

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**THE EARL BALDWIN SUITE, DUKE HOUSE, CLENSMORE STREET,
KIDDERMINSTER**

THURSDAY, 4TH SEPTEMBER 2008 (6:00 PM)

PRESENT:

Councillors: G W Ballinger (Chairman), Mrs J Greener (Vice-Chairman), M Ahmed, A J Buckley, Mrs H E Dyke, J Holden, J Phillips, K J Stokes, J Thomas and N J Thomas.

Observers:

Councillors: J-P Campion and N J Desmond.

CSP.48 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Williams.

CSP.49 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor A J Buckley was a substitute for Councillor Williams.

CSP.50 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

CSP.51 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 7th August 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CSP.52 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

CSP.53 Customer Services Review

The Committee considered a report from the Acting Customer Services Manager updating the Committee on the progress of the Wyre Forest Customer Service Centre since it had opened in November 2006.

During discussions, the following points were highlighted:

- a) The Council had been involved in an exercise undertaken by a company called Mystery Shopper Ltd whereby a total of 37 authorities had had their performances measured.
- b) The Council decided to measure performance in three areas, i.e. Telephone

Response, Email Response and Website and had achieved number one for provision of a telephony service.

- c) Customers of the Hub were contacted twice a year asking them to answer 8 questions. Results had shown that they were happy with the service they received and in particular with the Hubs opening hours.
- d) The telephony service was under review with a possibility of the services being transferred to Bridgewater House in Worcester.
- e) When Customer Services Advisors were not dealing with customers face-to-face, they were able to log onto the telephone system to answer calls.

The Cabinet Member for Community & Corporate Services reported the following:

- a) On behalf of the Cabinet, he congratulated the team for their hard work in achieving the number one position for the telephony service.
- b) A report would go to Cabinet in September 2008 with options for the Council on the telephone services. Worcestershire County Council had identified potential savings and these would be looked at by the Cabinet. The Cabinet felt that the Council had an excellent telephony service and wished to maintain that service.

The Leader of the Council reported that Worcestershire County Council had invested £1.2m into the six authorities that made up the Worcestershire Hub but they only received approximately £600,000 in return.

Members felt that the service being given by the Hub was excellent but were concerned to note that there could be a reduction in staff numbers, especially after achieving number one status. They also felt that this was going down the route of Shared Services.

In response to questions, Members were informed of the following:

- a) Wyre Forest were the last district to join the Worcestershire Hub. Malvern Hills District Council were the first. Wychavon received a higher subsidiary than others but offered no telephony service. Figures relating to the subsidiary of other Councils would be circulated to all members.
- b) It was important for the Council to keep staff on board as training had cost implications. Funding would be maintained and the level and number of staff would be kept the same.
- c) Information would be sought when telephone calls were received and logged, it was not known if it was split into areas of the district.

The Principal Accountant explained to members that the reduction of £47,000 for Wyre Forest District Council was 20% of the total received in 2007/08, this was compared to the 34% reduction for Malvern. This £47,000 related to Customer Services Advisor staff and Management costs.

The Head of the Chief Executives Office informed members that a new satisfaction survey would start late in 2008 and it may look into capturing the information on a

geographical basis. There was software available which would be able to map the information and the Council may consider buying it.

Agreed:

- 1. The information be noted.**
- 2. Members be informed of the subsidiaries are for other authorities in the Worcestershire Hub.**

Recommendation to Cabinet

- 1. The Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee wished to congratulate the Hub staff on the success of their achievements to date in delivering a first class service.**
- 2. Strongly oppose any attempt by Worcestershire County Council to withdraw funding for services provided by the Kidderminster Hub.**

The Acting Customer Services Manager and the Principal Accountant left the meeting at this point, (6.36pm).

CSP.54 Corporate Plan Priorities 2008/09

The Committee received a report from the Head of the Chief Executive's Office which informed Members of progress up to 31st July 2008 with regard to the Priorities for 2008/09 as set out in the Corporate Plan 2008/2011.

The Head of Planning, Health & Environment and the Housing Services Manager were also in attendance to explain to members of the Committee the target for affordable housing. The following point was highlighted:

- a) Indicator BP0834b was a County target. Housing and Planning Staff from County and District level had met approximately six months ago to look at targets for affordable housing. As the credit crunch had started to take hold, it had been impossible to set a district target because of the problems with the housing market, builders were pulling out of jobs and Government Office had put on hold the housing targets for 12 months. A figure of 25 units for the district was anticipated.

Members were given the following responses to their questions:

- a) It was impossible to predict what would happen especially with the withdrawal of mortgages for first time buyers, although new initiatives were being introduced. Both the district and the housing association partners were working hard looking at possible new initiatives that may be available to bring schemes forward.
- b) The Council may be in a position to consider contributing capital if sensible schemes were put forward. Members were reassured that all possible options were being considered.
- c) There was a limited amount of land available and targets were based on the

deliverability of the land.

- d) 2007 was a boyant year for the housing market and it had been anticipated 92 units would be built. That figure was now 80 as the private development schemes had slowed down. A meeting was scheduled with the Housing Corporation week commencing 8th September 2008 to discuss the issue.
- e) Members would be given progress report with the situation in the housing market.

The Head of the Chief Executives Office informed members of the following:

- a) The report format had changed slightly since the last report to make it easier to understand.
- b) The Audit Commission would be looking at performance management and would revisit some of the points in the report. A report would be bought back to this committee for information.
- c) The officer responsible for BP0812b had been contacted for an update and it was being progressed by Worcestershire County Council.
- d) The recycling points for BP0813 should be installed by the end of September 2008.
- e) The shop front of 23/24 Bridge Street, Stourport-on-Severn had been installed but the shop was not finished. This was a complex area as the owner for the back of the building was unknown.
- f) BP0808 – New ICT Strategy would be amended to October 2008.

The Head of Planning, Health & Environment advised members of the Committee that with regard to BP0850a and BP0850b – 8 & 8a Bridge Street, the target would be changed in time for the next meeting of this committee. Information was still awaited by Government Office as to the method by which the objections would be heard. It was impossible to predict the date of that enquiry due to the complexity of compulsory purchases.

In response to members questions, the Head of the Chief Executive responded as follows:

- a) A report would be produced for the next meeting of Corporate Services Scrutiny Meeting on 2nd October 2008 giving an update on the Business Waste Recycling.
- b) Consultation exercises had been carried out on the Corporate Plan at the end of the calendar year including staff sessions. The public had also been invited to give their views, articles had appeared in the Kidderminster Shuttle and proposals had been put on the website.

Members felt that with regard to the targets and comments that were in the report, the relevant Head of Service should be the person to respond.

Agreed:

- 1. The information be noted.**
- 2. A report be bought back to this Committee with the views of the Audit Commission.**

CSP.55 Recommendation Tracking Form

The Committee received the Recommendation Tracking Form. The Chairman informed the Committee that a separate meeting would be held to consider the report. The Scrutiny/Committee Officer would contact all members with dates for the meeting.

The Chairman asked Members to contact the Scrutiny/Committee Officer if there were any specific items they wished to discuss.

Agreed: The Scrutiny/Committee Officer to contact members of the committee with dates for a meeting to go through the recommendation tracking form.

CSP.56 Feedback From Cabinet

The committee noted the content of the Cabinet action list of 7th August 2008, which related to the Local Land and Property Gazetteer.

Agreed: The information be noted.

CSP.57 Work Programme

The Panel considered its work programme for the current municipal year with regard to the Sustainable Community Strategy Theme, Corporate Plan Aim and the Forward Plan.

The Scrutiny/Committee Officer informed the committee that the date for the ICT Training item would be changed to 8th January 2009 as the ICT Strategy was not yet in place.

The Cabinet Member for Community and Corporate Services asked for an item to be added to the work programme for October 2008 on Website Changes.

Agreed:

The work programme for the current municipal year be amended as follows:

- 1. ICT Training be amended to 8th January 2009.**
- 2. Website Changes be added for 2nd October 2008.**

CSP.58 Press Involvement

The committee agreed that the meeting for the recommendation tracking forms would be in the open section of the agenda.

CSP.59 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Decision:

Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of “Exempt Information” as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

CSP.60 Summary of Minutes

The following proceedings were considered after the press and public had been excluded from the meeting. A summary of the minutes relating to these items has been made as “exempt information” would be disclosed if the minutes were published in full.

CSP.61 Minutes

Agreed:

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on the 10th July 2008 be confirmed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

CPS.62 Centralised Office Accommodation

A verbal update was received from the Leader of the Council regarding the current status of the Centralised Office Accommodation project.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm.