

**CUSTOMER SERVICES & RESOURCES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

16 January 2007
5.00pm – 7.34pm

PRESENT: Councillors, Blackhurst, Bradnack, Hughes, Hymans, James, Liddle (Vice-Chair), McPherson, J. Rosenstiel and Taylor (Chair).

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Cantrill, Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

The Chair welcomed Cllr Andrew Blackhurst, Nova Roberts as the new Head of Customer Services, and Deborah Fletcher as the locum Committee Manager to the scrutiny committee.

07/CSR/01 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on 14 November 2006 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

07/CSR/02 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Ellis-Miller.

07/CSR/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

07/CSR/04 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

07/CSR/05 KEY DECISION Service Plans for 2007/08, Revenue and Capital Budgets 2006/07 (Revised), 2007/08 and 2008/09 (Forecast)

(See also record of decision CS&R/070116/02)

Members raised questions on some of the Service Plans detailed below.

City Services External Trading

The Director of City Services reported that the table on page 70 of the report should read “a) To achieve an annual turnover of £798,500 and surplus of £7,500 for external trading to help meet costs of providing frontline services in the city”.

Customer Access Strategy

Councillors raised the following to which officers and other members replied (A):

- Would consultation with customers, with an emphasis on access, take place?
A: The website was being user-tested.
- What was the timescale for joining 'outposts' across the city into CAS?
A: There was no plan to include community centres or housing offices.
- The Council should take access to its buildings more seriously. Full physical access would be needed at Mandela House's customer service centre.
- How does the long-term objective of improving customers' perception and experience of the Council's services manifest itself? Currently the perception is that the Council isn't doing enough.
A: The Council was at the beginning of that process. It was difficult to measure in the short-term. During the course of this year a monitoring system would be developed. When the service was up and running and rolled out over 18 months from February, it would need to be monitored in a tangible way.

Democratic Services

- How is Local Democracy Week being promoted?
A: The 'I'm a Councillor Get Me Out of Here' event took place last year, as did a stall in Lion Yard shopping mall and tours around the Council Chamber. Local Democracy Week took place during half-term which meant that many tourists got involved rather than local residents who may have gone on holiday.
- Would there be any specific training for spokespeople as well as that planned for the Executive, backbenchers and opposition?
A: The budget currently allows for a few conferences. The Executive Councillor agreed to consider this issue further.
- With regards to the personal development planning for Executive members, was identifying common training needs the next step?
A: The work with the IDeA had been piloted with three members. The Members Support Services Manager was hoping to roll this out to a wider group of members next year.
- How will the reliance on paper be reduced?
A: From March cycle, committee papers would be produced in A5-sized format, for a two-cycle trial. This would require a reduced font, but a larger-font version would also be available on request to members and to the public. Correspondence from the Tree Team would be via email rather than on paper. Broadband would be provided to members as part of an improved ICT service rather than simply to save costs.
- Could the number of members of the public attending meetings be broken down, into figures for the Guildhall and Area Committees?
A: These would be sent to Committee members.

Economic Development & Tourism

- Could the introduction of a 7-day waste collection service to the Market be done without growth proposals?
A: The Director of Environment & Planning said that he would need to confirm, but this was probably the case.

Internal Audit

- Was the section getting the support it needs to meet targets?
A: The right leadership and resources were in place, and 95% of the Audit Plan was the correct achievable target.

Procurement

- There ought to be a way of proving the service is value for money, but this is difficult; and the service plan should demonstrate it.
A: The department acts as an agent that identifies efficiencies. A list of objectives to meet may require the prioritisation of short-term goals over long-term ones. It is not just about buying, but also buying legally, and is hugely involved in the Customer Access Strategy and Green Buying Strategy.
- There is almost no mention in the report of supporting local businesses.
A: 15% of the overall spend is within the locality. It is not possible to specifically ring-fence for local buyers, but other methods are available such as advertising locally.

Property and Building Services

- Accessibility for the disabled to all buildings needs to be ensured as it still remains a problem.
- Simple, inexpensive modifications could be carried out, such as installation of grab rails in the toilets at the Guildhall. The direction in which doors open should also be considered.
A: The officer agreed to action immediately the installation of grab rails.

Revenue and Benefits Services

A report to the March meeting would set out changes to the Service.

- Concern was raised at the lack of post offices, especially to the north of the city.
A: 10% of council payments come via post offices. It would be necessary to consider how local shops can be used for council services. Currently a variety of ways of paying was being looked into, and also how this can be included in CAS.

The committee considered the recommendations of the report.

- a) Regarding the Performance Indicators, the Executive Councillor agreed to work with officers to develop a PI for better access to council buildings and report to a future meeting.
- b) Review of Charges: The Scrutiny Committee noted that this was an interim set of charges, and a revised set would be submitted in the summer.
- h) The following Capital bid was upgraded from medium priority to high:
 - C1073 – Improvements to Committee Rooms – Lighting and Power - £15,000 (2007/08)

With regards to lighting and audio-visual equipment in the committee rooms, as mentioned in C1201 and C1073 of Appendix H, it was suggested that the two budgets could be combined in order to spend more on AV equipment and the remainder on lighting; queried whether the AV equipment for the committee rooms could also be used in the council chamber; or that the council chamber or even the Corn Exchange could be used for larger meetings such as Planning. The Executive Councillor did not agree that the two budgets should be combined.

The following Capital bids were downgraded from high priority to medium:

- C1072 – Improvements to Admin buildings toilets/kitchens and creation of staff rest rooms - £25,000 (all years)
- C1077 – Hobson House – Refurbishment of rear building (former Chief Constable's house) etc. - £25,000 (2007/08)

The following Capital bids were postponed for 1 year:

- C1072 – Improvements to Admin buildings toilets/kitchens and creation of staff rest rooms - £25,000 (all years)
- C1118 – Disabled Access & Facilities – The Guildhall Halls - £80,000 (2007/08)

j) The following items were recommended for deletion from the Hold List:

- H14 – Cleaning & Restoring Outside of Guildhall
- H20 – Reception Facilities – Mandela / Hobson House

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations as amended above by 6 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the amended recommendations.

07/CSR/06 **NON KEY DECISION Review of Level of Support provided by the Council to Cambridge United Charities**

(See also record of decision CS&R/070116/03)

Members agreed to defer this item until a future meeting.

07/CSR/07 **KEY DECISION People Strategy**

(See also record of decision CS&R/070116/04)

The Chair thanked the Head of Human Resources for putting the strategy together, saying that it was useful for drawing things together and for new staff.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 6 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

07/CSR/08 **KEY DECISION Office Accommodation Strategy**

(See also record of decision CS&R/070116/05)

Members made the following points.

- The Introduction of the report is difficult to understand
 - A: The wording of the introduction needs to be tightened up, particularly 1.1.
- The report should go before the Joint Staff Employers Forum (JSEF) and the feedback from that considered at the next scrutiny committee meeting.
 - A: The report has already gone to unions, and a separate flexible working policy will go to JSEF.
- The report should be reviewed periodically over the next 3 to 5 years.
 - A: It will need to be reviewed annually.
- The council should make better use of occupational health.
 - A: The officer is currently looking into how to procure occupational health services.
- Components of the strategy need to be built into the various service plans.
 - A: This may be premature for next year's service plans.
- In light of the UNISON staff survey in Appendix 1, it was unfortunate that the idea of a staff canteen had been dismissed.
 - A: The canteen that existed at the council a few years ago was closed down as it was costing too much money to run, and the trolley service provided by the Corn Exchange was discontinued for similar reasons.
- Air-conditioning is expensive, was it possible to consider an alternative method to deal with the hot summers.
- The length of meetings should be considered, as this uses up energy such as lighting.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 6 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

07/CSR/09 NON KEY DECISION **Cash Allocation Interface**

(See also record of decision CS&R/070116/06)

The Head of Revenue Services reported that it had become apparent through testing that the current cash allocation system was not technically fit for purpose.

Members asked if the council was aware that the support contract with Microsoft was going to end two years ago? Is there a risk of support being withdrawn again on new software?

The Executive Councillor proposed to go back to ICT and Serco and discuss the strategy for Open Protocol and how it relates to software procurement. The Head of Revenue Services agreed to report back to members.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 6 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

07/CSR/10 KEY DECISION **Disposal of Small Sites for Affordable Housing**

(See also record of decision CS&R/070116/07)

The Chair explained that the meeting would remain open to the press and public as long as the appendices were not referred to directly.

Cllr Bradnack expressed concern that local members had not been consulted. The Head of Property & Building Services explained that proper consultation had taken place but this had been omitted from the report in error; no responses had been received.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 6 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

07/CSR/11 KEY DECISION **Rees Thomas School Site**

(See also record of decision CS&R/070116/08)

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 6 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

The meeting ended at 7.34pm.

Chair