

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BUSINESS EFFICIENCY SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON
THURSDAY 9 APRIL 2009 AT THE BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOM - TOWN HALL**

Present: Councillors M Cereste (Chairman), M Fletcher (Vice-Chairman), P Croft and G Elsey

Officers Present: Andrew Edwards – Head of Strategic Property
Helen Edwards - Solicitor to the Council
Rona Hendry – Unison Branch Secretary
Mark Burn – Unison Representative
Mike Kealey – Acting Head of HR
Mike George – Senior HR Consultant – HR Analyst
Claire Boyd – Lawyer
Louise Tyers – Performance Scrutiny Manager
Libby Walker – Governance Support Assistant
Gemma George – Governance Support Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Harrington and Fower.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 8 January 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2009 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:

- Budget 2009/10 – Fees and Charges at the Museum
- Extension of Heltwate School
- Nene Bridge Refurbishment
- Junction 8 Signalisation Project

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

- A query was raised regarding the fees and charges at the Museum and what equivalent market value items there were. Members were advised that further information on this issue would be provided.

- A query was raised regarding paranormal events and what they consisted of. Members were advised that these are events where members of the public paid to spend the night in the Museum with the possibility of having a paranormal experience.
- A query was raised regarding the allocation of contracts to companies, could the process be scrutinised further and could tenders be accessed. Members were informed that the ability for the Panel to scrutinise the award of contracts was in place. However, only areas could be scrutinised and not individuals. If in appropriate circumstances the Panel wished to scrutinise tenders that this could be arranged.
- Members questioned whether the minutes from the recent informal meeting held to discuss the work programme could be forwarded on to them. Members were advised that the minutes would be forwarded to them in due course and another informal meeting to further discuss the work programme would be arranged.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel noted the report.

6. Staff Sickness

Further to a request by Members of the Business Efficiency Scrutiny Panel, a report was submitted for consideration detailing staff sickness, with the information broken down into departments. An overview of the action being taken by the Council to address the issues was also highlighted.

The Acting Head of HR presented the report and informed Members that he had been in post at Peterborough City Council since December 2008 and during that time the focus had been on the head count reduction, however the issues surrounding staff absences had not gone unnoticed. The cost factor of staff sickness was very high, as was the pressure and stress which impacted the staff that were left to cover.

The number of sickness days taken by an individual staff member tended to reflect the level of commitment and the individuals morale.

Some new processes and procedures were to be brought in to monitor the staff sickness levels and discussions were to be proposed with union representatives regarding an absence management programme. This management programme would ultimately help to distinguish between the two types of sickness.

Two representatives from Unison were invited to the table to speak and the following observations were raised and discussed including:

- The representatives from Unison wished for the Panel to know that they empathised with the HR situation
- Unison representatives commented that return to work interviews were necessary, however it did not appear that all managers followed this procedure
- A query was raised regarding rehabilitation programmes, were there any available. Unison representatives were not aware of any existing programmes but would always be willing to offer help and support if needed.
- The Unison Representatives commented on the way the staff sickness figures were calculated. The figures included Saturdays and Sundays, however most employees were not contracted to work these days. Therefore the overall figures did not provide a true reflection of the situation.

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

- A query was raised regarding exemplary attendance. Did the Council offer any incentives to staff in order to help decrease sickness levels. The Panel was informed that there were no current arrangements for rewards, however letters were sometimes sent to employees who had achieved a year without sickness. This was not everyday practice however.
- It was suggested that if an employee had 12 months without sickness, they should receive an extra 2 days annual leave or be given their birthday off. This would provide staff with a positive incentive for maintaining attendance.
- A query was raised regarding redundancies. What were the overall figures likely to be and when would staff, who were at risk, be made aware of their situation. The Panel was informed that the figures would be available within the next week and employees at risk would be informed of their situation as soon as possible.

ACTION AGREED:

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

7. Disposal of Assets

The panel received a report in response to a request from Members regarding the assets which had been disposed of during the last three months. The report included what had been sold or auctioned, what their value was and had they met their value.

Peterborough City Council was a major landowner in the Peterborough Area, owning a total of 2000 assets which had a use value of £380m. These assets were used to support the Council in the delivery of objectives.

The report focussed on the disposal process for surplus assets. Assets were declared surplus in one of two ways:

- **Service Declaration:**
The service that operated from the asset advised the Head of Strategic Property that they no longer had use for an asset either in whole or in part. The Head of Strategic Property would accept responsibility for the asset when certain criteria had been met, this included the transfer of the property related budget. The Head of Strategic Property would then examine options for the use of the facility. This would include the possibility of transferring the asset to a Community Group or Partner. In addition, consideration would be given to moving another service into this asset. The aim being to consolidate council activities into those assets that were fit for purpose and efficient to operate.
- **Identification of alternative use by the Head of Strategic Property:**
The Head of Strategic Property identified an activity that could be moved to one asset thereby allowing the re-use or disposal of another. In this instance, relocation costs would be funded by Strategic Property. This could have involved more than one service operating from an asset. The residual property would then be disposed of by Strategic Property. Such a proposal by Strategic Property would take into account the condition of the assets, maintenance liability, location and regulatory compliance etc.

Any formal disposal decision was supported by an Option Study, which considered factors such as current and future liabilities, location, condition, future potential etc. The Option Study would then be used to inform consultation with the Ward Members and the Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Business Improvement.

Once the disposal had been agreed, Strategic Property would examine the ways in which best value could be obtained. The disposal approach would then be dependent upon a number of factors including, size, location and the type of asset.

ACTION AGREED:

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

8. Executive Decisions

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

- Nene Bridge Refurbishment
- Refurbishment and Enhancement of Clare Lodge Secure Unit, Glinton, Phase 3
- Award of contract for the Refurbishment of the Jack Hunt Swimming Pool.

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.

9. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

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

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the latest version of the Forward Plan.

The meeting began at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.19 pm

CHAIRMAN