

## Minutes of Meeting 15<sup>th</sup> September 2004

**Chair:**

Cllr G. A. Walker

**Councillors:**

R. Belam,

**Officers in Attendance:**

Jacquelyn Adams	Group Manager - Complaints
Joanna David	Head of Performance Management
Hannes de Bruin	Unit Manager - Management Development
Ian Goldsworthy	Strategy & Resources Manager
David Knight	Principal Committee Manager [Scrutiny]
Clive Morton	Head of Scrutiny
Christine Neyndorff	Head of Cultural Services
Katherine Pedley	Head of Libraries

**Residents Present:**

There were no residents present at the meeting.

**8. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE & SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr. Jon Wilson.

**9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None received.

**10. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No requests received.

**11. MINUTES**

Agreed subject to the following amendment:

Item 6 Improvement Plan

Paragraph 2, line 1: delete "Commission" and insert "Sub-Committee".

**12. IMPROVEMENT PLAN [DEADLINES]**

The Sub-Committee received a report that provided a summary of the delays in achieving certain targets in the Council's Improvement Plan.

In addition, the report outlined any revisions to deadlines contained within the Improvement Plan for the period up until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2004.

The main points of the discussion on this report are summarised below:

**Comment:** The Sub-Committee needs to have cross-references for the performance indicators with the definitions used for each key milestone?

**Response:** The viability of such cross-referencing can be looked at.

**Question:** Why was the June 2004 target for agreeing a borough - wide service model for 24-hour access to Mental Health services not met?

**Answer:** The target was overly optimistic and the borough - wide service model will now be in place on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2004.

**Comment:** Can a report detailing the progress with regard to the service model be presented to the next meeting of this Sub-Committee?

**Response:** That can be arranged.

**Question:** What is the current position with regard to the Council's Headquarters options appraisals?

**Answer:** The Commission scrutinised the options appraisals report at its last meeting and have suggested to Cabinet that:

- A medium term risk assessment be undertaken in respect of the Accommodation Strategy;
- Consideration is given to the Health and Safety Implications of the introduction of home working;
- The timetable as set out in Appendix 4 of the Accommodation Strategy report should be revised to reflect the current position;
- Consideration is given to the human resource implications of the proposed Accommodation Strategy, in particular with regard to changes to people's working condition [E.g. hot desking and home working].

**Question:** What is the current position on the achievement of whole Council Investors in People [IiP]?

**Answer:** Although the IiP standard was not achieved overall, services were successful in a number of modules and partially successful in others. The Assessor's report stated that very good progress was being made, that the current initiatives should be continued, and if possible strengthened. If this happened then it would only be a matter of time before the standard was achieved.

In addition, it should also be noted that only a relatively short period of intensive work had taken place on IiP before the assessment and this coincided with the appointment of an Interim Head for Libraries in May and the secondment of a Learning and Development Manager.

An Action Plan has now been drawn up to ensure success at the next Assessment; 2 Permanent Service Heads have now started, Katherine Pedley for Libraries and Lorna Lee for Museums and galleries, and both will ensure the action plan is implemented with the support of the Learning and Development Manager. It has now been agreed, on the recommendation of the Assessor that the 2 units will be assessed separately next time, and that she will be carrying out a "healthcheck " in November with a full assessment in February 2005.

In addition, the Council are using internal verifiers who undertake yearly assessments to assist the directorates in achieving whole Council IiP

**Comment:** There has been concern that training and development for library staff is insufficient.

**Response:** In the past 3-4 months a manager has been seconded from the Youth Service to assist in the motivation, training and development of staff.

**Question:** What is the difference between the Library Development and Renewal Strategies?

- Answer:** The Renewal Strategy is about buildings whilst the Development Strategy is concerned with people.
- Question:** What is the position with regard to the Museums and Galleries Service?
- Answer:** The Head of Service is confident that through the advice offered by the External Assessor, excellent progress has been made.
- Question:** How best could we develop mechanisms to improve the Local Strategic Partnership?
- Answer:** The Sub-Committee should look at how well the Partnership is meeting its objectives.
- Question:** How can the Sub-Committee evaluate the Partnership?
- Answer:** The external accreditation of the Partnership by the Government Office for London provides evidence on how well it is delivering the agreed work streams.  
A report detailing how this will be achieved can be presented to this Sub-Committee.
- Question:** Why has the review of the debt policy and collection procedures only been partially met?
- Answer:** The Equalities Impact Assessment took longer than anticipated.
- Question:** When will the Procurement Strategy be implemented?
- Answer:** The end of September 2004.
- Question:** Why has there been a delay in publishing the Regeneration Strategy for Waltham Forest?
- Answer:** The delay has been due to the London Development Agency delaying decision-making on Single Pot funding to deliver regeneration activities in the upper Lea Valley.
- Question:** Why have there been delays in achieving the priorities in relation to waste, Street Cleansing and Recycling?
- Answer:** Discussions on permanent arrangements to extend the hours that street sweepers are at work across the Borough are being incorporated into Equal Pay negotiations. Following the decision not to outsource Street Services, it had been proposed that those street sweepers on agency contracts would be moved into permanent positions, with a new shift system to provide earlier start and finish times.  
However, until negotiations around equal pay are concluded these arrangements cannot be introduced. In the meantime, the Head of Service has agreed new shift patterns with agency staff to ensure street sweeping from 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Question:** Why has there been a delay in achieving the modernisation and improvement of the Statutory Drug Service?
- Answer:** This is due to the fact the North East London Mental Health Trust [NELMHT] had no strategic staff in place until late August and they were unable to prepare and complete the Vision document for achieving the modernisation and improvement of the Service.
- Comment:** The Sub-Committee would like the opportunity to scrutinise that document when it is available.

**Question:** How has the delay in transferring the external Hearing-Impaired Service to EduAction from Lifelong Learning impacted upon the users of that service?

**Answer:** A response will be provided to the next meeting of this Sub-Committee.

### 13. COMPLAINTS MONITORING

The Sub-Committee received a report that outlined the progress on the Improvement Plan Priority "Review complaints process and the implementation of monitoring through CRM (Customer Relations Management)."

The report also examined the action, which has been, and is being, taken to improve performance in responding to complaints from members of the public. The Sub-Committee noted that the Council currently operates a two-stage complaints process.

Stage 1 of the process requires the service area to which the complaint relates to acknowledge the complaint within five calendar days and to provide a full response within 28 calendar days. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response, they may request the Chief Executive to review the matter under Stage 2 of the process. Again, any such request must be acknowledged within five days and a full response sent within 28 days. The Corporate Complaints Team carries out this part of the process, which is located within the Corporate Services Directorate.

Over the last eighteen months or so, the Council has sought to encourage genuine complaints to help identify service delivery issues/problems and secure improved performance. This has brought about a significant increase in the numbers of complaints being made.

In 2002/03, 137 complaints were received under Stage 2; in 2003/04 there were 166; and in the first four months of 2004/05 the number has increased to 75 (suggesting over 200 for the current year).

The Corporate Complaints Team currently comprises 1 x Manager and 1.75 x Investigators. One of these investigators deals almost exclusively with Ombudsman complaints. A development bid for 2004/05 to increase the number of investigators was not approved. Against this background of limited resources, performance in terms of responding to Stage 2 complaints has remained weak.

The Best Value review of the complaints service in 2001 has added a further complexity. The Council previously operated, in common with other local authorities, a 3-stage complaints process with Stages 1 and 2 being dealt with by the service concerned and Stage 3 by the Chief Executive. Management Board, when it considered the report of the Best Value Review, agreed a two-stage model in the interests of improved customer services. Only one other London Borough operates such a process. The commitment to a 28-day turn around of these complaints is also difficult to achieve with current resource levels. The Sub-Committee also noted that no other London Borough operates a Performance Indicator for the equivalent of our Stage 2.

There are other emerging changes that will further impact upon the service. In January 2005, the Freedom of Information Act requires Councils to have a framework in place to deal with complaints about non-compliance. In addition, it has been suggested that the Standards Board will return some Member/MP complaints to Councils for investigation. The Local Government Ombudsman has also indicated that his caseload is increasing, adding further pressure on the resources available to the Complaints Team.

The main points of the discussion on this report are summarised below:

**Question:** What is the data protection situation with regard to the information gathered as part of any investigation?

**Answer:** Users only have access to the information that they require in order to complete an investigation.

**Question:** How is the Service publicised?

**Answer:** The Council's Complaints Leaflet has been revised to invite customers to both compliment/comment on services as well as complain. It is proposed, subject to Cabinet approval, that in January 2005, a customer suggestion scheme will be launched. This will provide the Council with a mechanism to consider customer improvement suggestions and implement them

**Question:** When is the next Annual report?

**Answer:** The Report for 2003/04 is being finalised and will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in the autumn.

**Question:** What will be in the report?

**Answer:** The report will provide information on the number and type of complaints received by each service area. Lessons learned from complaints will also included in this Report.

**Question:** Can copies of this report also be made available to Members of this Sub-Committee?

**Answer:** Certainly.

**Question:** As part of the Improvement Priority, a Customer Relations Management (CRM) system is being proposed which will improve the way in which the Council interacts with residents and others contacting it about service delivery issues. When will this system be introduced?

**Answer:** The Improvement Plan priority referred to the complaints element of the CRM system, which is being implemented in September 2004. This was, however, conditional upon CRM being implemented in August. Given the complexity of the necessary contract negotiations and other related issues, this timetable was always likely to be over-optimistic and the system will be introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005.

#### **14. IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Sub-Committee received a report that is a re-draft of the Improvement Plan and showed the targets in a chronological order.

The main points of the discussion on this report are summarised below:

**Comment:** Scrutiny needs to look at what really matters to the Council and develop mechanisms to see how the Sub-Committee can best examine the Improvement Plan.

**Response:** A Scrutiny Policy Officer can be given the task to work with the Improvement and Performance Team to develop how the Sub-Committee can identify, that which is critical to any scrutiny of the Council's performance.

In addition, those Councils that are recognised as lead practitioners in this area can be contacted to identify good practice that can be replicated in Waltham Forest

#### **15. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS.**

The Sub-Committee noted dates of future Improvement and Performance Sub-Committee meetings for the period up until 15<sup>th</sup> March 2004:

- 2nd November 2004

- 11th January 2004
- 15th March 2005.

Members are reminded that unless otherwise stated all meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission will be held at Walthamstow Town Hall, Forest Road, London E17 4JF and commence at 7.30 p.m.

Meeting closed at 9: 35 p.m.

**Chairs Signature**\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**\_\_\_\_\_