

NORTH DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT OF THE MEETING

Committee: Service Review Committee

Date: **Wednesday, 13 August 2008 starting at 3.40 pm**

Venue: Council Chamber, Nordon, Salisbury Road,
Blandford Forum

Present: Cllr Vic Fox (Chairman)
Cllr Mervyn Jeffery (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Derek Beer
Cllr Barrie Cooper
Cllr Michael Cox
Cllr Joe Hickish
Cllr Nick Mason
Cllr John Tanner
Cllr Chris Tomlinson

Officers Present: Mark Williams, Research and Performance Policy Manager

Apologies: Cllr Mark White

11.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST No declarations of interest were made by Members under the Code of Conduct.
12.	REPORT OF THE LAST MEETING The report of the meeting held on 9 July 2008 was confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
13.	URGENT BUSINESS There were no items of urgent business.
14.	PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT UPDATED (APRIL 2007 – MARCH 2008) The Research and Performance Policy Manager presented the report which had been considered by Cabinet in June setting out the year end performance against both National and Local Indicators. He tabled an additional paper which showed the comparison between the figures for this authority and those of some 120 other local authorities in rural areas within

the SPARSE group.

Members' attention was drawn to the Key Performance Indicators which were those looked at by the Audit Commission and covered areas such as housing issues, capacity, community etc.

The Policy Manager highlighted the following:-

- *BV8 – Percentage of Invoices Paid with 30 days.*

This was good for local businesses and was above average for the grouping.

- *BV12 – Number of days sickness per employee*

It was highlighted that staff sickness was increasing and the Senior Management Team were very aware of this. He added that this figure was partly due to a number of staff on long-term sickness absence. A number of strategies had now been put in place to tighten up procedures.

Members were concerned that this issue appeared to be a cause for concern each time this report was presented to the Committee. They felt that it would benefit the Committee in its understanding of the issues if a breakdown of the figures could be undertaken such as taking out long-term sickness figures, breakdown by departments etc.

The Scrutiny Officer reminded members that they had in the past asked the Portfolio Holder to attend the Committee to answer a number of questions and this could be undertaken again. She added that the information presented was often out of date due to scheduling of committee timetables and would welcome suggestions as to how this could be rectified.

It was felt important to get behind the figures presented in the report as this issue did result in costs to the authority. It was highlighted that this had been an area of concern over a number of years and improvements should now be seen. If this was not the case it was important to understand why.

Cllr Tanner raised the issue of cost to the authority in trying to improve the situation and whether this was resulting in value for money. Cllr Beer felt it was very important to get behind the figures as it was not only the impact on the authority which needed to be considered it was also the impact on service provision to the community.

- *BV17a – Staff from ethnic minorities*

Cllr Jeffery asked how the targets for this type of indicator were set. He felt that if members were not informed of the full detail ie percentage of people from ethnic minorities in the district, then there was no way of ensuring that this target was realistic. The Policy Manager advised that the target had been set by the Personnel Section and approved by Cabinet. He added that the Audit Commission had highlighted the need

to make the workforce more reflective of the local community and the need to get a better balance.

- *Planning Indicators*

The Policy Manager highlighted that performance in the Planning Section was generally good and advised that resources had been moved around within the team to assist with this. The Chairman stated that the Development Control Manager had attended a meeting of the Committee last year to explain the detail behind the figures and had indicated that it was difficult to undertake a direct comparison with other authorities due to differences in case load and structures.

The Policy Manager stated that a piece of work was currently being undertaken to obtain establishment details from other authorities to try and get a more direct comparison.

- *BV78a – Speed of Processing – New HB/CTB Claims and BV78b – Speed of processing changes of circumstances for HB/CTB Claims*

The Policy Manager advised that although progress was being made in these areas this was not happening as quickly as in other authorities. The Chairman indicated that the Revenues Manager, in her last report to the Committee, had indicated that it was difficult to appoint qualified staff and the issues highlighted may not have occurred if the process of appointment had been quicker.

Cllr Mason queried the target set for BV78b had been 14 days when the previous figure for actual days taken in 2006/07 had been 11.4 days. He felt that it was important to understand the reasoning behind this.

Members raised various issues which could affect these figures such as an elderly population, information not being properly supplied etc. Cllr Mason felt that it was important not to get into a trap of putting forward explanations. The Portfolio Holder and relevant officers needed to be asked to give clear answers to the Committee as to why figures were not met and how targets are set. The Policy Manager advised that although the targets were set annually they were reviewed on a monthly or six weekly basis when meetings were undertaken between Team Leaders and Portfolio Holders.

The next set of targets would start to be generated in September when Team Leaders talk to colleagues and start to formulate either business plans for 2009/10. These would then be brought to the Scrutiny Workshop as part of the budget process. He added that due to a new set of National Indicators being introduced there were a smaller number than at present. However, others were to be retained as local indicators and if members felt a need to retain a particular indicator they could indicate this.

Following further discussion the Committee felt that it was important that they were clear on how they would present a challenge to the levels of targets being set and the issues that surround this. The Policy Manager

	<p>stressed the importance of the need to challenge constructively.</p> <p>The Policy Manager drew members' attention to the other items contained in the report.</p> <p>Human Resources Management - He highlighted that current number of employees was 240 compared to the permanent establishment figure of 273. This indicated a more controlled and careful approach to replacement of posts.</p> <p>He advised that a Workforce Development Officer had now been appointed as a joint post with Poole Borough Council, and she would be working on strategic training issues within this authority.</p> <p>Risk Management – Important for all business plans to include risk assessments as these would help to identify areas where issues could affect services and their potential to miss targets.</p> <p>Customer Management – The Policy Manager advised that the figures in the report were presented to the Senior Management Team on a quarterly basis. The breakdown in the report showed how quickly teams were responding to telephone calls.</p> <p>Cllr Cooper raised the issue of the high level of calls being abandoned within the Development Control Service. The Chairman stated that he had experienced an issue whilst trying to contact the Service and felt that the reasons behind this issue needed to be explored. The Policy Manager reminded members that there was a complaints system in place and the greater the number of issues registered would allow a wider picture to be seen and possible solutions drawn up.</p> <p>The Chairman stressed the importance of this particular issue as this was often the first and only contact residents had with the authority and it was important to ensure a good impression.</p>
	<p><i>The meeting ended at 5.05 pm</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Chairman</i></p>