

Partnership Board

Thursday, 12 May 2005

2.00pm

Box 13, Riverside

In attendance: Councillor Linda Ebbatson (Leader of the Council)
Councillor Simon Henig (Deputy Leader of the Council)
Roy Templeman (Chief Executive)
Clive Leach CBE FRSA, (Chair, County Durham Cricket Club)
Keith O' Brien (Local Businessman)
Miriam Harte (Director of North of England Open Air Museum at Beamish)
Craig Etherington (Customer Relationship Manager)
Julie Underwood (Improvement Programme Manager)
Maxine Parkinson (Improvement Programme Co-ordinator)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Rev Paul Worsnop (Methodist Minister, Chair of Credit Union, Representative of Churches Together) and Peter Kemp (former Chair of the Housing Advisory Board).

Councillor Linda Ebbatson, Leader of the Council requested that the Board's congratulations be conveyed to Roberta Blackman-Woods on being elected as a Member of Parliament and that confirmation be sought as to whether she wished to continue to serve as a Member of the Partnership Board.

She confirmed that she had received a letter from Angela Balatti advising that she was unable to continue to serve on the Partnership Board and suggested that consideration be given at the next meeting of the Board to recruitment of additional Member(s).

Action: The Board's congratulations to be conveyed to Roberta Blackman-Woods on being elected as a Member of Parliament and confirmation to be sought as to whether she wished to continue to serve as a member of the Partnership Board.

Action: Consideration to be given to the recruitment of additional Member(s) at the next meeting of the Partnership Board.

2. Minutes of the meeting held 13 January 2005.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 January 2005 were agreed as a true and correct record.

3. Improvement & Recovery Plan Update

The Board was provided with an update on the Improvement & Recovery Plan. They were advised that since the previous meeting, a Customer Relationship Manager had been appointed and that a considerable amount of work had been undertaken on the development of the Customer Excellence Strategy. As a result, the meeting scheduled to be held in March 2005 was postponed to ensure that the information presented to the Board was meaningful and in a format that aided discussion.

A significant amount of work had also been undertaken concerning Strategic and Corporate Planning, the Board was informed. This involved the Council looking at their response to the Community Strategy, the Vision Statement and the development of key strategic/corporate documents including the Corporate Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Best Value Performance Plan and Improvement & Recovery Plan - Phase 2, ensuring they all linked together.

A copy of the Council's draft Corporate Plan was circulated at the meeting for Members' consideration. The Corporate Plan, they were advised, focussed on what the Council had achieved to date and what it hoped to achieve in the future. The Plan contained seven priorities, which were connected to the customers priorities for achievement.

A review of the progress made with regard to Improvement and Recovery Plan (Phase 1) and details of the proposals for Improvement & Recovery Plan (Phase 2) were also included in the Corporate Plan, it was confirmed. An eight page summary document would be produced, which would serve as the public interface the Board was advised.

Further details of the content and aims of the Plan were provided and it was agreed that a copy of the Plan and the summary would be circulated to Members of the Board for comment.

The importance of employees being appropriately trained to the correct standard was highlighted and the Board was advised that significant investment had been committed to implementing Improvement & Recovery Plan (Phase 1) and as a result, appropriate training including Project Management, Equalities & Diversity, and Financial Training had been provided for all relevant employees. Customer Care training for all employees was a key priority included in Improvement & Recovery Plan (Phase 2) and the introduction of cultural change would be managed through the Organisational Development programme, which included training and cross - departmental working.

The importance of Elected Members being appropriately trained was also emphasised and the Board was advised of the investment made in various initiatives and programmes as part of the Improvement & Recovery Plan (Phase 1). These included the establishment of a performance management framework, which involved the introduction of PDP's for all Members and the signing up to a Member charter, which involved commitment to training, a Member Development Programme and scrutiny support, amongst other proposals. It was emphasised that Officers and Members must work together at a strategic level to move forward the organisation and effectively deliver the Corporate Plan.

The Board was advised that they would receive a copy of the Corporate Plan within the next two-three weeks and were asked to give consideration specifically to a) how it impacted on themselves and their organisations and b) whether it was a business document that could be used to manage an organisation.

Action: A copy of the Corporate Plan and eight page summary document to be circulated to all Members of the Partnership Board for comment.

4. Customer Excellence Strategy and Customer Based Information

A discussion paper on the Customer Excellence Strategy and Customer Based Information and a copy of the draft Customer Excellence Strategy had been previously circulated to Members.

Craig Etherington, Customer Relationship Manager gave a presentation to Members of the Board on 'Achieving Customer Excellence in Service Delivery.'

His presentation focussed on the following areas:

- Our Vision for Customer Excellence
- Customer Excellence as the first priority in the Corporate Plan
- How the Council proposed to deliver the vision for Customer Excellence
- Making it Work - Key Objectives of the Strategy
- Links to other documents, projects and priorities

He made particular references to the use of the website and other accompanying mechanisms to improve access to and the delivery of services, the links with the Corporate Plan and the need to embed the appropriate culture within the organisation to deliver the strategy, the need to effectively evaluate and co-ordinate information received from customers and the importance of consistency in the Council's approach.

He then referred to the key objectives in the Strategy and outlined his proposals for achieving these objectives. Discussion and comments ensued as follows:

'To set standards that are precise, measurable and reflect the needs of and expectations of our customers'

The Board was advised that initial work had commenced with Environmental Services in this area and that it was envisaged that the Council would use focus groups of customers to consult on our standards.

To actively engage with our customers, partners and staff in the development and improvement of our services

Active engagement with customers would be undertaken in conjunction with consideration of the Staff Survey Action Plan, it was confirmed.

To create an organisation with the skills, processes and culture to deliver better access to improved public services.

A core competency framework was to be established, the Board was advised.

To make it more convenient, easier and quicker for the citizens of Chester-le-Street to do business with us

The Board was advised of the Council's proposals regarding improved ways of working, which including links with the voluntary sector and improved electronic/IT mechanisms for access to services.

To make sure that all the people of Chester-le-Street have equal access to the services that they need

Particular reference was made to the Equalities & Diversity Awareness Training being undertaken by all employees.

To make sure that access to service is the same whether in local areas/neighbourhoods or the civic centre

Mechanisms suggested included access to the website from various locations and the installation of kiosks at appropriate locations/venues. The importance of ensuring that information provided from these locations was up to date was emphasised.

To provide more responsive, more reliable, more satisfying public services that meet the expectations of the people of Chester-le-Street

The Board was advised of the proposals for the new Comments, Compliments and Complaints system, which was to be introduced in July 2005.

Deliver better access to better quality public services in the most cost effective way.

The Board was advised of the Council's proposals with regard to partnership working and working with other District Councils/County Council.

Discussion ensued on the importance of the role of the voluntary and community sector in assisting the Council in this area and particular references were made to the possible use of community centres/venues and the need to understand and engage with the community regarding their needs.

Discussion then took place on the difficulties in capturing and evaluating information received from the public, the variety of formats by which feedback/information was received and the need to respond to it appropriately.

Particular reference was made to the importance of 'ambassadors' of the Council and their role in receiving and providing information to the public. Ambassadors could include employees, elected Members or contractors employed by the Council, it was established. The Board was advised that a system for capturing information/trends for each ward was being developed as part of the Customer Excellence Strategy.

The Board's opinion on whether the actions in the Strategy were achievable within the timescale was sought and the consensus of opinion was that they were realistic and achievable. It was suggested that additional internal targets for achieving the actions in the strategy be set to ensure progress remained on schedule. The importance of continuously reminding customers, during the process of what had been achieved and the need to be consistent when implementing changes was emphasised.

5. Date and Time of Next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Board would be held in mid July 2005.

It was agreed that the topics for discussion at the next meeting would be as follows:

- Press, Publicity and Information
- Council's Corporate Plan

Discussion ensued on future options for managing the Council's external communications, ie press and publicity, which included the possibility of facilitating this through a Regional Media Centre and the appointment of consultants. It was agreed that Melanie Laws from the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) be invited to attend the next meeting of the Board to advise on this and other issues relating to Press and Publicity.

Particular reference was also made to the possibility of using 'tourism' organisations, for example One North East to assist the Council in this area.

Action: Melanie Laws (ANEC) to be invited to the next meeting of the Partnership Board to be held in July 2005.