

**Notes of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee**  
**Business Improvement Working Group**  
**27<sup>th</sup> January 2015**

**Present:** Councillors: Brian O'Connell (Chairman), John Chidlow, Philip Circus, Leonard Crosbie, Malcolm Curnock, Duncan England, Frances Haigh, David Jenkins, Diana van der Klugt

**Apologies:** Councillor: Laurence Deakins

**Also present:** Councillors: Roger Arthur, George Cockman, Claire Vickers

**Officers:** Katharine Eberhart, Director of Corporate Resources  
Chris Lyons, Director of Planning, Economic Development & Property  
Brian Elliott, Property & Facilities Manager

**1. RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2014**

The notes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2014 were approved as a correct record.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OR CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

There were no announcements.

**4. PROPERTY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

The Property & Facilities Manager presented a briefing paper which gave a desktop analysis of the property and asset portfolio, an analysis of the current structure and an outline of the direction of change in terms of department structure. The detail of the change in relation to the effect on people was currently being worked on and a period of informal consultation with the team was in progress. It was anticipated that a report on the proposed restructure would be submitted to the Personnel Committee in March.

There were a number of drivers for change at this time including the transformation programme, the relocation of the Council's offices (with the corresponding decrease in facilities management responsibilities), the desire for property to make a bigger contribution to the Council's revenue streams and the desire to improve service delivery.

It was hoped that the new structure would deliver:

- A flatter structure with clear objectives and focus on transactions and property/building management;
- Improved communication on property issues across the department;
- Improved service to internal clients;
- Improved procurement processes;
- Simplified working practices; and
- Cost savings.

The Working Group thanked the Property & Facilities Manager for his informative, clear and precise report.

Members queried the balance of budget allocation between reactive repairs and planned maintenance. The Property & Facilities Manager advised that, in the past, these budgets had generally been underspent due mainly to over-optimism on the part of officers as to what was actually achievable. As part of the current budget process, these budgets had been more carefully scrutinised and reduced to ensure that what was planned could be delivered. Members also discussed the possible link between reactive repairs and legacy issues at a number of the Council's larger projects. It was also accepted that there was a fine judgement required when deciding at what point reactive repairs to an existing asset would become uneconomical and replacement/major repair would be needed. The Property & Facilities Manager indicated that he was planning a review of planned maintenance for current assets but that this would take some time to complete.

The Property & Facilities Manager agreed with Members that there was a need for increased commercial awareness within the team and he was addressing this.

The report to Personnel Committee would address the skills and level of staffing required to manage the Council's portfolio. Major works were currently, and would continue to be, specified and procured from outside contractors and major projects would be project managed by the recently created project management team.

The Chairman asked the Property & Facilities Manager to report back to the Working Group on the details of the proposed new structure and how it would work, once it had been agreed by Personnel Committee.

5. **FINANCIAL IMPACT OF THE OVERTURN OF DECISIONS ON APPEAL AND DETAILS OF THE PERCENTAGE OF PLANNING APPEALS ALLOWED**

This information would be circulated by email to the Members of the Working Group and discussed at the next meeting of the Working Group.

6. **PLANNING ENFORCEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR QUARTER 3, 2014/15**

The Working Group noted the report.

7. **DRAFT LOCAL ENFORCEMENT PLAN**

The Chairman reminded Members of discussions at previous meetings. The draft Local Enforcement Plan had been circulated for information.

The Director of Planning, Economic Development & Property advised that the Plan would be published on the website as guidance on the Council's enforcement policy for Members, parish and neighbourhood councils and members of the public.

He confirmed that the enforcement team was adequately staffed when compared to other authorities. Many of the complaints received were as a result of individuals being unhappy with a particular decision or arising from neighbour disputes. It was therefore important to remember that in all cases the legal test was whether it was expedient to take action.

Members agreed that decisions on whether to take enforcement action should be left to the professional judgement and discretion of officers but that it was important that local Members were advised of cases within their wards.

The Working Group discussed the contents of the Plan and agreed that it would be helpful to have this information on the website. Members had identified a number of typographical errors in the draft Plan. It was suggested that the fifth paragraph of section 5 regarding the general approach to planning compliance should be amended to indicate that: "Apart from some listed building and advertisements cases, it is not a criminal offence to undertake works ...". Also, later in the paragraph, it was suggested that the reference to a formal Notice should direct readers to the different types of notice that were then listed.

The Director of Planning, Economic Development & Property confirmed that, whilst planning conditions were monitored proactively, information from Members or members of the public regarding non-compliance was also welcomed. He confirmed that it was not the Council's practice to give advance notice to developers when checking on compliance, although sometimes it was necessary to contact a developer in order to gain access to a secure site. It was noted that there was a standard condition on permissions that stated that development had to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans.

The Director of Planning, Economic Development & Property advised that, in most cases, where contact was made regarding a planning breach the matter was resolved without the need to take formal enforcement action.

The Working Group considered that the draft Plan was a helpful and well written document that should be published on the website, subject to the comments made above and the correction of any typographical errors (Members to advise the Director of Planning, Economic Development & Property of any errors they had noticed). In addition, the Director of Planning, Economic Development & Property would ensure that the enforcement team was aware that they should advise local Members whenever it was proposed that enforcement action should be taken. The issue of communications with Members regarding planning matters generally, including enforcement, would be taken up at the Cabinet Member's new Development Management Advisory Group, which would be meeting shortly. Once published, all Parish and Neighbourhood Councils should be advised.

**8. PERFORMANCE GRAPHS FOR DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT QUARTER 3, 2014/15**

It was noted that the percentage of major developments determined had dropped slightly. The Director of Planning, Economic Development & Property advised that this situation was being monitored to ensure that there was no further drop. He also advised that a new member of staff had just been appointed to the majors team, which should improve performance in this area.

The Working Group noted the information submitted.

**9. FOLLOW UP REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE**

The Director of Planning, Economic Development & Property submitted a report giving an update on actions that had been taken with a view to improving performance within the Development Management Department. In particular he advised that:

- Regular meetings were now being held between all planning staff to improve liaison and training.
- Regular Major Projects team meetings were held between the planning team and other Council service departments.
- A S106/CIL working group was now in place but it would be some time before the desired outcomes were all in place.
- The Cabinet Member for Living & Working Communities had set up a Development Management Advisory Group, which would be meeting soon.

- Once the staffing issues had been resolved and performance issues addressed, the need for early communication with Members, Parish Councils and agents would be dealt with.
- Performance continued to be monitored carefully.
- Whilst a number of new permanent appointments had been made in the Development Management team, a similar number of existing staff had left. However, interviews were currently being held to fill the recent vacancies and it was hoped that these posts would be filled shortly.
- The backlog of planning applications had not yet been cleared due to the ongoing issue of staff turnover and the focus on dealing with current applications.
- Salary levels had been reviewed and increased where appropriate when compared to market rates.
- Consideration would be given to the reinstatement of the post of Validation Officer as part of the review of the structure that was being undertaken.

With regard to his review of the structure of the Development Management Department, the Director of Planning, Economic Development & Property indicated that he anticipated taking a report to the Personnel Committee in March.

In summing up the current position, he indicated that whilst improvements had been made the process was ongoing and he anticipated that it would be late summer before all posts were filled and the Department was operating as he planned. He advised Members that there was a general shortage of qualified planners and the issues being experienced by Horsham were echoed in other authorities. He also confirmed that the Council supported training for planning officers and the planning officer posts were on long grades which encouraged progression.

The Working Group requested a further update at the first meeting in the new Council year, by which time it was anticipated that the new structure would have been agreed.

## **10. BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION UPDATE**

The Director of Corporate Resources circulated a copy of an extract from the Cabinet Budget report, which summarised the progress made to date and what was currently planned in respect of Business Transformation.

So far, the implementation of revised staff Terms and Conditions, the management restructure and the pay and grading review had delivered annual savings of £440,000.

A new website with increased functionality to improve the customer experience and reduce the cost of transactions had been developed and

launched. The first stage of a centralised customer contact centre had been completed and further services were being added. Approximately £95,000 had been spent on developing these areas to date and resulting savings of £100,000 per year were anticipated.

In summary, to date £333,000 of the £500,000 set aside for Business Transformation had been spent, leaving a balance of £167,000.

Progress on the Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS) was being accelerated as a result of the forthcoming move to Parkside. In response to a Member's query, the Director of Corporate Resources advised that the backing-up of the EDRMS was part of the overall CenSus IT service, not a separate cost.

In October 2012, when the Business Transformation Programme had been outlined, a savings target of £1,250,000 had been set and to date £440,000 had been realised with a further £100,000 in the pipeline. It was now planned to target a further £1,000,000 savings by 2017/18, giving an overall total target of £1,540,000 rather than the target set in 2012. The main focus now would be on how the Council commissioned its services with a view to achieving most of the new savings through this.

In response to Members' comments, the Director of Corporate Resources indicated that she would endeavour to provide information to the Finance & Performance Working Group on current telephone/website transaction statistics in comparison to those before the introduction of the new website. She also undertook to feedback comments regarding improving the knowledge base of the contact centre operators.

It was also suggested that there should be training for Members on accessing and making best use of the available electronically stored information. This would be addressed as part of the induction programme for Members after the elections in May.

The meeting finished at 7.41 p.m. having commenced at 5.30 p.m.

CHAIRMAN