

**POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL**

**7<sup>th</sup> March, 2006, at 5.30 p.m.**

**Present:** Councillor Simmons (in the Chair) and Councillors Cowper, Freeman, Gibbon, Hepplewhite, Moderate, Norman, Syer, Thomson and Walker.

**Also Present:** Councillors Dickie, Howarth, Kellett, Kinghorn, Marsden, McDonnell, Smith, Stoddart and Young

**Apologies for Absence:** There were no Apologies for Absence

**Bullet Points from the Meeting of 7<sup>th</sup>. February.**

Subject to the following amendment, which was brought to the attention of Members, the Bullet Points from the Meeting of 7<sup>th</sup>. February, 2006, were approved as a correct record.

NB Under the heading, **Telephone Communication System**, the second Bullet Point should read:-

“The Head of HR informed Members that the Telephone System has very few limitations and as such can be configured exactly to the Council's needs. In effect, the system works exactly the way we want it to. The existing Call Centre technology is however a basic system and cannot be configured in the same way”

**BULLET POINTS**

**Flourishing Communities Fund – Application Process**

- The Economic and Community Development Manager was in attendance and briefed Members on the new Application Form and Guidance Notes that had been prepared for Applicants making bids for funding from the Flourishing Communities Fund.
- The Application Form had been designed to enable the collection of all relevant details, considered necessary to allow for in-depth consideration of individual applications.
- Members considered that the Form was comprehensive however a number of amendments/additions were suggested in the interest of further clarity and for the benefit of Applicants.
- The Head of Community Services and the Economic and Community Development Manager indicated that they welcomed the suggestions for amendments/additions to the Application Form and Guidance Notes made by Members.
- The Head of Community Services sought confirmation that, in accordance with normal Scrutiny procedure, confirmation and subsequent issuing of the new Application Forms and Guidance Notes could not take place until after consideration and agreement of this Panel's Recommendations by both the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. This would not take place until May, 2006.

- The Panel gave consideration to this situation and, in order to progress pending and new Applications, recommended that subject to the incorporation of the amendments/additions suggested, the Application Form and Guidance Notes be issued to Applicants immediately and that the Chairman and Members of the Scrutiny Committee be requested to confirm this action retrospectively.
- Members noted that this was not usual procedure, however they agreed that, in this instance, and for the specific reason of assisting Applicants by progressing pending and new applications, this course of action be taken and suitable Recommendations be made to the Scrutiny Committee.

### **Telephone Communication System**

- The Head of Community Services and the Customer Services Manager were in attendance, gave the Panel a comprehensive briefing and responded to questions regarding the information which had been requested by Members in relation to the Telephone Communications System.

Specific reference was made to:-

#### **1. How calls are received and routed via Cityinfo or alternatives.**

**(in addition to the information presented :-)**

- It was noted that "Quick-fix" calls were normally routed away from Cityinfo staff dealing with the more complex Revenues and Benefits enquiries.
- Callers were informed that they would be added to a queue and were given an explanation of what would subsequently happen to their enquiry.
- The number of calls was monitored on an ongoing basis.
- The facility was now available to enable Call Response times to be monitored and this would also be done on an ongoing basis.

NB Cllrs. Hepplewhite, Marsden and McDonnell left the Meeting at 6.10pm

#### **2. The number of posts currently on the establishment, and line Management Structure.**

**(in addition to the information presented:-)**

- It was noted that a desktop "Wallboard" advises the operator of staff availability and queues.
- It was possible to bring in back office staff to cover call "Peaks".
- Senior staff would also "step down" to fill in, when the occasion demanded.
- When necessary, at times of potential high activity, staff holidays were restricted.
- The Head of Community Services indicated that no Benchmarking had as yet been carried out, to allow comparison of the system with those of other Organisations. However, it was the intention to eventually compare against "Beacon" Authorities.
- The Customer Services Manager informed Members that she attended meetings of a "Partnership Group", at which standards were compared.

- 3. The number of staff currently employed to respond to Telephone Enquiries.**
- 4. The number of staff allocated to respond to the 4 “Groupings” ie Repairs, Refuse, Revs. and Bens. and Cityinfo, and how many Officers are allocated to each.**

**(in addition to the information presented:-)**

- It was noted that vacancies for 3 part time Customer Services Officers and a part time Customer Services Assistant were currently being advertised.
- Retention was an issue as other Authorities were also recruiting and there were salary level differentials between Authorities which were affecting our staff retention.
- The current Job Evaluation could go some way to overcoming this problem.
- It was acknowledged that the duties could be stressful, especially at times of high demand.

NB Cllr. Smith left the Meeting at 6.34pm

- 5. The number of calls received (per day, week, month) and “Hot Spots”, identified by the system.**
- 6. Details of the process of the Cityinfo “Call Logging” and query tracking procedure, and the rationale behind it.**

**(in addition to the information presented:-)**

- The Customer Services Manager indicated that the system was being developed on an ongoing basis and that currently 80% of all enquiries were being answered at first point of contact.

NB Cllr. Gibbon left the Meeting at 6.35pm

- Members requested that further performance figures be brought to the Panel however the Head of Community Services informed the Panel that the figures for March would be unrepresentative because of the effects of the annual issue of Council Tax/Benefit material.

The Meeting Terminated at 6.36pm