



Shetland Islands Council

MINUTE

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~~Executive Scrutiny~~ Committee
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lerwick
Monday 8 May 2006 at 3 p.m.

Present:

J P Nicolson	B Cheyne
F B Grains	R G Feather
I J Hawkins	F A Robertson
T W Stove	

Apologies

L G Groat

In attendance (Officers):

G Johnston, Head of Finance
J Riise, Head of Legal and Administration
J R Smith, Head of Organisational Development
P Peterson, Performance Management Co-ordinator
A Cogle, Service Manager – Administration

Invited to Attend:

A Hamilton, Head of Planning
V Hawthorne, Development Plans Manager
I McDiarmid, Planning Control Manager
S McLeod, Building Standards Manager
A Taylor, Conservation Manager

Circular

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

Minute

The minute of meeting held on 30 March 2006, was confirmed.

Min. Ref.	Subject	Action/ Info
6/06	<u>Customer Care Standards</u>	

<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p>	<p>The Committee considered a report by the Head of Organisational Development (Appendix 1).</p> <p>During discussion, the Committee agreed that whilst standard letter formats, etc. were useful, it was also the case that behaviour and manners towards the public were as important as the written response. The Committee agreed that whilst not all staff in general were no doubt aware of this, there were some complaints, and it was important for staff to ensure that they gave the impression of being interested and in a manner which encouraged people to come back again.</p> <p>Regarding correspondence with community councils, the Committee noted that the Association of Shetland Community Councils, at their meeting in April, had highlighted some complaints with regard to the quality of correspondence being received and the promptness of responses. It was agreed that the Head of Legal and Administration would continue his dialogue with Community Councils, thereafter review the outcome perhaps leading to setting of some minimum standards and appropriate formats for departments to follow in responding to queries from Community Councils.</p> <p>Members made observations regarding jargon, abbreviations and terminology being used, particularly in reports, and agreed that more consideration should be given to using plain English and providing a glossary of terms or explanation of abbreviations used.</p> <p>The Committee referred to some examples within the report and its appendix, but noted that this was an internal document for communicating between staff, and recognised that the staff involved may be familiar with the terminology. However, it was accepted that there was still a need to keep documents plain and simple.</p> <p>The Head of Organisational Development advised that there were a number of customer care actions within the Corporate Improvement Plan this year, and next, and would be recommending that the Council keep Customer Care as part of Section 2 of the Corporate Improvement Plan with regard to 'Organising our Business'. The Committee agreed.</p>	<p>Head of Org. Dev.</p>
<p>7/06</p> <p>1</p>	<p><u>Further Information on Statutory Performance Indicators</u></p> <p>The Committee considered a report by the Head of Organisational Development (Appendix 2).</p> <p>The Head of Organisational Development explained that following production of the comparative figures regarding Statutory Performance Indicators, each service area had provided a brief explanation as to the underlying causes for the results shown for Shetland Islands Council.</p>	

2	Mr J P Nicolson said that the Council should give serious consideration to conducting exit interviews, or make arrangements to contact female Chief Officers who had already left the Council, with a view to finding out whether there were any equal opportunity issues to be addressed.	Head of Org. Dev.
3	The Head of Organisational Development advised that the Council had embarked on a fairly substantial management development programme, which would assist in the analysis of equal opportunities, as well as finding out whether the issues being faced were local issues, or being replicated nationally.	
4	Regarding the indicators for Building Warrants, the Committee noted that the new statutory indicators were to be introduced, mainly in response to the implementation of the new Building Regulations, which would hopefully result in more realistic indicators.	
5	Reference was made to the indicators for Food Hygiene, and Members noted that the information related to the year 2004/05, and the Section was now able to carry out its full range of activities.	
6	The Committee referred to the information relating to the period within which empty houses were being re-let, and asked that more information be provided on the reasons for this, for example if there was a high proportion of properties being returned in poor condition, and to find out if the Council was markedly different from other areas.	Head of Org. Dev. / Head of Housing
7	The Committee otherwise agreed that no further action was required on any of the remaining indicators, and were satisfied with the explanations given.	

8/06	<u>Performance Management Update</u> The Committee considered a report by the Head of Organisational Development (Appendix 3).	
8	Mrs I J Hawkins referred to Priority 2, Equal Opportunities, and asked how the outcome targets for ethnic minorities had been evaluated. The Head of Organisational Development advised that a weekly drop-in café had been organised at Islesburgh Community Centre, for those who were learning English as a foreign language. He said these had been well attended, and provided a facility for those people, including migrant workers, to meet with others who were new to Shetland. He added that it was hard to say how far the target had been met, but it was an activity that had helped some.	

9	Referring to page 18 and developing staff, Mr J P Nicolson said he remained concerned about the structure of the Executive Management Team. In particular, he said that the Interim Heads of Education and Social Work were included in the Team, but it was known that this would be short term, and they would take their skills with them. The Head of Organisational Development advised that the Executive Management had recently been reformed, and included the Head of Finance, as well as the General Manager of the Shetland Charitable Trust and the new Shetland Community Development Trust. Mr Nicolson said this was understood, but was of the view that some consideration should be given to ensuring that the breadth of representation should ensure that all areas of the Council were covered at this corporate level and improve linkage with Council policies.	
10	During the discussion, Members agreed that when communicating with the public, staff should also consider those who do not have access to the internet and ensure alternative methods of communication were available.	
11	Members expressed an interest in being provided with the results of the staff audit surveys.	
12	In conclusion, the Committee noted that the purpose of the Corporate Improvement Plan was to assist the Council into shaping next year's Corporate Plan, and agreed the importance of ensuring ongoing discussion and debate regarding the targets, priorities and achievements.	

	In order to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information, the Committee resolved in terms of the relevant legislation, and on the motion of Mr J P Nicolson, seconded by Mrs I J Hawkins, to exclude the public during consideration of the following items of business. <i>(Mr T W Stove attended the meeting.)</i>	
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9/06	<u>Follow up on Issues Raised at last Meeting</u> The Chairperson agreed that after having discussed the issues with the Executive Director – Infrastructure Services, an update would be provided at the next meeting on the relationship between the DLO and Scord Quarry.	
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10/06	<u>Report from Head of Planning</u> The Committee considered a report by the Head of Planning.	
1	Mr J P Nicolson said the report had been very informative, but was concerned particularly with regard to the fact that the problems	

	being faced had developed over some years. Mr Nicolson said this was an example of the need for service areas to have a direct and regular link into the Executive Management Team.	
2	The Head of Planning provided a short presentation to the Committee, highlighting the resources, performance and issues affect service performance, as well as proposed solutions.	
3	The Head of Planning concluded with an invitation to Members of the Scrutiny Committee to attend the Planning Service for an informal discussion with staff and a closer look at current issues.	
4	Reference was made to the reports in the media following the last Scrutiny Committee. Mr Nicolson confirmed that the presentation today had re-emphasised the fact the Committee had been primarily concerned with increasing expectations and limited resources, rather than with staff skills or competencies.	
5	<p>A full and frank discussion took place concerning the relevant issues, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service has not been meeting targets for at least two and a half years; • Resource problems are the main cause, followed by changing and complicated legislative requirements, which will continue, particularly with regard to Environmental Assessments, the new Planning Act and the recently revised and Building Regulations; • Demands on the service from large-scale projects, results in day to day service being hampered by insufficient resources; • The Important contribution of the Service towards sustainable development and economic growth is recognised; • The regulatory nature of the service attracts public acrimony and may have meant that it received less than its due in terms of increased resources; • Need to focus on improving statutory requirements; • The recruitment process could be much more creative in attracting and retaining staff, both for the short term and long term; and • Significant problems had now been highlighted and were acknowledged by management and Councillors. 	
6	The Committee agreed that before coming to any conclusions as to the outcome of this review, that the Scrutiny Committee members visit the Planning Service for an informal discussion with staff. <i>[Members later agreed to attend the Planning Service on the morning of Monday 22 May].</i>	
7	Mr J P Nicolson concluded by saying that it should be made clear	

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	that the Scrutiny Committee acknowledged that the difficulties being faced were very real, and the Committee was seeking to be supportive of the Planning Service.	
J P Nicolson CHAIRPERSON		