SC.56/06 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – PROGRESS REPORT**

Members considered a report which kept them informed of achievement against selected Performance Indicators. Regular monitoring of indicators was an essential part of securing value for money for service users and the taxpayer, as any dip in performance could be identified quickly and action taken to investigate the likely cause and be on line to meet targets.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Members wished for it to be recorded that the in-depth explanatory notes which accompanied the indicators were most useful;
- (b) A Member questioned whether sickness absence was increasing. In response, it was noted that figures were improving and there were very few instances of long-term sickness cases amongst employees at present;
- (c) The Chairman of the Development Control Committee commended the performance of Members and those staff responsible for the determining of planning applications, particularly in light of the recent increase in work levels being experienced by the service;
- (d) The success of mediation in preventing a number of households from becoming homeless was highlighted;
- (e) Disappointment was expressed regarding the number of affordable homes currently being developed on site. A Member felt that whilst some sites could be brought forward in advance of the emerging Local Development Framework, it was preferable to bring housing forward slowly to ensure it be retained in the future as affordable. A Member commented that there appeared to be a plentiful supply of housing in the Plymouth area and as a consequence those seeking affordable housing could consider relocating;
- (f) Members were informed that the target for working days lost due to sickness absence would be re-set following the leisure transfer and it was accepted that this would make comparisons with previous years difficult. With regard to type of sickness absence being experienced, officers advised that managers and personnel were provided with breakdown analysis which was monitored very carefully.

**RESOLVED**

1. That Scrutiny has noted and commented on (as detailed above) performance against the national and local indicators, which currently form the Council's Balanced Scorecard (as detailed in Appendix A of the presented report), for the quarter ending December 2006;
2. That Scrutiny has noted and commented on (as detailed above) the audited outturn for all BVPI performance indicators for 2005/06 compared to national top 25%, Devon, Core Group, Excellent Districts and Sparsely populated Districts (as detailed in Appendix B of the presented report).

**SC.57/06 RISK MANAGEMENT – QUARTERLY REVIEW**

A report was considered which provided an update on risk management.

The Council's risk management systems were considered to be developing satisfactorily and the importance of ensuring that the Council continued to improve its systems and performance was noted.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the Sherford workshops facilitated. The Health and Safety Advisor provided details of the workshops and advised that the concerns identified with regard to resource availability were resolved within a matter of days;
- (b) the purchase of a generator. It was noted that an update would be provided in the next quarterly review report regarding the project. Members were informed that a 'fit for purpose' generator would be purchased in due course but as a consequence of the considerable delay experienced, it was anticipated that cost of purchase would marginally increase;
- (c) key lines of enquiry for internal control. It was agreed that a footnote would be incorporated into future quarterly reports stating why particular criteria were emboldened and designated with a star. For the purposes of internal control, Members were advised that 'significant partnerships' were defined as those where the Council had a clear liability should the partnership fail. Furthermore, a guidance document had now been created on the setting up and establishing of a new partnership, with an exit strategy now being a requirement for all partnerships entered into by the Council;

- (d) the risk management process in key projects run by the Council. The Health and Safety Advisor highlighted the need for the process to be amended for such projects. It was requested that in the future, the risk assessment be aligned to the 13 themes within the project guidance. Members stated their belief that all Members should receive a level of project management training. The point was also raised that to utilise their existing skills to the utmost, Members could be consulted far earlier during the project management process.

### **RESOLVED**

That Scrutiny has considered and noted the progress made on risk management and asks that its comments regarding partnerships and risk reporting be noted.

### SC.58/06 **AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OF SCRUTINY**

Members considered the schedule of future items for consideration and in particular reference was made to:-

- (a) the invite to attend the West Devon Borough Council meeting on 20 March 2007, at which representatives of the Primary Care Trust will be present. In response to this invite, Cllrs Fielden and Squire indicated an interest in attending;
- (b) the South West Water and Police authorities. A Member believed that Scrutiny should invite representatives from South West Water to attend a Scrutiny meeting as a matter of urgency. The Member felt that the apparent lack of accountability when budget setting was of real concern and was causing immense hardship to certain sections of the South Hams community. In addition, Members felt that a letter should be sent to the police authority outlining the concerns of Scrutiny with regard to the justification of its budget setting.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 1.15 pm).

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Chairman