

THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL AND WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Three Rivers and Watford Shared Services Joint Committee** held in the Town Hall, Watford Borough Council, on 1 March 2010 7.30 pm to 8.40 pm

Present: Councillors A Wylie (Chair), B White (Vice-Chair), M Bedford, G Derbyshire, Z McQuire and R Sangster

Officers: David Gardner - Director of Corporate Resources and Governance
Tricia Taylor - Executive Director, Resources
Alan Power - Head of Finance
Sue Townshend - Head of Revenues and Benefits
Avni Patel - Head of ICT
Terry Baldwin - Head of HR
Carol Chen - Head of Legal and Property Services
Sarah Haythorpe - Principal Committee Manager

JSS27/09 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

None.

JSS28/09 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Joint Shared Services Committee held on 3 December 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

JSS29/09 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

No items submitted.

JSS30/09 SCHEME OF DELEGATION

This report proposed a scheme of delegation from the Joint Committee to Officers in Shared Services to be incorporated into each Council's constitution. Now that Shared Services had been implemented it was necessary for the Committee to consider which functions should be delegated to officers, in order for day to day business of operating the services be undertaken efficiently and effectively. A proposed scheme of delegation was attached to the report (Appendix 1) for approval.

Clarification was sought on the agreement made in respect of budget variations and virements between the shared services. The Director of Corporate Resources and Governance advised that Watford Borough Council had agreed budget variations and virements between shared services at the January Council

meeting. It was stated Three Rivers would be dealing with the issue as a delegated matter but this was subsequently clarified as arrangements had been approved by Council following agreement of the minutes of the Joint Committee's meeting in December.

In response to a question on the Council's legal representatives being able to make settlements out of court without a set financial level before the matter had to be referred to the Portfolio Holder, the Head of Legal and Property Services advised there could be occasions which required officers to have delegated authority to make a deal to save ongoing costs. Employment tribunal matters were an example of these occasions.

It was noted that the Head of Revenue and Benefits would continue to calculate two separate council tax bases for each Council to approve.

In response to a question on the definition of the areas of responsibility, the agreement would only include services within the remit of shared services.

In response to a question on the acquisition of new IT equipment, the Executive Director, Resources advised that decisions taken within the overall budget framework were set, with reference to each Council's agreed capital budgets, the ICT service plan and shared services budget. It was agreed that an additional function be added under ICT "Acquisition of ICT equipment for operation of Shared Services".

ACTION AGREED:-

- (1) that the Scheme of Delegation attached to the report at Appendix 1 be approved subject to the additional function being added under ICT "Acquisition of ICT equipment for operation of Shared Services"; and
- (2) that the Scheme be incorporated into each council's Constitution.

JSS31/09 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

This report provided an update on the implementation of shared services and performance to date. Members noted the following points:

- Shared services was achieving resilience
- Staff were now co-located with ICT/Finance at Three Rivers and HR and Revenue and Benefits at Watford
- Savings had been included in the detailed business plans
- There was a drive forward to improve the quality of the services and improve performance.

Each of the four Services Heads gave the following updates to the Committee:

ICT – Avni Patel

All shared services staff had been migrated to the new Active Directory;

Thin client testing at Three Rivers had been finalised and all shared services staff had the ability to work using this method including sharing diaries;

The Watford communication links had been moved to Apsley and the 2nd phase of the internet facing servers move had been completed. ICT were currently finalising the move of servers to Apsley;

Finalisation of the termination of the Steria contract and the transfer of staff and function to the in-house service, including TUPE arrangements was taking place;

Completion of a joint PID and requirements specification documentation with WBC and TRDC on E-petitions was taking place with demonstrations and workshops being scheduled;

A scoping study for the mapping of Watford's open spaces for the LDF had been completed;

The Implementation of the asset management system for Watford was being progressed.

In response to a question on the implementation of the new Revenue and Benefits system, Members were advised that there had been a learning curve for both the Revs and Benefits and the ICT team in the handling of the upgrade. The system had gone live and the final upgrade to issue NNDR bills was planned. It had been imperative that the transfer of data from Watford's Civica system to the new Academy system was completed accurately. This involved four tranches of iterations of data being made and internal audit checks completed to provide the system with a clean bill of health.

With regard to Key Performance Indicator (KPI) 3 (acquisition cost of workstation) this cost was being revised downwards as prices were being reduced and details would be reported during the next financial year.

On KP1 7 (user satisfaction) the new call logging system would allow this information to be reported from Quarter 1 2010/11. An Annual survey would be also be completed with both Councils.

Finance – Alan Power

A major issue in accountancy going into the shared service agreement had been the 5.5 vacant posts (30% of the establishment). Interviews had taken place for these posts and job offers had been made.

A major project for the team was implementing the new finance management system to be introduced from 1 April 2010 although collaborative planning was proving more complex to implement and would not be available from 1 April but should be available from the end of May.

In response to a question on progress with the income management situation, the Head of the Finance advised that a review of income management and proposals would be forwarded to the Shared Services Management Team with progress to be reported to the Committee at a future meeting.

The budget monitoring report provided to both Councils would be using the same information source. The team would be looking to harmonise processes throughout the year including reviewing guidance and training needs.

In response to a question on Performance Indicator FN09, the collection of miscellaneous debts, it was agreed that this would be included in the performance indicators for Revenue and Benefits.

Human Resources – Terry Baldwin

There had been some teething problems with the Northgate payroll system, but the Council were working to resolve these issues;

All appeals for roles in Shared Services had been completed with the exception of 1 role in Revenue and Benefits;

Induction days had been held in both Councils for staff to introduce them to their new Council;

HR Manager role – two strong candidates had been identified for this role;

Work would be undertaken on a harmonisation project covering terms and conditions of service in both Councils from 1 March. It was estimated this project would take 6 months. A report would be presented at a future meeting on the harmonisation of the terms and conditions of service in both Councils;

Previous report writing difficulties had been overcome and performance indicators would be produced on a regular basis;

Appraisal completion in 2009/10 was expected to have improved;

Staff turnover figures were 3% for Three Rivers and 1.69% for Watford; staff sickness was 2.41% at Three Rivers and 1.92% at Watford;

Revenue and Benefits – Sue Townshend

The Capita accounting system had gone live with staff now getting acquainted with the new system.

Agency temps were working to reduce the backlog of benefit payments. With regard to Performance Indicator RB3, speed of processing new benefit claims, the results had been disappointing but improvements had been made in Quarter 3 due to the use of additional resources.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits reassured the Committee that anyone applying for benefits, who was experiencing severe financial difficulties, would be considered as a high priority. There would be a convergence of processing times in the Service Plan in Year 3 and 4.

Key initiatives over the next few months had been be:

- To test the integration portal so that we can transfer agreed first-line enquiries to the Customer Services Centres.
- To continue to build experience and knowledge of the new system for staff.
- To extend mobile working so that the team could visit new claimants at home in order to speed up processing times. Soundings of interest had been made within the current team.

The Committee requested that the Quarter 1 and 2 figures for Three Rivers on the time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events be circulated to the Committee.

ACTION AGREED:-

- (1) That the Committee notes the report;
- (2) That the Quarter 1 and 2 figures for Three Rivers on the time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events be circulated to the Committee;
- (3) That a KPI for the collection of miscellaneous debts be included in the performance indicators for Revenues and Benefits; and
- (4) That a note be circulated to Members on the current main differences in terms between the two Councils and that proposals for the harmonisation of the terms and conditions of service in both Councils be reported to this Committee.

CHAIRMAN