

THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL AND WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Joint Shared Services Committee** held in Committee Room 2, Watford Town Hall, on Monday 5 March 2012 from 7.30pm to 8.25pm.

Present: Councillors Andy Wylie (Chairman), Brian White (Vice-Chairman), Matthew Bedford, Ralph Sangster, George Derbyshire and Asif Khan.

Officers: David Gardner, Director of Corporate Resources and Governance.
Tricia Taylor - Executive Director Resources
Phil Adlard - Head of Revenues and Benefits
Sarah Haythorpe - Principal Committee Manager
Alan Power - Head of Financial Services
Terry Baldwin - Head of Human Resources
Emma Tiernan - Business Manager, ICT

Also in attendance:- Councillor Stephen Johnson and Keith Thomas, Actica Ltd.

JSS46/11 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

None.

JSS47/11 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Shared Services Committee held on 23 January 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

JSS48/11 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman ruled that the following report, which had not been available for five clear days before the meeting, was of sufficient urgency to be considered by the Committee for the reason indicated:

Item 5 – ICT Requirements Specification

To enable the ICT Specification to be approved to obtain proposals from suppliers for the delivery of the service to the councils.

JSS49/11 ICT – SERVICE SPECIFICATION

This report sought approval of the ICT service specification which included changes to the procurement process.

It was recommended by the Council's Procurement Manager that separate full tender exercises be conducted simultaneously with both the Hertfordshire County Council framework supplier, Serco, and the GPS framework suppliers. A comparison of the Serco bid with that of the preferred GPS supplier would then be made to assess the most economically advantageous tender. This approach was tested with GPS and was supported by them as well as Actica Consulting who will be assisting with the procurement process.

All tenders received would be fully analysed and evaluated independently to ensure the best Value for Money service was provided to meet both Councils requirements. A disadvantage with this approach could be that 10 potential suppliers could put forward tenders which could take longer to process.

In response to a question on how much the extra work could cost the Council and who would undertake that work, Keith Thomas, Actica Ltd advised that the bulk of the work would be shared between Actica and the Council with additional cost to the Council for possible resources of around £2k and additional input and time from the ICT Officer.

In response to a question on the period of time for tenders to be returned, Keith Thomas at Actica Ltd advised that potential suppliers would be given 4 weeks to return their tenders.

The timetable previously published outlining dates of key milestones was currently being reworked and would be available for circulation to all stakeholders shortly. It was anticipated that should outsourcing be approved for the ICT shared service, it could be handed over to a new provider in October 2012.

In response to a question regarding the involvement of Members it was advised that the Committee would be involved in the shortlisting of the preferred suppliers and would be required to sign off the recommendation of who should be selected as the preferred supplier.

It was agreed that a timetable to include key milestones for the tendering process, including what would be reported to the Joint Committee and when, the appointment of the preferred supplier and the handing over to the new provider be circulated to the Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) that the ICT Service Specification be approved.
- (2) that the revised approach to obtaining costed proposals from the market be approved.

JSS50/11 REVENUES AND BENEFITS UPDATE

This report provided an update on the revenues and benefits service.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits advised that Council tax bills for both Councils would be despatched to residents from 9 March 2012. Both Councils had agreed a nil increase in their portion of the Council Tax.

DWP Inspectors would be visiting the Revenue and Benefits team this week to assess how the changes which had been put in place were impacting on the processing of new claims. A report from the DWP would be available during week commencing 19 March. Members of the Committee would be kept up to date on the visit.

On the arrangement of the closure of the South Oxhey office, it was advised that there had been no drop in visits due to the closure, in fact, there had been a small increase in the number of people using the service.

It was proposed that the phones continue to be closed on Wednesday afternoon apart from between 14 March – 4 April when the Council Tax bills would be despatched to residents.

In response to a question by a Member of the Committee on the timescales for the arrangements to close the South Oxhey office and if there was a stop point, the Head of Revenue and Benefits advised he was confident there had been no detriment to the service provided in South Oxhey. The closure of the office had helped to reduce the backlog of claims to a manageable level.

The Chairman advised that the South Oxhey would continue to be closed on Wednesday but this decision could be reviewed at any time by Members. The closure of the office on Wednesday's had provided efficiency gains but with no loss of contact for the people of South Oxhey.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits advised that an average of 510 telephone calls were being received each week but it was hoped this would reduce once the self service facility was available which it was hoped would be by the end of April.

In response to a question by a Member of the Committee on when the arrangement not to take telephone calls on Wednesday afternoons would stop, the Head of Revenue and Benefits advised that the situation would continue to be monitored although the CSC at Watford, in line with Three Rivers, were now able to respond to some benefit calls.

The Chairman advised that 510 calls a week was a lot of telephone calls and requested that this arrangement be reviewed by the Portfolio Holders and Officers in April and that a further report be presented to the Committee at the next meeting.

Members of the Committee were generally very pleased with the improvements and hoped the progress would continue.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) that the contents of the report be noted;
- (2) that the arrangement to close the South Oxhey office on a Wednesday be continued;
- (3) that phones continue to be closed on a Wednesday afternoon (apart from 14 March – 4 April) but this arrangement be reviewed by the Portfolio Holders and Officers in April with a further report to the Committee at the next meeting in May; and
- (4) that the "trigger point" for engaging resilience resource be set at 1000 documents and subject to review in three months.

JSS51/11 NEW STAFF APPRAISAL PROCESS

This report provided an update on the move to a new staff appraisal process which it was noted had taken longer than originally planned but a new system would be in place for March 2013.

In response to a question on why it had not been possible to implement a new appraisal system, the Head of Human Resources advised that it had been found that the Resourcelink system did not have the required modules to deliver the new appraisal system.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) The appraisal cascade should run between March and June annually, with a mid year review in autumn.

- (2) The same time scale should be implemented across both councils to support consistency in training planning and to enable a streamlined process in the Shared Services.
- (3) Learning and Development to finalise consultation with managers and staff and take their feedback into account when designing a new appraisal process.
- (4) Training is undertaken in both Councils to emphasise the importance of appraisals and discussions with staff.
- (5) A further report is submitted to Joint Committee once the options outlined above have been costed and reviewed against the detailed specification.

JSS52/11 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Members noted that the performance indicators were logged on the website

The Head of Finance advised that the preparation of the closing of accounts programme for both Council's for 2011/12 was underway and would be circulated to all Staff by the end of March with a report to be presented to both Audit Committees. The problems from closing the accounts last year had now been addressed.

RESOLVED:-

that the update be noted.

JSS53/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman advised the Committee that this would be Tricia Taylor's last meeting as she would be leaving Watford Borough Council in April. He paid tribute to all her work and the contribution she made in implementing the four shared services.

Tricia Taylor thanked the Chairman for his comments.

The Chairman advised that he would not be standing at the next election in May but thanked Members and Officers for their contributions in implementing the four shared services.

The next meeting of the Joint Committee would be held on Monday 28 May 2012 at 7.30pm.

CHAIRMAN