

Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee
25 February 2004

Irvine, 25 February 2004 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Tom Barr, David Munn and Ian Richardson.

In Attendance

B. Devine, Chief Executive; B. MacDonald, Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion); A. Herbert, Assistant Chief Executive (Finance); J. Barrett, Assistant Chief Executive (Information Technology); I.T. Mackay, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Protective); J.M. Macfarlane, Assistant Chief Executive and G. Young, Personnel Manager (Personnel); J. Montgomery, Principal Performance Review Officer and A. Osborne and D. McCaw, Corporate & Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Barr in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Margaret McDougall, Elizabeth McLardy and Robert Rae.

1. Service Performance Reports for 6 months ended 30 September 2003

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on Service Performance for the 6 months ended 30 September 2003.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 has established Best Value and Community Planning as statutory duties for local authorities. As a result, the Accounts Commission has introduced new arrangements for the audit of Best Value which represents a significant change to the approach taken in previous years. North Ayrshire Council will be one of seven authorities to undergo an "Audit of Best Value" during 2004.

Members currently receive Annual Reviews of performance within Service Plans and Annual Reports in relation to Statutory Performance Indicators. The Council's Corporate Management Team has identified through self-assessment that performance monitoring should be improved through the introduction of half-yearly performance reporting. This should ensure that Members have a more current view of performance across Services at any given time.

Officers reported on the performance highs and lows for the six months ended 30 September 2003 and on the immediate priorities for Corporate Services as follows:-

Chief Executive's

Performance Highs

- Efficiently administered Scottish Parliamentary & Local Government Elections.
- Reviewed Council's constitutional arrangements & introduced revised committee structures.
- Delivered comprehensive induction training programme to Members of new Administration.
- Briefed Members on implications of Local Government in Scotland Act 2003.
- Developed new Community Planning structures and thematic groups.
- Facilitated timely audit, reporting and scrutiny of 2002/03 Statutory Performance Indicators.
- Established Joint Ayrshire Panel for Social Work complaints.
- Reviewed Domestic Abuse Strategy.
- Successfully recruited members for Children's Panel Advisory Committee and delivered extensive training programme for it.
- Selected by Scottish Executive to participate in 2 year Fast Track Hearings pilot.
- Secured £1/2m from the New Opportunities Fund for the Youth Justice Team.
- Produced community newspaper and supported various high-profile communications initiatives, eg community newspaper, recycling, fostering, Ayrshire Economic Forum, Marymass, schools PPP and Better Neighbourhoods.
- Began to develop Civil Contingency Plans for Allied Distillers, Chivas Brothers and Defence Munitions sites and conducted significant emergency response exercises for Nobel Enterprises and Defence Munitions.
- Managed budget effectively and reduced sickness absence to 50% of 2002/03 level.

Performance Lows

- Relative lack of quantifiable measures of performance.
- Operational difficulties with CPAC complaints process.

Immediate Priorities

- Recruit new Chief Executive.
- Lead and facilitate arrangements for new Audit of Best Value.

- Advance Risk Management Strategy in conjunction with Financial Services and Zurich.
- Continue to develop arrangements for Community Planning, including dedicated support staff and incorporation of Social Inclusion Partnership into Community Planning Partnership.
- Begin preparations for European Parliamentary Elections.
- Conduct public household survey to gauge views of Council services
- Deliver training to ensure Sysdox system is fully operational.
- Review CPAC complaints procedure.
- Provide support to partners to develop a Rape Crisis Support Service.
- Complete the in-progress Civil Contingency Plans and conduct emergency response exercise for
- Continue to develop meaningful measures of performance.

Discussion took place on the delays in responding to complaints and the officers present provided information on this. Members intimated that it would be helpful to include within future reports information on the volume of compliments and complaints pertaining to each service.

In response to Members' positive feedback regarding the Induction Training and pre budget Seminar, the Chief Executive intimated that training would continue throughout the 4 year term which would repeat some of the induction training and introduce new training for Members.

Development and Promotion

Performance Highs

- Few objections submitted to Finalised Local Plans (200 approx) and subsequent successful negotiation and withdrawal of some objections.
- Successful marketing of Montgomerie Park and selection of preferred bidders, meeting quality, timing and financial aspirations.
- Award of SNH Grant for community outdoor access to implement Community Initiatives. Inaugural meeting of Outdoor Access Forum.
- Securing of over £700,000 of EU funding - 100% success rate in applications submitted. Delivery of events programme - 3 sea based events.
- Economic impact assessment commissioned with final report December 2003.
- 165 company assists and 258 employee beneficiaries assisted representing 68% of assists target at the half year 95% of beneficiary targets.
- Launch of 2 new business support initiatives targeting 25 companies
- Launch of EU supported EQUIP programme.

- Completion of Town Centre Quality of Life improvements - Irvine and Saltcoats - project within budget and achieving training targets.
- Introduction of property related FAQs on Navigate.
- Property Particulars - continuous improvement of Particulars on Council website.
- Successful introduction of document management system within D&P;
- Departmental filing system with on-line request facilities giving total control of all files with detailed history reports.

Performance Lows

- General delays in implementing the Service Deliveyr Plan as a result of pressures on staff resources.
- Wind down of key service delivery agent (DNA) impacting on Community Economic Development service delivery.
- Staff vacancy during period.
- Delays in implementation of new Estates Management Module
- Decimation of Capital Receipts programme due to Scottish Water issues
- Growing competition from outside providers for property enquiry service loss of income.

Immediate Priorities

- Preparation for and delivery of public local inquiries on statutory plans.
- Research lobbying and joint working in respect of Scottish Water's Q&SIII.
- Instructing lawyers in the completion of sales at Montgomerie Park.
- Securing the implementation of Phase II of the Beith THI.
- Comprehensive monitoring of the Action Plan pursuant on the Scottish Executive Planning Audit Unit Report with particular regard to customer fora.
- Address community economic development issues resulting from wind up of DNA.
- Safeguard public interests re economic development activity associated with the wind up of DNA.
- Fill staff vacancy in Research and Intelligence team. Progress economic impact assessment re offshore events.
- Asset Revaluations - planned/phased valuations.
- Rating Revaluation - preparation for 2005 Revaluation.
- Asset Management Planning - a key feature of the new Prudential code - Estates will assist Asset Registrar (Financial Services) in provision of information.
- Implementation of Estates Management Module - major step towards Corporate GIS

- To liaise with Building Control and Environment re income from Property Enquiry Service. Introduction of digital recording within D&P to standardise and enable remote working.
- On-line payment system.

Discussion took place on income levels from rented properties and on the Property Enquiry Certificate service.

Finance

Performance Highs

- Successful prosecution by the Procurator Fiscal and Sheriff Court of two fraudulent claimants.
- The introduction of the customer contact centre to handle council tax enquiries.
- Improved in-year collection levels for both rates and council tax.
- Most section's service plan targets are well on course for completion by the end of the year.
- Annual accounts submitted on time, with resultant audit certificate being received unqualified.
- Debtors module of FMS has been implemented and tested. Training of key users is complete. Due to go live in October.
- CHRIS21 payroll upgrade has been implemented and tested. Training of key users is complete. Due to go live in October.

Performance Lows

- Benefits processing times have shown a further deterioration in the first half of this year.
- The introduction of tax credits has led to delays in processing benefits claims where there is a tax credit element.
- Council tax correspondence response times have suffered as a result of staff transfers to the contact centre.
- PDR's have yet to be started, although this is planned for early next year.
- Written procedures in accountancy have still to be completed.
- A strategic review of budgeting was due to be submitted to the CMT in the autumn. This is to be finalised.
- Progress against the service plan within exchequer services has been limited. This is due to the retiral of the Exchequer Manager, and delays in restructuring / appointment of a risk manager.

Immediate Priorities

- Benefits processing times will be addressed with a view to reducing the backlog.
- Migration of benefits and council tax databases to new system (i-World). This generates a requirement for staff training.
- Benefits section will continue to address their backlog through improving processing times.
- Council tax section will produce and issue 2004/05 bills. Response times for correspondence will be addressed.
- Business rates section will produce and issue 2004/05 bills.
- Internal audit will revise their terms of reference. Participation in a Audit Scotland VFM study will also take place.
- CHRIS21 and the new debtors system will both go live in October. Subsequent reviews and refinement will take place.
- PDR process will start in accountancy section.
- Best Value awareness will be raised among staff.
- Customer consultation exercise will be developed.
- E-procurement implementation will commence - finance involvement will be considerable.

Discussion took place on the increasing sickness absence levels within the Benefits Section. This is primarily due to long term sickness within the section.

The introduction of a new Management of Debt Section within Finance should have the effect of improved collection levels of Council Tax.

Information Technology

Performance Highs

- Chartermark awarded in February for 3 years. This award is the first of its kind in the Council, the first for any IT Department in Scotland, and only the second awarded to an IT Department in the UK.
- Overall level of customer satisfaction, as measured through the annual customer survey, was maintained at a very high level. In addition, the overall score is within the top quarter of UK Councils (when compared to the SOCITM benchmark).
- Targets for Service Desk performance are being met (measured using time taken to respond to and resolve problems).
- Project Management of the implementation of the Council's Telephone Contact Centre.
- Development of computer systems to support both the Contact Centre and the Cleansing Special Uplifts operation.

Performance Lows

- Service Reviews with each Council Service have not been undertaken every quarter, which is the target frequency.

Immediate Priorities

- Ensure Service Reviews are conducted every quarter.
- Ensure revenue budget shows break-even at year end.
- Maintain performance of Service Desk.
- Achieve absence management target.

Legal and Protective

Performance Highs

- Statutory performance indicators – continuation or improvement of high performance in most SPIs against increased workload in some services.
- Budget – budget continued to be effectively managed within the budgetary resources.
- Increase in income through increase in workload in most services but particularly in Building control, Development Control, Registration and Community Safety work at Trading Standards.
- Registration – continuing excellent scores in the annual assessment by the Registrar General Best Practice Notes issued by the GRO (out of 2 in Scotland) relate to North Ayrshire activities.
- Legal – all capital receipts continue to be brought in within timescale agreed with Finance
- Development Control/Building Control – implementation of upgrade to computer system to enable Corporate Land and Property Gazetteer (part of e-governance).
- Development Control – structure now in place in accordance with Scottish Executive Planning Audit
- External Food and Health & Safety Audits showed high level of service delivery.
- Legal and Protective website identified as informative and user friendly
- Trading Standards – customer surveys demonstrated high customer satisfaction.
- Building Control – lead role with Disability Discrimination Act/equal opportunities accommodated within existing resources.

Performance Lows

- Development Control –historical deficiencies in processing and monitoring of planning applications continue to result in some SPLs being in the lower quartile.
- Fabric of Townhouse in need of substantial repairs, and not conducive to delivery of a modern District Court and Licensing service.

Immediate Priorities

- Development of further KPIs to assist in measuring performance
- Review levels of staffing, I.T. And Training to ensure increased workload (reflected in increased income) is dealt with satisfactorily.
- Work with other Council Departments and external agencies to secure renovation of Townhouse.
- Follow up planning audit.

Members noted that there will be a follow up visit from the Planning Audit Team within the next 2 weeks to look at the results of the Action Plan produced 18 months ago. All issues identified by the Audit Team have been or are being addressed by the service.

Personnel

Performance Highs

- The continuing improvement in sickness absence rates as a result of the introduction of proactive personnel policies and procedures, improved monitoring arrangements and an increased role for the Occupational Health services.
- Investors in People re-accreditation for Personnel.
- Successful completion of the Work/Life Balance project with funding secured from the Department of Trade and Industry.
- The undertaking and implementation of a major organisational review of the management structure and staffing and administrative arrangements with Social Services.
- The continuing development of policies and procedures to ensure that the Council complies with the Employment Act 2002.
- A significant increase in the provision of health and safety courses including the granting of licenses from the Institute of Occupational Health and Safety for specially tailored courses for Technical Services.
- The introduction of employee benefits in the shape of alternative workplace therapies and life plans for employees.

Performance Lows

- The introduction of a Job Evaluation Scheme for the bulk of the workforce has been delayed due to system development problems at a national level and subsequent trades unions negotiations.

Immediate Priorities

- The development and introduction of a revised Grievance Procedure and consideration of Disputes Resolution and Management of Change processes.
- Revised Disciplinary Procedures for Teaching Staff.
- Facilities Agreement for Trade Union Duties and Activities.

Discussion took place on progress with the Job Evaluation Scheme and on comparisons between the sickness absence levels within Corporate Services and the Council average.

Customer Contact (Telephone contact Centre)

Performance Highs

Customer

- Achievement of 85% of calls answered.
- 94% accuracy achieved in Council Tax.
- 80%+ calls completed at first point of contact.
- 100% of forms issued within 48 hours of receiving the request.

Financial

- Project went live within budget and timescale.

Continuous Improvement & Learning

- Robust Business Continuity Plan in place.
- Changes made to the CRM as a result of customer and staff feedback, which reduced call length and increased accuracy.
- Changes made to the "Customer on Hold" message as a result of customer feedback.

Performance Lows

Customer

- Higher average handle times than expected.
- External telephony problems in July impacted on the service provided to customers.

Immediate Priorities

- Identify regular peaks and troughs and align staffing patterns to match these.
- Train, coach and develop advisers to reduce call length and further increase accuracy.
- Introduce iWorld into Telephone Contact Centre.
- Maintain existing levels of service provision to customers.

Members were advised of the new cash collection system now in operation and that all calls to the Contact Centre are voice recorded to protect staff against complaints.

Customer Contact (Local Offices)

Performance Highs

- Reorganisation of staffing resources to match revised workload arising from the transfer of telephone calls to the Telephone Contact Centre, including bringing together the Services at Largs Local Office under a loose arrangement whereby they are managed as a single Service through the Principal Officer (Local Office Services).
- Introduction of the Customer Relationship Management System aligned to the TCC.
- Exit Polls and Customer Satisfaction Surveys consistently show respondents to be satisfied with the services provided from Local Offices.
- Good relationships developed through regular meetings with Amenity Groups on the Isle of Arran and local organisations on the Isle of Cumbrae.

Performance Lows

- Staff training aligned to the TCC was not fully fulfilled.

Immediate Priorities

- Complete training for all Local Office staff in collaboration with the TCC
- Introduce monitoring processes and procedures in Local Offices aligned to the TCC
- Introduce iWorld to all Local Offices
- Ensure a quality service continues to be provided to the public for their face-to-face transactional, inquiry and information needs
- As opportunities arise, establish joint working with other public sector agencies.

2. Statutory Performance Indicators 2002/03: Scottish Context

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the Scottish context for the Statutory Performance Indicators for 2002/03.

Audit Scotland has published a number of pamphlets on SPIs which enable the Council's own performance to be set in the national context. Two of these pamphlets covering "Corporate Management" and "Environmental and Regulatory Services" were published on 15 January 2004 and 5 February 2005 respectively and are available on Audit Scotland's website.

The performance information on the Council's website will be updated in due course to include this Scottish context, therefore ensuring that it is transparent to the public and other stakeholders.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 3.20 p.m.