

...working in partnership to enhance the quality of life for all...
COUNCILLOR LEN HORWOOD

Finance and Governance Portfolio Statement

2009-12

Cllr Len Horwood



TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL



1. What is the portfolio responsible for?

Introduction by Councillor Horwood

As the Portfolio Holder responsible for Finance and Governance, the majority of the services for which I have responsibility (with the exception of Revenues and Benefits and the Gateway) do not have any front-line presence. Their primary role is to support others through the provision of resources, assets, goods, advice and assurance.

This Portfolio Statement sets out my key objectives for the forthcoming year and the two years beyond that.

My overall objective is to provide high quality support services whilst, at the same time, reducing the Council's overheads enabling us to put money into priorities. Whilst at first sight these appear to be contradictory aspirations, I believe that a combination of business process re-engineering, partnership working and the necessary staff restructuring will provide the opportunity to deliver them.

2. Functions and Services

As Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance, I am largely responsible for all support services, namely:

- Internal Audit
- Legal
- HR

- Revenues and Benefits
- Democratic Services
- Finance
- Property

I am also the Lead Cabinet Member with regard to a range of partners/partnerships, namely:

- SEEMP
- DWP

Finally, I have responsibility for a range of key issues and projects including:

- VFM
- Procurement
- Risk Management
- Governance
- Data Quality
- Business Transformation/Delivery Unit
- Back office integration
- Customer Service and Gateway

3. Key Plans and Strategies

As Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance, I have a key role in developing a number of policy framework documents and in ensuring that other strategies relating to the Council's financial and human resources and assets support the Strategic Plan and corporate priorities. Specific plans for which I have responsibility include:

Resource allocation-

- Budget and Capital Programme
- Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
- Asset Management Plan

- VFM Strategy
- People Strategy

Governance

- Procurement Strategy
- Strategic Audit Plan

I also take an active interest in the service plans relating to those services for which I have overall responsibility.

4. What are the opportunities for this portfolio?

A number of other overarching opportunities present themselves – in particular, the opportunity to improve partnership working with neighbouring authorities and other public, private and voluntary sector organisations and the opportunity to improve efficiency and capitalise on our investment in ICT through a joint approach to business process re-engineering with Maidstone and Ashford borough councils.

The Tunbridge Wells Gateway has fundamentally changed and improved the way in which we deal with customers. This presents a continuing opportunity to change how we work and also acts as a driver for further streamlining our business processes. Gateway also helps us to improve the way in which we gather and act upon feedback from customers and the views of residents and stakeholders and, in

particular, to improve our engagement with 'hard to reach' groups.

5. What are main areas for improvement?

The Council draws on a broad spectrum of information to inform its improvement programme. This includes external inspection, internal audit, complaints, feedback from staff, resident surveys and other outreach initiatives such as ward walks. We have attempted to codify our improvement priorities in the Council's Improvement Plan. For my portfolio area, key areas for improvement include:

- Building on the VFM strategy to improve on the current VFM framework
- Continuing to improve our asset management arrangements
- Embedding recent improvements to the way in which we plan and manage our budget
- Further strengthening governance arrangements
- Completing the implementation of the financial management system (FMS) and capitalising on it so as to improve budgetary management and procurement
- Overseeing the work of the Council's Delivery Unit to ensure that key projects and improvements to service delivery/savings are delivered
- Strengthening project management arrangements
- Monitor and review the Council's recently introduced People Strategy and

make any resultant changes to the Council's HR policies and procedures

6. What are our priorities for 2009-12?

My key priorities for each of the service sections for which I have overall responsibility are set out below

ICT

Above all else, I want to see the Council fully exploiting the potential of its historic investment in information and communication technology (ICT). This means:

- Broadening the electronic provision of services (both internally and externally) and encouraging 'self-serve' wherever possible specifically exploring the potential of information kiosks in establishments frequently used by residents
- Maximising the potential of CRM to deliver services to the public and, in particular, to support the Gateway
- Providing the necessary support for the Financial Management System (FMS) and all other system upgrades
- Supporting managers in looking at ways of delivering services more efficiently through the use of BPR and any associated IT improvements.
- Capitalising on and extending the use of scanning (document image processing)

HR

I have four main priorities for HR.

- To continue to deliver the programme of improvements associated with our 'Fit for

our Future' programme with a specific review of the Council's policies staff benefit structure

- To complete the restructure of the Council's senior management team and the Council's administrative functions
- To develop and encourage a culture of innovation within the Council including the development of a staff suggestion scheme (WASP)
- To continue with recent improvements in staff and Member training including the fulfilment of our commitment to attain the I&DeA/SEEMP Member Development Charter

Property/Facilities Management

The Council has been criticised in the past for the way in which it manages its assets. We have done a great deal to address many of these criticisms including the establishment of a Corporate Property Group. Continue with the programme to register all the Council's deeds and review the Council's recently produced Asset Management Plan. Key priorities for the next three years include: Mechanisms for property purchase and disposal

- Complete the registration of the Council's deeds
- Investigate the opportunity for further benefit to be achieved at the Council's new depot as a result of the Select Committee report
- Support the master planning exercise and develop options for the Town Hall also to identify sites held in private hands they may assist in the development of the Civic Site

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- Review our property portfolio to assess which properties we need for operational purposes and which properties we should be seeking to dispose of

Finance

A great deal has been done to improve the way in which the Council plans and manages its finances. Financial reporting has been improved. New financial and contract procedure rules have been introduced, the Council continues to balance its budget and reduce its reliance on investment interest. The budget process this will begin at a date earlier than ever before. Key priorities for the future include:

- Continue to roll out new FMS and maximising its benefits in terms of improved budgetary management and more efficient procurement of goods and services
- Building on the Council's VFM Strategy and continuing to embed a culture of VFM
- Continue to improve the Council's Use of Resources score to at least a level '4' for 2009/10.
- Review the restructure of the Council's accountancy section to ensure it is providing the flexible working and greater resilience that was expected

Legal Services

The Council's Legal Services section is well regarded both within and outside the Council and has recently attained 'Lexcel' accreditation as a hallmark of the quality of service it provides. My priorities for the Legal Services section are:

- To improve mechanisms for gathering and acting on customer satisfaction
- To increase flexibility and accountability to client departments (including a more transparent approach to billing and recharges)
- To achieve partnership working with at least one other local authorities.

Democratic Services

There are three dimensions to the Council's democratic services section: overseeing the smooth running of the Council and its committees, promoting democratic engagement and e-democracy and promoting participation in democracy through the ballot box by maximising turnout at elections. My priorities in this area for the next three years include:

- Improving democratic engagement and involvement/participation
- Continuing to develop and improve the Council's scrutiny function
- Developing 'e-democracy'
- Increasing electoral turnout

Internal Audit

The Council's Internal Audit function is a vital component of the Council's overarching mechanisms for ensuring probity and good governance. The Council's Internal Audit function is also responsible for Strategic Risk Management. My priorities in this area include:

- Developing and delivering the strategic audit plan
- Reviewing the way in which we provide our Internal Audit services and

benchmarking the number of days spent on audit with other authorities

- Ensuring that Strategic Risk Register and Business Continuity Plan are reviewed and updated on a regular basis and that business continuity arrangements are tested and that regular reports on risk management are provided to Cabinet

Procurement

The Council does not have a dedicated procurement function as such but does have an approved Procurement Strategy and a Procurement Coordinator. My priorities for procurement are:

- To deliver the Council's Procurement Strategy
- To review the way in which we manage and procure key goods and services specifically in regard to agency staff
- To review key contracts including that for planned and emergency buildings maintenance
- To explore the potential of a procurement partnership with other local authorities.

Revenues and Benefits

The Council has an extremely effective Revenues and Benefits service which is both high performing and cost-effective. However, I am not complacent and believe that there is scope further to reduce costs, improve performance and ensure resilience through partnership working. My priorities are:

- To explore the potential for partnership working with Maidstone initially and with other authorities as appropriate.
- To maintain the Council's high levels of performance and assess how the

Revenues and benefits section could benefit further from its involvement in the Gateway

- To maintain collection rate in the current economic climate.

Gateway

As mentioned above, the opening of the Borough's first Gateway was a major achievement for us and our major partners and has provided us with a significant opportunity to improve the way we do business with our customers face-to-face – particularly in the light of the current economic climate. Rather than having to negotiate a complex range of reception desks (both within the Council and with partner organisations), customers access the bulk of public and voluntary services from under one roof. My priorities for the next two years in the area of Customer Access include:

- Making the most of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) technology to improve the way in which we deal with customers across multiple delivery channels;
- Continuing to bring partners on board and to improve linkages between the services we and they provide;
- Making the most of customer feedback through complaints and customer satisfaction data;

The key priority of the Lead Member on Customer Access is to continue to progress the Business Process Re-engineering which will ensure better customer access and service

These priorities are underpinned by a need to recognise that the Council is operating and is likely to continue to be operating in changing times. The Council is heavily reliant on income and has suffered from the impacts of the recession. Looking forward, it is likely that we will have to manage with considerable reductions in central government grants. This is something that we will manage but all priorities must be seen against this backdrop and may be subject to changes.

7. Delivery and performance management

This Plan draws on and elaborates on a number of key issues set out in the Council's Strategic Plan. I have also discussed these corporate priorities and my portfolio priorities with the relevant service managers and these have been incorporated into their Service Plans. Key Performance Indicators and Local Performance Indicators which are relevant to my portfolio are set out as an appendix to this Statement. Along with Cabinet, I will be receiving quarterly reports on these indicators. In addition, I will be discussing them on a more regular basis at my monthly meetings with the relevant service managers.

9. Contact

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Key Performance Indicators – 2009-12

LP Finance 02	(KPI) Number of online transactions and payments
LP Finance 05	(NEW) % of establishment costs within 1% of projected
LP Finance 06	(NEW) % of Non Pay Costs within 1% of projected
LP Finance 07	(NEW) % of Major Income Streams within % of projected
LP Perf 04	(NEW) Value for money in the Use of Resources Score
LP Revs Ben 03	Speed of processing - changes of circumstances for HB/CTB claims (BV78b)
LP Revs CT 00	(KPI) % of Council Tax collected (BV9)