

POLICY & REVIEW (PERFORMANCE) PANEL

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Policy & Review (Performance) Panel held in the Civic Offices at 4.00 pm on Thursday 22 March 2007. (NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting)

Present

Councillors Jason Fazackarley (Chair)
Alistair Thompson (Vice-Chair)
Frank Jonas
Richard Jensen
April Windebank

Officers

David Williams
Valerie Lane
Simon Rutter
David Adams
Paddy May
Martin Evans

20 Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Howard Jones, Simon Bosher, Steven Wylie, and Anthony Martin.

21 Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

22 Minutes of Meeting held on 15 February 2007 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Review (Performance) Panel held on 15 February 2007 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendment in relation to members' interests, and signed by the Chair.

23 Progress on Spend to Save Schemes 2006/07 (AI 4)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Financial Services which sets out the progress made to date on Spend to Save schemes approved by the City Council. The Panel heard that it is too early to report on the progress of those schemes with a starting date after January 2007, so progress on those schemes will be reported later in the year. The forecast savings for 2006/07 and later years for all Spend to Save schemes have already been deducted from cash limits, so any shortfall in savings must be found elsewhere within the relevant cash limit.

In response to questions, the Panel heard that

- The City Solicitor is currently reviewing the structure of his department and this may lead to further permanent appointments of solicitors as well as the two solicitors who will be appointed as part of the current Spend to Save scheme.
- Although the Energy Efficiency Officer has not yet been appointed, advertisements for the post have now been published. Meanwhile, the Joint Sustainability Group and Asset Management Services are looking at sustainability issues.
- With regard to the Reshaping of Adult Services (Spend to Avoid Cost Scheme), confirmation was given that the latest CPA results will be factored into this exercise.

RESOLVED that

(1) progress on the schemes as outlined in paragraph 4 of the report be noted;

(2) a further report be brought to this Panel at the end of the first quarter of the new municipal year.

24 Progress on Use of Resources Process Project – Financial Services Best Value Action Plan and DA Management Letter Action Plan (AI 5)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

To consider the attached report from the Head of Financial Services which updates members on progress made to date on the action plans drawn up as a result of the Financial Services Best Value Review and the District Audit Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2004/05.

The Panel heard that this progress report concentrates on those tasks in the Use of Resources Process Project which were programmed to be undertaken between February 2006 and the end of 2006/07 and which relate specifically to the Action Plans drawn up as a result of the Financial Services Best Value Review and the District Auditor's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.

In December 2006, the Use of Resources Process Project Board agreed to concentrate resources on those high priority tasks that it was considered essential to complete if the score for the use of resources element was to be improved from two to three for 2006/07. The Panel heard that those items show as green (Appendix 1) are either progressing in accordance with the timetable and without any problems or have already been completed.

Those actions shown as amber (Appendix 2) reflect tasks where there have been some slippage against the timetable or where there are some minor problems preventing progress. Appendix 3 shows the two tasks still shown as red. A great deal of progress has been achieved since the last detailed progress report to the Policy & Review (Performance) Panel in October 2006. Whilst most of the actions arising from the Financial Services Best Value Review and the DA Management Letter Action Plans are on track to be completed as planned, the need to divert resources to the high priority tasks in the Use of Resources Process Project have had an impact on progress. In response to questions the Panel heard that

- There is now a full complement of accounts staff which has led to greater efficiency
- There are two items whose status is currently on red: the Budget Book and the Internal Audit Risk Assessment. The Budget Book will now be published by 1 April 2007. The Audit Manager is working with the South Coast Unitaries Audit Group to improve the current red status of the Internal Audit Risk Assessment.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

25 CPA Score for 2006 and CPA Programme Update (AI 6)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Strategy which provides the Panel with a summary of Portsmouth City Council's recently announced Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) rating, the second to be received by the authority under the "Harder Test" regime, introduced in 2005 and provide a summary of progress on the "Improving Our CPA Scores Programme" that is working to achieve Portsmouth City Council's CPA objectives.

The Panel heard that the "Harder Test" aims to provide councils with a tougher test with a stronger focus on service users and value for money. Appendix 1 of the report shows a graphical illustration of the framework for CPA. Scores for CPA remain based on an aggregate of service scores, plus a "use of resources" judgement and a periodic corporate assessment. The Portsmouth City Council's overall CPA score remains at three stars (out of four) for 2006. Some 80% authorities are now within the top two CPA tiers (ie three or four stars), but this proportion is likely to decrease in 2008/09 when all authorities will be rated based on their new (ie under the Harder Test regime) Corporate Assessment score.

PCC's judgement from the Audit Commission for direction of travel was "not improving adequately" which is the lowest level on the four point scale used in the assessment. It was felt that this judgement was not a true reflection of PCC's rate of performance improvement. A request was therefore made for a review of the decision by the Audit Commission.

The Chief Executive of the City Council advised the Panel that

- A letter had been received from the Regional Director of the Audit Commission confirming that there would be no change to the direction of travel assessment which therefore remains at "not improving adequately".
- The procedure for the appeal did not show much evidence of transparency.
- It is not clear from the letter received from the Regional Director whether any of the supporting evidence was considered.

- The assessments are not yet on the website and consequently although it is known that 18 authorities appealed against their assessments, it is not yet clear which authorities have had a response.
- The Chief Executive will pursue the matter further, although it is recognised that the PCC is not in a very strong position with the Audit Commission, having already appealed against the judgement once.
- Although there are areas where the criticisms made by the Audit Commission are valid, it is felt that the overall judgement is harsh.
- The only remaining challenge to the assessment is via a judicial review.

The Panel heard that section 6 of the report outlines the mechanisms for achieving “four star” status and section 8 shows those areas which could be regarded as potential barriers to achieving four star status. Furthermore, the Panel heard that given the current funding, it is not likely that the service scores can be improved sufficiently to reach four star status.

The Panel heard that Appendix 4 of the report concentrates on how Portsmouth City Council intends to improve its CPA scores. The key areas of concern are

- Direction of travel project - ability to achieve the objective
- Corporate assessments project - behind schedule
- All projects identifying risks and issues as amber status

The Panel heard that on the existing indicators, the City Council is generally doing quite well but progress against the new indicators is not so good. Two service scores (Social Care (Adults) and Culture) have fallen from a score of three in 2005 to two in 2006. The score for Social Care was strongly disputed at the time the judgement was made by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and it is felt that this does not reflect the performance of the service. The culture score has fallen because three performance indicators are below the lower threshold of performance, two of which were introduced in 2006 as part of the Sport England set.

There followed a general discussion about the need for a sustainable financial strategy to be adopted by the City Council and the Chief Executive made it known that he wishes to engage with the group leaders in the future with particular regard to prioritisation.

RESOLVED that the Panel

- (1) notes the CPA score for the authority and individual service blocks for 2006;**
- (2) supports the Chief Executive in his endeavours to obtain a full explanation from the Audit Commission pertaining to its direction of travel judgement for Portsmouth City Council;**

- (3) notes the highlights report covering the period from 1 November 2006 to 31 January 2007 (Appendix 4).**

26 Quarterly Overview of Key Issues from Performance Monitoring (AI 7)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Consideration was given to the attached report from the Head of Strategy which informs the Panel of key issues arising from performance reporting over the last quarter. The report is part of a regular programme of reporting every quarter to give an overview of progress on performance management.

The Panel heard that 72% of indicators showed improved performance compared to the performance in the equivalent months for the previous year. However only six indicators out of more than 20 within the Corporate Scorecard are currently at top quartile levels for unitary authorities. The following have been identified as key issues with indicators in the scorecard based on returns received for December 2006

- Social Care (Adults)
- Council Tax collection
- City Helpdesk
- Planning applications and appeals
- Culture

The following areas have shown improved performance over recent months and these are

- Acceptable waiting time for care packages
- Social Care indicators PAF C29 to C32
- Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP)

The Panel heard that following the Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" there are likely to be changes for the performance management framework for local government as a whole. One of the main elements of this is the replacement of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) with a new less burdensome comprehensive area assessment (CAA). A more detailed report about the changes will be brought to this Panel at a future meeting.

RESOLVED that the Panel

- (1) notes the performance issues considered by the Strategic Directors Board in the last quarter, and the plans agreed to address performance issues;**
- (2) conveys congratulations to officers and cross-party members in respect of the dramatic improvements in performance against scorecard indicators in children's social care.**

27 Date of Next Meeting (AI 8)

Members were advised that the date of the next meeting is scheduled for 31 May 2007 at 4.00 pm in Conference Room A, Civic Offices.

There followed a short discussion after which it was agreed that one of the items on the next agenda should be to consider when future meetings should be held.

The meeting finished at 5.05 pm.

Chair

VJP/DMF
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