

Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2007

Present:

Councillor Watson – In the Chair

Councillors Clayton, Isherwood, Judge, Morrison, P. Murphy, Sandiford, Smith and Trotman.

Present by Invitation:

- Councillor Battle, Deputy Leader
- Councillor E. Newman, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services
- Councillor Priest, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources
- Councillor Swannick, Executive Member for Environment

RG/07/13 Minutes

The Chair of the Committee reported that the views of the Committee on the Manchester Partnership expressed in the June meeting had been presented at the Manchester Board meeting of 17 July and that the Board had shared the Committee's views about the need for robust linkages. She also informed the Committee that she had agreed that the report on the review of ward co-ordination would now be brought to the September meeting.

In relation to minute RG/07/10 members also requested that those key decisions that involved projected savings should be added to the work programme so that the Committee could be satisfied that those savings had been realised.

Decision

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2007.

RG/07/14 Civica Universal Housing Management System

A report of the Director of Housing was submitted updating members on the implementation of Civica UH Management System and outlining how the technology will contribute to the reshaping of service delivery.

The Director of Housing advised the Committee that the Civica system was an effective product that was fully compatible with systems used across the family of housing companies and capable of further development in line with Manchester's future demands. The new system was more user-friendly and would deliver shortened training times and facilitate mobile working. She added that during the implementation and stabilisation period response times to calls had increased, but were now close to achieving target levels.

Members raised the following questions: -

- whether members of staff had experienced any difficulty in acclimatising to the design features of the software
- if the out of hours service was running with the new Civica system
- what fault reporting and version control software existed
- when remote and mobile working could be introduced
- whether the Council was still on target to achieve the £500,000 projected savings, and when this would be known
- the impact of the new software on service users

A member commented that some aspects of the system change over had been disruptive and had resulted in delays, specifically in producing gas servicing reports, and further time delays on reinstating housing applications. Members also commented that there had been delays in the Housing on Call section and questioned whether a contingency was in place for its slow performance.

The Director of Housing responded that initially there had been difficulties adjusting to the software, as would be expected, but these had now largely been resolved. She further added that the number of system faults reported was steadily decreasing. The system provided improved options for mobile and remote working and this could be introduced by the independent local housing companies as an aid to management in the future. She advised the Committee that 15 additional staff had been brought into the Housing on Call centre on a temporary basis to ensure that service delays were kept to a minimum during the implementation stage, and that a contingency plan had been in place involving reversion to the former system during the implementation stage, but this had not been necessary. She added that the department was still on course to achieve the projected savings through a reduction in maintenance costs, and that this should be capable of being evidenced towards the end of the year, and she undertook to report back to the Committee in March with information about customer satisfaction with the service; the operation of the 'out of hours' service, and the realisation of the projected savings.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services reported on the action that he had taken in response to the problems of service disruption during the first phase of implementation, and that he had closely monitored the implementation of the system through daily reports from officers. He felt that some valuable lessons had been learned from the process, and he requested that members made him aware if they encountered any service delays due to the new system.

Decision

1. To note that the difficulties encountered during the implementation process, but that there is now increased confidence that the new system will work effectively and deliver financial and service user benefits.
2. To request the Director of Housing to report back to the Committee in March with information about customer satisfaction with the service; the operation of the 'out of hours' service, and the realisation of the projected savings.

Councillor Isherwood declared a personal interest as a board member of Southwards Housing plc
Councillor Trotman declared a personal interest as a Board member of Northwards Housing plc

RG/07/15 Use of Technology to Reshape and Improve Service Delivery

A report of the Manchester Improvement Programme (MIP) Director was submitted advising the Committee on the technology component of the MIP.

The Director informed the Committee that the Council had a range of reliable legacy systems in place which lacked the necessary flexibility that was necessary to enable the Council to deliver further service improvements and to respond to constantly evolving customer demands. The work in hand therefore sought to establish working platforms that would provide greater confidence in the Council's ability to deliver its ambition of 'one-stop shop' accessibility to all Council services with the needs of services users being paramount

Members raised the following responses to the report: -

- It was felt that provision of technology to councillors was advancing less rapidly than in other fields and that opportunities for savings were being lost.
- Members queried whether 'bedding-in' problems with SAP were now resolved, and about the level of savings that were being achieved through the Council-wide procurement system.
- Concerns were expressed in relation to communities where access to the Internet was low and the extent to which they were missing out from the new technological developments.
- Members asked for a demonstration of how E-auctions worked in practice to demonstrate how savings can be made.

The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources stated that the provision of technology to councillors was currently being reviewed.

The MIP Director advised members that the transition to SAP had been on a vast scale and had imposed large demands on staff in terms of data integrity. Some difficulties had been experienced as might be expected by change on this scale, but extensive resources had been devoted to drop-in sessions and training to resolve remaining issues. The City Treasurer added that the closure of accounts for the past financial year had been managed effectively which served as a good example of the progress achieved.

Responding to the concerns regarding community access to technology, the Deputy Leader advised the Committee that services were offered on as many access channels as possible to cater for all Manchester's residents; however every attempt was also being made to improve access to technology across the city. Meanwhile all traditional means of access into Council services were being fully maintained.

In conclusion the MIP Director advised that the Council was still aiming towards a 'one-stop-shop' approach to customer care with a single number to which all enquiries can be directed.

Decision

1. To welcome the direction of travel towards improved service delivery through technological resources, and the interesting and exciting possibilities it will offer.
2. To request further information on savings achieved through the centralised procurement system at the end of the financial year.
3. To request that a demonstration of an e-auction is organised for members of the Committee.
4. To request that changes to working practices, for example through mobile working, are discussed with staff groups to ensure that they can adapt to changing working conditions.

RG/07/16 PFI Street Lighting Contract

A report of the Head of Engineering Services was submitted providing members with information about the way the project agreement was being monitored, and setting out the value for money, responsiveness to local issues and risk issues involved in the contract.

Members raised the following matters in connection to the report:

- whether a failed bulb in locations served by a single lighting column would be classed as an emergency repair and addressed as a priority
- what the reasons were for moving street lamps further away from the kerb
- the measures in place to address light pollution and spill disturbing local residents
- what the current risks involved with the contract were, and how they were being managed

The Head of Engineering Services responded that bulbs were replaced on a pro-active basis as they became old, and therefore bulb failure was a very rare occurrence, however a bulb failure in a location served by a single lighting column would not be classified as an emergency repair and would be addressed in a timely way, but not necessarily within 5 working days. He informed that there was considerable international evidence to support the belief that the removal of lamp columns to the rear of the pavement line resulted in significantly reduction in damage caused by motor vehicle collisions. The Head of Engineering Services further advised the Committee that issues of glare causing a public nuisance were considered in the ward consultation phase with special adaptations made to columns in specific locations.

Officers responded to the issue of risks involved in the contract by indicating that these would be at their greatest until the Initial Apparatus Renewal Programme (IAPR) was completed. AMEY (the contractors) were currently incurring greater expenditure than the City Council and the project was 3 months behind schedule overall, but payments were made 6 months in arrears and there was only a minimal

risk identified of falling further behind. A member suggested that it was worthy of note that the contract had enabled the Council to move from a position where it was only capable of expending resources repairing the previous lighting infrastructure without any realistic prospect of being able to access the sort of resources necessary to bring about lasting improvements, and that in consequence the interests of the people of Manchester were not being best served. The PFI contract had enabled wholesale lighting improvements to be delivered across the city and to improve the safety and well-being of Manchester residents.

The Executive Member for Environment commented that the risks involved in the contract were well managed and that the Council continued to work closely with the contractor on all aspects of the contract implementation. In terms of value for money considerations he had no doubts that the contract was delivering on this though the increasing cost of electricity would be an issue for the future.

Decision

To express satisfaction with the management of the PFI, the clear value for money outcomes, and the level of confidence demonstrated that the risks involved are being effectively monitored and addressed, and that the partnership between AMEY and the City Council is working well.

RG/07/17 Waste and Recycling Collection

A joint report of the City Treasurer and the Strategic Director of Neighbourhood Services was submitted informing members of the progress made in the procurement of a joint venture partner for a contract to run the waste and recycling collection service. A report would also be submitted to the Executive on 25 July requesting authority to choose the preferred bidder be delegated to the City Treasurer.

Members requested that the selection of a preferred bidder, scheduled to take place on 15 October, be delayed until after 18 October to allow the Committee the opportunity to consider the evaluation process before a decision is taken.

Members stressed the importance that the partner selected would contribute to the Council's objectives reducing litter to landfill, and would offer a collection service that was flexible and responsive to local needs. The Head of Environmental Services reassured the Committee that the Council would be clear on what level of service was expected and service quality levels would be built into the contract.

Decision

1. To note the report
2. To request that the selection of a preferred bidder, scheduled to take place on 15 October 2007, be delayed until after 18 October 2007 to allow the Committee the opportunity to consider the evaluation process before a decision is taken.

RG/07/18 Information and Overview Report

A report of the Head of Democratic Services was submitted providing information on relevant issues within the Committee's remit.

Decision

To note the report.