



**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
BUSINESS EFFICIENCY SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH ON 20 NOVEMBER 2008**

Present: Councillors Cereste (Chairman), Elsey, Fletcher, Fower and Croft

Officers in attendance: Adrian Chapman, Head of Neighbourhood Services
Andrew Edwards, Head of Strategic Property
Rowena Sampson, Consultation and Engagement Officer
Suzanne Barlow, Interim Head of Communications
Louise Tyers, Performance Scrutiny Manager
Carrie Denness, Principal Solicitor
Gemma George, Governance Support Officer

1. Apologies

No apologies had been received.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 June 2008

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2008 were approved as a correct record.

4. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that the exempt annex relating to agenda item 8, which entailed exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972, should be exempt and the press and public excluded from the meeting during its discussion as the public interest in disclosing the information did not outweigh the public interest in maintaining the exemption.

5. Feedback and Update Report

The panel received the report and were provided with feedback and updates on the following issues:

- Riverside Community Sports Pavilion
- Temporary Staff

Members were invited to comment on the report and the following issues were raised:

- A query was raised regarding the sickness levels at Peterborough City Council and whether they were higher or lower at other Councils. Members were advised that further information on this issue would be provided
- A further query was raised regarding the figures for sickness and whether the Business Efficiency Panel should receive regular updates. Members were informed that the Scrutiny Committee received regular reports on sickness and the figures were closely monitored

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel noted the report.

6. Review of the Costs and Effectiveness of the Your Peterborough Resident Magazine

Further to a request by a Member of the Business Efficiency Scrutiny Panel, a report was submitted for consideration detailing the costs and effectiveness of the council's resident newsletter.

Your Peterborough, the council's magazine for residents was published ten times a year and following feedback from residents and a review of best practice in other councils it had been redesigned in the spring of 2008.

Following the introduction of the new format, independent public opinion research had been carried out to over 800 households via telephone interviews. Participants were chosen at random and the results obtained had been extremely positive.

The cost of the magazine was broken down into two sections, production and delivery. The annual production costs were £163,500 a year, £2.04 per household per year, 20p per household per issue. The contract had been under review with the focus being to reduce costs whilst maintaining quality.

Delivery was under contract with Royal Mail to ensure delivery to all households within a designated time frame. The annual delivery cost was £75,000, 93p per household per year, 9.3p per household per issue. As with production, the contract had been under review to reduce costs whilst maintaining delivery standards.

The overall cost for the ten issues was therefore £238,500, £2.97 per household per year, 30p per household per issue.

Members were asked to consider the report and the following observations were raised and discussed including:

- The overall effectiveness of the magazine was questioned. With the presence of the Evening Telegraph and the many local radio stations was the publication needed?
- At a cost of 30p per issue, was it really that expensive?
- Nearly a quarter of a million pounds was spent on the publication, was there sufficient advantages to producing the magazine for this amount of money?
- Did the internal communications team have a satisfactory relationship with the local media or was this something that could be enhanced in order to better utilize their services?
- From the 800 households included in the independent opinion research, the overall results looked to be very satisfactory and the magazine proved to be informative.
- The results obtained from the citizen's panel review were positive.
- It would be beneficial if the magazine could bring more to the local economy.
- Some members felt that Your Peterborough served a certain number of Councillors only and was of no real benefit to the people of Peterborough.
- The total revenue for advertising was slightly disappointing being only £17,000, could the marketing potential of the magazine be better realised? Would it be of benefit to place the marketing in the hands of an agency?
- The publication was not economically viable, in the long term it would become very costly for the council
- It was important for the residents of Peterborough to be provided with regular updates and information relating to the council,

Members further discussed the report and the following issues were raised:

- Members sought clarification on the results of the citizen's panel review in relation to the effectiveness of Your Peterborough magazine. Members were advised that 49% of the

people who responded agreed that Your Peterborough magazine was a good medium. The figure was a good reflection on the publication.

- A query was raised regarding the possible reasons for the percentage of website users being higher than the percentage of Your Peterborough readers and did this mean that more people owned computers than previously assumed. Members were advised that it could possibly be accounted to the number of people working on computers during the day and not necessarily owning their own computers.
- A further query was raised regarding the possibility of sending an emailed web link out to the public instead of the magazine. Members were advised that it would be a worthwhile exercise to find out whether this would be preferred by the public. At the end of January 2008 a focus group had been held with 20 members of the citizens panel it was suggested that it would be of benefit to arrange another one to discuss Your Peterborough magazine and the various possibilities surrounding it.
- Members sought clarification on whether the cost of sending Your Peterborough only to those residents who had requested a copy, would be much higher than the cost of sending the publication as a blanket delivery. Members were advised that sending Your Peterborough to selected households only would increase the costs considerably.
- Members questioned the future of the publication and whether they could be provided with future updates and research on certain areas, namely if it could be categorically proven that the publication was wanted, if there was the possibility that it could be provided less frequently and also if there was any duplication within the weekly bulletin and Your Peterborough. Members were advised that an update report on the effectiveness of Your Peterborough magazine would be provided in four months time.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel noted the report and requested a further report in four months time.

7. Citizens Panel Report

The Panel received a report which highlighted the benefits, value and service of the Citizens' Panel. The report also contained the results of the survey conducted in spring 2008.

The Citizens' Panel was comprised of approximately 1500 Peterborough residents (roughly 1% of the City's population) selected from the postal address file. The residents selected were a representative sample of city residents, proportional to each ward and Neighbourhood Investment Area. With a ready formed residents' panel, this provided considerable cost savings as the panel were available to be utilised for other surveys.

The panel membership was refreshed each year by one third so that members did not become overly familiar with services and therefore the possibility of survey responses providing a skewed result was lessened.

The 2007 and 2008 surveys were sent out under the Greater Peterborough Partnership (GPP) banner and provided questions for Peterborough City Council and its strategic partners including the police, fire service, NHS Peterborough and the Council for Voluntary Services. The 2008 spring survey was the third consecutive survey that had been conducted since 2006.

The Panel received a presentation on the citizens' panel survey, and key points were highlighted, including:

- The panel's views on strategic priorities. These results were not dissimilar to the results gathered from the previous surveys conducted. The most important priority highlighted was "creating strong and supportive communities".
- The positive change in the number of people feeling safe inside and outside their homes. A notable change being "outside in local areas after dark".
- The percentage of people who felt that they could influence decisions. The result was slightly low and could be accountable to the fact that people were not aware of being able to influence decisions.
- The percentage of people who felt that Peterborough was a "good place to live, work and play" had fallen slightly since 2007.

- Four different focus areas which included points such as anti-social behaviour, lack of affordable homes, influencing decisions affecting local areas and low membership of community groups and organisations. All of the points contained within the four focus areas would be prioritised and worked on.
- Citizens' panel good news gathered from the survey which included, amongst many other things, support for regeneration and growth in the city and satisfaction with the regional pool, the Lido and Jack Hunt swimming pool.

Members were asked to consider and comment on the report and presentation and the following issues were raised:

- Concern was expressed regarding the fact that the citizens' panel appeared to view the city as being "non-vibrant, prosperous or attractive to visitors". Members were assured that the results measured as a whole indicated that people did generally feel that Peterborough was a good place to live.
- A query was raised regarding the possibility of sending the 1500 surveys out over the course of a couple of months, instead of sending them out all in one go. Survey timings were critical and distributing over a couple of months would surely give a broader set of responses. Members were informed that although it was an interesting idea, it would prove to be more costly and more labour intensive.
- Members queried this response stating that it would surely be better to acquire relevant information even if it proved to be a more costly exercise. Members were assured that this had been taken into consideration and better use would be made of existing panels such as parish and partnership panels. There would also be a review of neighbourhoods produced by the end of the year.
- Clarification was sought on how the questions were set, and by whom. Members were advised that various partners had questions incorporated into the survey, including the police, the fire service and NHS Peterborough.
- A query was raised regarding the survey content. There appeared to be several questions relating to smoking but no questions relating to teenage pregnancy, Teenage pregnancy received a lot of funding and our rate was extremely high, so members felt it should have been covered in the survey. Members were advised that the questions relating to health covered topics that hard data could not be collected for easily. Teenage pregnancy was one of PCT's top four priorities, was included in the Greater Peterborough Partnership solutions centre and was part of the LAA that was being dealt with and monitored.
- A further query was raised regarding whether questions on teenage pregnancy should be included in future surveys. Members were advised that it would be difficult to word suitable questions that would be relevant to all of the survey members. In response to this, members suggested asking "were people aware of teenage pregnancy or not?"
- Members sought clarification on whether it had become a problem to engage young people in the surveys. Members were advised that it had become slightly more difficult.
- A query was raised regarding the methods used to gather information. Would it be of added benefit to conduct the surveys with the general public face to face rather than through focus groups and would it encourage interaction with people who would not usually partake in such surveys, therefore enhancing the overall results. Members were advised that the panel comprised of a varied cross section of people from all the wards and the results reflected this. Also there would be a neighbourhood review conducted later on in the year that would provide valuable information from a wider cross section of the public.
- Clarification was sought on the reasons for having six response options instead of five. Members were advised that it was good practice to have six options as if there were five options, unfortunately people tended to just opt for the one in the middle.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the report.

8. Asset Management in Peterborough City Council

The Panel received a report in response to a request from the Chair of the Panel. The report set out the approach to asset management which had been adopted by Peterborough City Council.

Peterborough City Council was a major landowner in the Peterborough area. In total 2000 assets were owned with a use value of £380m (FY08/09 values). The assets were used to support the Council in the delivery of objectives.

Property assets were considered to include buildings and land owned by the Council to support objectives. These assets were split into two categories, operational and non operational. Operational properties were held in direct support of the Council objectives. This included assets such as schools, the Town Hall and Bayard Place. This category also included those assets that were rented e.g. Midgate House.

Non operational properties were those that were held to support businesses and also generate a revenue income for the Council. These would include the retail units under the Town Hall and the industrial units at Alfric Square.

Key issues were further highlighted to the Panel, including:

- The policy context
- Asset usage
- Surplus assets
- The disposal process

Members were invited to comment on the report and the following issues were raised:

- Members queried whether the asset portfolio was continually monitored. Members were assured that the asset portfolio was continually monitored and challenged, as was asset usage.
- Members sought clarification on the “agile working” that had been implemented at Bayard Place and would it have an effect on productivity in any way. Members were assured that productivity and efficiency would in no way be affected. Heads of Service had given detailed feedback regarding the amount of work space needed by their staff whilst maintaining services. The “agile working” would continue to be monitored in the future.
- A query was raised regarding the targets for the forthcoming years. Members were advised that over a five year period the target was to lose 5% of the portfolio, but it would be advisable, with regard to assets, to wait for the right economic time.
- A further query was raised regarding the possibility of the buildings deteriorating if they were not looked after properly and would this be a factor that would be considered when managing the portfolio and disposing of assets. Members were advised that there were lots of factors taken into account when managing the portfolio and looking at assets that could be disposed of.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the report

9. Executive Decisions

The Panel considered the following Executive Decisions made since the last meeting:

- Award of street lighting maintenance contract 2008-2011
- Termination of existing street lighting maintenance and repair contract
- Award of mainstream school transport routes
- Supporting people resettlement/floating support contract
- Corporate hardware contract
- Request for approval to use the Midlands works framework contract 3 2008-2011

- Professional services partnership
- Provision and management of sports facilities at Bretton park
- Refurbishment and enhancement of Clare Lodge, Glington, phase 3
- Eastern region term maintenance framework contract
- Contract for the provision of specialist family assessment services
- The green backyard
- Sale of land and building known as 110 Paynels, Orton Goldhay
- Award of special education needs (SEN) transport routes

There were no requests from the Panel for further information on any of the decisions.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel considered the Executive Decisions which had been made since the last meeting.

10. Forward Plan – December 2008 to March 2009

The latest version of the Forward Plan was presented to the Panel for consideration.

A request was made for further information on two items included in the Forward Plan. These were S106 planning obligations and allocation of social housing.

The Panel was advised that the S106 planning obligations would be considered by Council in December and the Housing Register and allocations policy would be considered by Council in February 2009..

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the latest version of the Forward Plan.

11. Agenda Plan 2008-09

The Panel received the latest version of the Agenda Plan for consideration.

There were no requests from the Panel for further information on any items.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel noted the latest version of the Agenda Plan 2008-09.

12. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 8th January 2009.

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 8.45pm.

CHAIRMAN