

POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL

17th July, 2007

Present: Cllr. Wilkes (in the Chair) and Councillors Cowper, Freeman, Kellett, Lodge, Martin, Simmons and Wolstenholme.

Also Present: Councillors: Dickie, Moderate, Robinson and Turnbull

Apologies for Absence: Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors McDonnell and Walker.

Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 19th June, 2007.

The Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 19th June, 2007, were approved as a correct record.

BULLET POINTS

MEMBERS ONLINE

- The Director of Legal and Administration Services was in attendance to give Members a background to the introduction of the System.
- The introduction had been brought about following consideration of E Government Requirements and ongoing Efficiency Savings.
- Following agreement at Cabinet in May, 2006, the System had been introduced on a six month trial period, which was later extended to the end of December, 2006.
- All Members had been invited to "sign up" to the system during the trial period, before the system was introduced permanently in January, 2007.
- It had been agreed that an appropriate allowance would be paid to Members to cover costs of printing etc and it was likely that the amount of the allowance would be kept under review.
- For Members with no personal access to PC's, two computers would be made available in the Members Room to facilitate access to the Members on Line system and enable the printing of required copies.
- From January, 2007, Members would only receive hard copies of papers for the Committees/Panels of which they were a member. All other papers would be available via the Members on Line system.
- Though no definitive figures were available for the meeting the Director of Legal and Administrative Services indicated that there had been substantial savings, both in the reduction in Courier time and expense, and in the reduction in the use of paper for printing.
- There was some concern that Members were not being allowed the same facilities as Members of neighbouring Authorities, however it was pointed out that a new survey was being carried out on behalf of the Panel to establish current practice and developments in those Authorities.
- The issues of the security of the material on the Members on Line site and of the site itself were also raised and Members were informed that these were being raised on their behalf with the Council's Website Manager.
- Members who did not access the Members on Line system also raised the problem of venues and times of meetings of the Committees/Panels of which

they were not a member, as they had no way of knowing venues or changes of venues.

- It was agreed that in order to assist, with immediate effect, a paper copy of the weekly Schedule of Meetings, be circulated to all Members in the weekly Courier.
- It was further agreed that Members with Email addresses be also sent an electronic copy of the Schedule of Meetings.
- Members were reminded that a survey of all Councillors had been carried out at the request of the Policy Panel, in relation to the Members on Line system. The results of the Survey had highlighted both individual issues regarding the system and more general issues of Instruction/Training.
- It was suggested and agreed that in the short term, instruction in the system would be given, to those Members requiring it, by Democratic Support and an invitation to this effect would be forwarded to all Councillors. More general IT Training could be picked up by HR's Corporate IT Training Programme.
- The results of the Survey also lent themselves to the production of a Draft Report on the Scrutiny, which would incorporate written responses to individual concerns, details of the Instruction/Training of Members and any proposed improvements to the system which the Panel may wish to discuss with the Website Manager.
- It was agreed that a Draft Report on this basis be drawn up and presented to the Panel for discussion.

TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

- The Head of Community Services and the Customer Services Manager were in attendance to give Members a further update on progress made with the current system. The update had been requested by the Policy Scrutiny Panel in October, 2006.
- Information was circulated in relation to current performance against Local Performance Indicator figures which had been drawn up following a previous request by the Policy Scrutiny Panel. The figures related specifically to the Cityinfo Service. Figures showed that over 300,000 calls a year were being handled.
- There was some concern expressed by Members that there were still specific instances of lengthy delays in responses both to telephone calls and to Voicemail messages, however the Head of Community Services indicated that there had been a general improvement. Over 70% of calls had been answered at first point of contact in 2006/2007, the target for 2007/2008 had been set at 75%. A revised target of 50% of calls to be answered within 1 minute had been set for 2007/2008.
- It was also noted that figures for some individual calls showed waiting times of well over an hour. Some investigation had taken place into these calls and indications showed that the figures may have resulted from technical anomalies. Members requested that this be looked at under the current service contract.
- Members expressed concern over the current "option" offered to callers waiting for a response, to hold and then leave a contact number. In practice the caller was automatically cut off after 3 minutes therefore there was no "option". Members requested that the recorded message be amended to give callers a clear description of what will happen. It was noted that the system was unable to give an "engaged" tone.
- Members also queried the number of calls being received via the telephone number issued on the Council Website. On average there were seven staff to cover the number. Members queried whether this was sufficient and the Head

of Community Services indicated that more analysis was necessary of demands on current staff in relation to peaks and troughs of calls.

- The Panel was informed that in essence the telephony software which had been introduced some time ago to support the initial Cityinfo centres could not now support the expanded system, the demand placed on Cityinfo had outgrown the original software and alternative software was now being considered.
- A "Lean Review" was also being carried out in conjunction with the Business Development Section, to identify and eliminate wasteful or duplicated procedures, trim down demand and eliminate unnecessary calls, with a view to streamlining and speeding up the system.

NB Councillors Kellett and Robinson left the meeting at 6.25pm

- The Panel was informed that a new Project in relation to Telephone Communications was to be forthcoming and would be headed by the Executive Director. A Project Initiation Document would be agreed and a subsequent Project Plan would be developed in relation to future requirements. Members requested that when the Project Plan had been agreed it be submitted to the Policy Scrutiny Panel for consideration.

NB Councillors Dickie and Turbull left the meeting at 6.37pm

- Members also requested that in relation to the calls held in the queuing system, if it was not already the case, the calls be dealt with "oldest first".
- It was agreed that a Draft Report be drawn up and submitted to the Panel for discussion incorporating the recommendations for short term improvement measures identified by Members.
- It was further agreed that the Project Plan which was to be prepared in relation to future investment in and development of the Council's Telephone Communications be requested when appropriate for consideration by the Policy Scrutiny Panel.

The Meeting terminated at 6.50pm