

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, on 2 July 2012 7.30 pm to 8.27 pm

Present: Councillors M Watkin (Chair), B White (Vice-Chair), G Derbyshire, S Nelmes and R Sangster

Officers:	Bernard Clarke	Head of Strategic Finance
	Phil Adlard	Head of Revenues and Benefits
	Jane Walker	Benefits Manager
	Sarah Haythorpe	Principal Committee Manager
	Avni Patel	Head of ICT
	Emma Tiernan	Business Manager, ICT

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A Khan

JSS12/12 **DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

None received.

JSS13/12 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint Shared Services Committee held on 28 May 2012 were confirmed as a correct record subject to the following correction and signed by the Chairman.

The spelling of Councillor Sarah Nelmes name to be corrected.

JSS14/12 **NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

None

JSS15/12 **ICT UPDATE**

A verbal report was provided by the Head of ICT on the tendering process for the service and the current staffing arrangements.

ICT Staffing

The ICT Business Manager's last day before going on maternity leave would be Friday 6 July. The ICT Business Manager post had been advertised and 4 candidates had been interviewed. One of the candidates had been offered the

job and references were being obtained. The successful candidate would be attending a handover meeting with the ICT Business Manager this Friday. At present a start date for the new ICT Business Manager had not been agreed but it was hoped it would be within the next four weeks.

The Committee welcomed back to work the Head of ICT and thanked the ICT Business Manager, Emma Tiernan, for all her hard work over the last few months and wished it to be minuted their gratitude and thanks.

With regard to the recruitment of the temporary ICT Business Manager, a Member advised that one of the items for discussion at the recent Watford Audit Committee had been concerns raised by the Auditors around the robustness in obtaining references for ICT staff. The Committee were assured that adequate references were being obtained for such an important position at this vital time and all the references would be fully checked.

There was a general need to ensure that before any ICT staff were appointed by the Council all appropriate references were provided and checked.

The Head of ICT advised that the ICT Business Manager had produced a handover document which included details of all the projects being completed by the team, team appraisals and all the work being undertaken in the team.

ICT Tender

The ICT tender would close on Monday 9 July and to date five suppliers had expressed an interest in submitting a tender. A revised project plan was circulated at the meeting.

In response to a question on the Membership of the Evaluation Panel it was advised that the following Officers would be on the Panel:

Head of Strategic Finance (Watford)
Head of ICT Shared Services
Infrastructure Manager (Shared Services)
Service Desk Manager (Shared Services)
ICT Business Manager (Shared Services)
Corporate Procurement Manager (Watford)
Finance representative (TRDC/ Shared Services)
Legal representative (Watford)
Director Community and Environmental Services (TRDC)
Head of Service (Watford)
Service Manager (Watford)
Director of Corporate Resources and Governance (TRDC)
Customer Services Manager (TRDC)

Actica Consulting (Facilitators)

The Evaluation Panel would be split into 3 groups to undertake the evaluation of tenders and a Moderator Group would also be established.

RESOLVED: -

- (1) that the verbal report be noted;
- (2) that the appointment of an interim IT Manager be noted;
- (3) that the revised project plan circulated at the meeting to Members of the Joint Committee be noted.

JSS16/12 **REVENUES AND BENEFITS UPDATE**

This report gave an update on the progress being made to produce the capacity plan and other matters.

Members noted that a formal response was sent to the DWP on 11 June 2012 together with a detailed Action Plan. To date the Council had received an acknowledgement that our response had been received.

The Benefits Manager advised that since the DWP inspection and the submission of the action plan, the performance of the benefits section had been monitored closely. Monitoring work would provide details on the officers time spent processing cases and the time spent communicating with customers.

The Director of Corporate Resources and Governance was meeting the Head of Revenue and Benefits each week to review the results of this monitoring work.

The capacity plan would be benchmarked against other local authorities on the number of staff required to meet the number of cases received. The key purpose of the capacity plan was to clear the backlog of cases to within current targets.

Sickness levels within the team were being monitored and team leaders were meeting with their staff on a monthly basis to monitor targets.

A Member of the Committee stated that comparisons with other Authorities could produce a number of problems as sometimes you were not comparing like for like and perhaps comparisons should be made with SERCO and the time they take to process a case.

The Benefits Manager advised that SERCO produced data on a weekly basis on their performance providing details on the number of hours worked and the number of cases processed. This data could then be compared with the Benefits team performance. It was noted that SERCO's output would be greater as they did not have to answer telephone calls.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits advised that there was a need to address capability and sickness absence within the team. Corporately at Watford there was a drive to reduce sickness absence to 6.5 days a year. There were cases of

sickness absence within Revenue and Benefits but it was appreciated this was a stressful area to work.

A Member of the Committee said that consideration must be giving to look at the way the claimant's application was dealt with to make the process satisfactory. Both Council's were starting from a bad place as the DWP published indicators for 2010/11, ranking the 200 authorities in the country, had Watford nearly at the bottom of the list and Three Rivers third from bottom of the list.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits advised the poor performance was one of the reasons why the DWP had made their visit and why both the Councils were committed to looking to improve performance.

Members noted that the capability plan would be completed well before the Joint Committee's next meeting in September. In view of this, and the need to make rapid progress, the Committee was asked to consider how and when it receives the plan.

A Member of the Committee suggested that the Director of Corporate Resources and Governance and the Head of Revenue and Benefits, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Committee, be delegated to agree the Capacity Plan in August before being presented to the Joint Committee at their meeting on 24 September 2012.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits advised that e-service testing was ongoing but good progress was being made. All testing would be completed by 20 July 2012 so that the service can go live.

RESOLVED: -

- (1) that the contents of the report be noted; and
- (2) that the Director of Corporate Resources and Governance and the Head of Revenues and Benefits, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Committee, be delegated to agree the Capacity Plan in August before being presented to the Joint Committee at their meeting on 24 September 2012.

JSS17/12 **CLOSING OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received a verbal report on the closing of the accounts. It was noted that:

- Officers had closed both Council's accounts before the statutory deadline;
- published the guidance
- both Council's accounts were within budget;
- the Accounts had been sent to the Auditors;

- the Accounts had been published on the website and printed copies made available;

Members requested a printed copy of the Shared Services Accounts be provided to Joint Committee Members (excluding Cllr Sarah Nelmes).

RESOLVED: -

- (1) that the report be noted.
 - a. Officers had closed both Council's accounts before the statutory deadline;
 - b. published the guidance
 - c. both Council's accounts were within budget;
 - d. the Accounts had been sent to the Auditors;
 - e. the Accounts had been published on the website and printed copies made available;
 - f. be noted.
- (2) that a printed copy of the Shared Services Accounts be provided to Joint Committee Members (except Cllr Sarah Nelmes)

JSS18/12 **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

This report requested approval to a set of revised performance indicators.

A Member stated that receiving Quarterly Performance Indicators was very useful but was not convinced that receiving them monthly would be.

The Head of ICT advised that the Performance Indicators for SS ICT1/2 which mention WBC systems defined as Priority 1 and Priority 2 by the Leadership Team did not apply to TRDC since all systems had not been harmonised. This needed to be corrected.

Members requested that Officers provide an explanation on including "Not reported" in the comments column.

Members asked if consideration could be given to the timing of the Joint Committee meetings to fit in with the publication of the performance management information.

RESOLVED: -

- (1) that the report be noted.
- (2) that Officers provide an explanation on including "Not reported" in the comments column.

- (3) that the Quarter 1 data be reported to the September meeting but that a monthly report be provided in August.
- (4) that the Joint Committee meeting dates be revisited to fit in with the Performance Management information reporting.
- (5) to correct the Performance Indicators for SS ICT1/2 which mentions WBC systems that had been defined as Priority 1 and 2 by the Leadership Team but do not apply to TRDC since all systems had not been harmonised.

CHAIRMAN