

POLICY & REVIEW (PERFORMANCE) PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Panel held on Wednesday 21 January 2004 at 5.30 pm, in the Civic Offices, Portsmouth.

(NB: These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting.)

Present

Councillor Graham Heaney (Chair)
Councillors Nické Bentley (from 5.45 pm)
Simon Boshier
David Stephen Butler
Malcolm Hey
Steven Wylie

1 Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Councillors Michael Andrewes, Peter Guthrie and Deborah Tomes all sent their apologies for absence.

2 Declaration of Members' Interests in accordance with Standing Order 14 (AI 2)

Councillor David Stephen Butler declared a personal interest that was neither clear nor substantial in respect of agenda item 7 by virtue of his position as a Portsmouth Housing Association board member. As his interest was neither clear nor substantial, Councillor Butler indicated that he would remain in the room during consideration of this item.

3 Minutes of Last Meeting – Wednesday 17 December 2003 (AI 3)

(TAKE IN MINUTES)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Review (Performance) Panel held on Wednesday 17 December 2003 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes (AI 4)

(a) Minute 110/03 - Draft Community Strategy

Paddy May, Corporate Strategy Manager advised the meeting that over 2,000 questionnaires and leaflets had been handed out. Replies were still coming in and were being assessed.

5 Update on Budget Position (AI 5)

Roger Ching, Director of Finance and Resources gave a brief, verbal update on the budget position for 2004/5. He indicated that he had spoken to all three political groups represented on the City Council and was due to meet with their group leaders and deputy leaders on Monday 26 January 2004 to update them.

With regard to the process of setting a budget, the Director of Finance and Resources indicated that he was still unsure as to whether each of the party groups would submit their own budget proposals. He was also uncertain as to when agreement over a budget might be reached. The City Council meeting that he was currently expecting the Council Tax to be set at was due to take place on Tuesday 17 February 2004. In the event of agreement not being possible on that day, a Council Tax resolution was required to be passed by no later than Thursday 11 March 2004.

The Chair circulated a brief note highlighting the process and anticipated timetable for agreeing the Council's budget for 2004/5. The process allowed for the Performance Panel to express a view, which it could forward onto the Executive, although it was not required to. After a short discussion, members agreed that a special, one-off meeting of the Performance Panel should be held on Thursday 12 February 2004 to agree any comments that they would wish to forward to the Executive.

CSM **RESOLVED that a meeting of the Policy & Review (Performance) Panel be held on Thursday 12 February 2004 to discuss the City Council's budget.**

6 LEA Performance Management (AI 6)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Mike Fowler, Senior Assistant Director (Resources) briefly introduced the report outlining performance management arrangements within the LEA. Mr Fowler reminded the Panel that the three key delivery plans of the LEA were the Education & Lifelong Learning element of the Community Strategy, the Education Business Plan (with six key priorities) and the Economic Development Plan (with five priorities). Mr Fowler explained that there were a range of specific plans, reviews and monitoring arrangements which played a key role in the delivery of these three key issues. Although he accepted that a significant proportion of management's time was spent on monitoring, Mr Fowler assured the Panel that it was always to an end with a specific target or priority in mind.

DELL **RESOLVED that the LEA performance management arrangements as described in the report be welcomed.**

7 Homelessness Review and Strategy Proposals Update (AI 7)

Mr Dave Adams, Housing Office Research Analyst and Tony Nicholas, Business Strategy & Solutions Manager gave a presentation to the Panel on the progress being made in respect of homelessness in Portsmouth.

Mr Adams outlined the trends in homelessness applications and acceptances in the city. He also reminded the Panel that the key objectives in the Housing Service's homelessness strategy were to reduce the overall level of homelessness, reduce the use of inappropriate temporary accommodation, reduce repeat homelessness, ensure the provision of good quality housing advice and also to secure continuous service improvement. Prevention of homelessness was at the forefront of the Housing Service's work.

With regard to reducing the overall level of homelessness, Mr Adams explained that issues relating to the termination of assured shorthold tenancies which were being addressed. Domestic violence and parental evictions required a different approach but support was given to the individuals involved, as appropriate. With regard to the future targets to reduce the number of households accepted as homeless had been set. It was hoped that the level of homelessness in Portsmouth would be halved over a five year period.

Mr Adams explained that the Housing Service was seeking to develop an approved landlord accreditation scheme, in consultation with colleagues in Environmental Health & Trading Standards. Issues relating to difficulties that many tenants had in securing a deposit for accommodation were being monitored and addressed. Officers looked carefully at the local links to Portsmouth that were claimed by homeless applicants but Mr Adams explained that local links to an authority were not the only factor in whether someone was accepted as homeless.

Mr Adams pointed out that some of the advice and assistance that the Housing Service was able to provide was dependent on government funding. The Homelessness Directorate, part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) funded a range of initiatives aimed at reducing homelessness. A proportion of that funding was however subject to an annual bidding process. The uncertainty over funding potentially caused difficulties.

With regard to questions as to the cost of the homelessness strategy, Mr Adams suggested that they were likely to be neutral or even a saving for the City Council. Not having to use bed and breakfast accommodation and enabling tenants to remain in their existing accommodation longer prevented additional demands being made on other City Council services.

Members congratulated members of staff within the Housing Service for the excellent progress which had been made so far. They asked for a further update to be given at the end of summer 2004.

RESOLVED that (1) progress to date in terms of reducing homelessness be noted and that;

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(2) all members of the Housing staff involved in the homelessness strategy be congratulated on the encouraging progress that has been made so far.

8 Review of Achievement of LPSA Targets (AI 8)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Paddy May, Corporate Strategy Manager briefly introduced the report. He reminded the Panel that Portsmouth's local public service agreement that had been signed in July 2002 was due to run until March 2005. Performance reward grants of £4.35 million were at stake, with each of the city's 13 targets potentially being worth £335,000 if they were achieved.

Members noted that they were due to receive a presentation on processing benefit claims at their meeting in February 2004. They also indicated that they would be interested in receiving further information relating to the number of people killed and seriously injured in road accidents within Portsmouth at the same meeting.

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Members indicated that they would like officers to monitor the situation regarding any data and reporting difficulties in respect of the employment rate of disadvantaged groups such as lone parents (target 4).

RESOLVED that the Panel

(1) note the achievement of each individual target and;

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(2) receives an update at a future meeting in respect of target 7 (the number of people killed and seriously injured in road accidents within Portsmouth.

9 Comprehensive Performance Assessment Update (AI 9)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Martin Evans, Head of Strategy briefly introduced the report. The City Council's total weighted score for the CPA had risen from 39 to 44 which was only two points short of the score needed to be graded as an "excellent" authority. Mr Evans indicated that there were likely to be major changes to the CPA from the year 2005. Portsmouth was currently rated as a "good" authority and our next compulsory corporate assessment might therefore not be done until 2006 or 2007.

RESOLVED that (1) the Panel notes the marked improvement in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of our services;

(2) it welcomes the performance improvements being sought to consolidate and improve our position on service scores so as to increase the chances of improving our CPA rating in 2005.

10 Date of Next Meeting (AI 10)

Members noted that meetings of the Panel would be held on Thursday 12 February 2004 (dealing with budget) and then Wednesday 25 February 2004 at 5.30 pm.

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm.

Chair