



Lewes District Council

www.lewes.gov.uk

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Garden Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes** on **Thursday 25 April 2013** at **10.00am**

Present:

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), A Dean, P F Gardiner, S J Gauntlett, J V S Harris, E C Merry, I A Nicholson, E E J Russell and J Stockdale

Officers Present:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer
J Amos-Davidson, Interim Head of HR
A Bryce, Head of District Services
A Chequers, Corporate Head – Housing Services
A Frost, Parks and Cemeteries Manager
L Frost, Director of Planning and Environmental Services
S Jump, Head of Finance

Minutes

31 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

32 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor J M Harrison-Hicks.

33 Variation in the Order of the Agenda

Resolved:

- 33.1** That Agenda Item 8 “HR Benchmarking” and Agenda Item 7 “Benchmarking (a) Waste and Recycling and (b) Street Cleansing” be taken immediately before Agenda Item 6 “Housing Benchmarking”.

34 HR Benchmarking Information

The Committee considered Report No 79/13 which provided benchmarking information on the Human Resources (HR) function and activities at the Council.

Benchmarking and Value for Money Studies could help to identify areas of activity and service delivery that had the potential to yield additional income or reduce costs.

The Interim Head of HR took the Committee through the Report. She explained that as part of the three year programme of benchmarking studies, a report was received from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Benchmarking Club on some of the HR activities at the Council in 2011. This was reported to the Employment Committee in October 2011, but the information being presented was not submitted to Scrutiny Committee at that time.

The Report compared the Council with 12 other District or Borough Councils with between 250 and 750 employees (the Council had approximately 460 employees with a full time equivalent of 400). The first part of the Report was concerned with the HR function and its costs and activities, while the latter pages concentrated on various HR performance measures such as sickness, grievances, age structure of the workforce etc. The Interim Head of HR advised that the full time equivalent (FTE) figure was a more accurate number to use in statistical analysis rather than a headcount figure when examining staffing figures.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Interim Head of HR advised that the comparable authorities within the Report were statistical neighbours, rather than neighboring authorities, and that it may be useful to obtain data from neighbouring authorities for future comparison purposes.

The Interim Head of HR highlighted to the Committee that costs per FTE were lowest in the comparable group for roles within policy and strategy and that changes in resources may be required in the future in order to increase capacity in that area at the Council.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Interim Head of HR advised that it may be useful to review changes to staffing and HR in light of the recent internal changes occurring at the Council.

Resolved:

34.1 That Report No 79/13 concerning HR Benchmarking be noted;

34.2 That the Interim Head of HR be requested to return to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to report on further Human Resources Benchmarking with neighbouring authorities; and

34.3 That the Interim Head of HR be requested to return to a future

IHHR

IHHR

meeting of the Scrutiny Committee with an interim report on the level of policy and strategy work that is required at the Council.

35 Benchmarking – (a) Waste and Recycling and (b) Street Cleansing

The Committee considered Report No 78/13 which detailed the benchmarking data on Waste and Recycling and Street Cleansing and provided a comparison with the data from other local authorities.

Benchmarking and Value for Money Studies could help to identify areas of activity and service delivery that had the potential to yield additional income or reduce costs.

The Director of Planning and Environmental Services took the Committee through the Report. He explained that the Council provided a waste and recycling service to 43,600 households across all parts of the District and that this was increasing as new properties were being built.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised that Lewes District Council was unusual in providing an in-house service. He added that all other local authorities in Sussex, apart from Brighton & Hove City Council, employed commercial firms to provide the service via an outsourcing contract. The Head of District Services explained that the service at Lewes District Council was in a better position for not joining the joint waste contract with other Councils in East Sussex as it was able to offer better value for money as well as retain a weekly refuse collection. The Committee added that keeping the service in-house allowed a greater degree of flexibility in decision making.

The Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised the Committee that in 2011/12, the Council was amongst the 5% best performing authorities nationally on the lowest average amount of waste arising per household. He explained that recycling rates were frequently used in the media and elsewhere as the headline indicator of local authority performance in waste management. He added that the introduction of food waste recycling later in 2013 was predicted to approximately double the Council's recycling rate from about 23.5 % to around 45%.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Planning and Environmental Services drew the Committee's attention to the waste hierarchy, as detailed on page 8 of Report No 78/13. He explained that this hierarchy detailed the importance of reducing and reusing waste, and that the Council made efforts in its reducing waste work through ongoing campaigns such as home composting.

The Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised the Committee that the Council offered a waste collection service to businesses within the District, in competition with a number of commercial contractors. The Head of District Services added that the Council had been developing the capacity and managing the charges with a view to looking at potential for income growth in this area.

The Committee questioned whether cardboard recycling would be rolled out to the entire District. The Head of District Services advised that the Council was working to extend this service to all residents, and that plans were in place to do this.

The Director of Planning and Environmental Services explained that the collection of green waste was not a priority for the Council at the moment, and that this was presently achieved through the promotion of composting facilities. The Committee advised that other options could be considered for green waste, such as central containers being placed temporarily in areas of the District for short periods of time for residents to use for their green waste.

The Committee was concerned that although the Council was undertaking many interesting initiatives concerning waste and recycling, Councillors and residents were not aware of them, such as the assisted collection service which helped residents who were unable to put their own rubbish out on the street for collection.

Resolved:

- 35.1** That Report No 78/13 concerning Waste and Recycling and Street Cleansing Benchmarking be noted;
- 35.2** That a vote of thanks be accorded to officers in the Waste and Recycling Department at the Council for their hard work in maintaining an excellent in-house service; and
- 35.3** That the Director of Planning and Environmental Services be requested to email a reminder to all Town and Parish Councils with information about current campaigns and initiatives concerning waste and recycling at the Council.

DPES

DPES

36 Housing Benchmarking

The Committee considered Report No 77/13 which reported on the current benchmarking activities that had been carried out, or were currently ongoing within Housing Services at the Council.

Benchmarking and Value for Money Studies could help to identify areas of activity and service delivery that had the potential to yield additional income or reduce costs.

The Corporate Head – Housing Services took the Committee through the Report. He advised that the Council was a member of HouseMark, which assisted benchmarking in a number of different ways. The Council took part in HouseMark's core benchmarking system which enabled officers to make a value for money assessment of the Council's operations across the broad range of business activities.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Corporate Head – Housing

Services advised that the Housing Department did not have completed benchmarking data, but that this was being prioritised by the newly appointed Housing Policy and Performance Manager. He added that significantly fuller data would be available next year.

The Corporate Head – Housing Services took the Committee through the data concerning responsive repairs and void works, as detailed in Appendix 1 of Report No 77/13. He explained that as central Government funding had changed, the Council was now able to invest more in properties across the District.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Corporate Head – Housing Services advised that the Council worked hard with tenants' groups to ensure their voice was heard.

Resolved:

- 36.1** That Report No 77/13 concerning the Housing Benchmarking be noted.

37 Feasibility Study into the Option of an in-house bid for Grounds Maintenance Services

The Committee considered Report No 80/13 which advised the Committee of the progress made with the Grounds Maintenance Contract and in developing an in-house bid for grounds maintenance services.

The Parks and Cemeteries Manager took the Committee through the Report. He advised that at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 22 November 2012, a Report was discussed concerning the existing Grounds Maintenance Contract. At this meeting, the Committee requested that an update on the Parks and Open Spaces Maintenance Contract be provided at a future meeting.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Parks and Cemeteries Manager explained that the main grounds maintenance contract, currently known as the Leisure Management (Outdoor) Contract (LMO), was awarded to the current contractor in March 2004. He added that over the past two years £60,000 of annual savings had been made from the contract by adjustments to the specification.

The Parks and Cemeteries Manager explained that the current Grounds Maintenance Contract expired on 28 February 2014. Due to the size and complexity of the contract, and the fact that due to its value it has to be advertised in Europe, work had already begun on preparations for the new contract. It was proposed to let the new contract run for a period of 10 years, with a breakout option at 5 years and an option to extend by a further 3 years.

He added that the contract was advertised to potential contractors in March 2013, with the contractor selection process due to be completed by June 2013. Contract documentation will be sent out in early July, with tenders

being returned for evaluation by late August 2013. A contract award would be made in autumn 2013.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Parks and Cemeteries Manager advised that approval had been given at the Cabinet meeting in March 2013 to prepare an in-house bid for the new grounds maintenance contract. Officers' preliminary work suggested that this offered an attractive and competitive bid which warranted consideration against bids from external contractors.

The Committee advised that it was important to consider staffing issues within the evaluation of the bid, as if staff would be moving in-house to Lewes District Council their job descriptions and rights would change.

Resolved:

37.1 That Report No 80/13 concerning the Feasibility Study into the Option of an in-house bid for Grounds Maintenance Services be noted; and

37.2 That the Parks and Cemeteries Manager be requested to email all members of the Scrutiny Committee with the draft contract specification for the Grounds Maintenance Services before the Cabinet meeting in October 2013.

PCM

38 Training

The Chair asked the Committee to consider whether it had any training needs for the coming year.

Resolved:

38.1 That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to examine whether media and public speaking training could be offered to all Councillors.

SCO

39 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved:

39.1 That the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 27 June 2013 at 10.00am in the Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes be noted.

All to note

The meeting ended at 11.45am

S J Osborne
Chair