

Overview and Scrutiny Reconciling Policy and Resources (RPR) boards 2008/09

Summary of the outcomes, observations and findings of the scrutiny RPR Boards held in December 2008.

<p>Scrutiny Committee / RPR Board membership</p>	<p>Notes / key outcomes</p>
<p>Adult Social Care Councillors Gubby (Chairman), Forster, Mrs Tidy, Taylor, Tunwell, Webb and Woodall</p>	<p><u>RPR board on 11 December 2008</u></p> <p>The board acknowledged the pressures that were impacting, or likely to impact, on the department in the forthcoming year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Efficiency Target had been changed from 3% to 4.5%. The Department has not so far been working towards this figure and would therefore have to identify further efficiencies; • In the past savings had been achieved through increasing procurement efficiencies. With the advent of individual budgets savings could no longer be made in this way and the Department would be looking to develop new ways of working with providers to achieve savings; • During the economic downturn there could be several added pressures placed on the Department: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Falling house prices could mean that self-funders run out of money to support themselves more quickly and the Department would have to step in sooner; • There could be more call upon mental health services; and • There could be more cases of homelessness. <p>The Board suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater emphasis be given to prevention services in the Portfolio Plan; • The phrase “key work streams” in the Portfolio Plan be changed to “key work”.

<p>Audit & Best Value</p> <p>Cllrs Murphy (Chairman), Ensor and Sparks.</p>	<p><u>RPR Board on 15 December 2008</u></p> <p>The Board focussed its questioning on effects of the current economic climate and deepening recession and the consequent challenges and pressures which need to be tackled.</p> <p>Board commentary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared services – acknowledged that working more effectively with other public sector bodies and other councils is becoming more important; the shared services agenda is crucial for the future. • Welcomed the new policy steer to take account of the effect of the economic downturn on residents, businesses and services. • Endorsed the need for a change of culture and the development of more innovative ways of delivering services; for example professional advice, such as accountancy, would in future be built into the cost of projects at their inception and would have to be borne by the project rather than absorbed by departmental revenue base budgets; this represents a major culture change. • Economic issues – the need to instil confidence in the business and wider community; endorsed the need for the County Council to pay creditors promptly to help local businesses with cash flow; in particular the proposal to target local SMEs for ten-day payments and to remind departments to treat such payments as a priority. • Acknowledged that the Capital Programme was particularly ambitious and there was, therefore, a resultant increased risk of slippage; no capital receipts were expected in the foreseeable future. • Staff capacity issues – there are sections of the County Council where some specialist work is carried out by just one person; workforce planning to provide back-up in those areas is essential. Welcomed the ongoing review of team structures within both departments along with the emphasis on flexibility and cost effectiveness; training would be key and the future aim to ‘grow our own’ staff as far as possible was endorsed. • Endorsed the additional work being undertaken with Sussex Enterprise and Business Link to help companies through the recession and discussions with credit unions. • Welcomed intention to provide more help to individual voluntary organisations.
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<p>Children's Services</p> <p>Councillors Maynard (Chairman), Field, Dowling, Ost, St Pierre and Whetstone</p> <p>Mr Jeremy Alford and Mr Sam Gregory</p>	<p><u>RPR board on 18 December 2008</u></p> <p>The board acknowledged the pressures that were impacting, or likely to impact, on the department in the forthcoming year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recession could mean that more children will be living in poverty; this could lead to an increase in the number of children being 'in need' and requiring a service. • Changes to the regulations around parents receiving incapacity benefit could also impact upon the most vulnerable children in society and lead to increased demand for services. • The 'Baby P' tragedy is already impacting on the workload of the Department and will have a financial impact in the long term. Referrals to the duty and assessment team have increased by 25% and the number of children on Child Protection Plans is also likely to increase. In the long term this will lead to more looked after children and is likely to increase the need for foster care placements and children's home places. • The issue of the training budget split between Adult Social Care and Children's Services is still unresolved; if the Department is unsuccessful obtaining the necessary funding it will need to find an additional £0.5m to cover staff training. • By raising the threshold to access Family Support, it is estimated that an extra 120 families will not now receive support on parenting skills, healthy eating etc. Reducing the grants to the voluntary sector will reduce the number of parenting programmes and child health activities being run. Whilst these are 'low risk' areas the concern is that by not providing early support more families will present with increased needs 'further down the line'. • The Board requested reference to the aim to reduce childhood obesity to be included in the Portfolio Plan. • The Board acknowledged the difficult situation the Department faced and recognised that there was a need to make savings in preventative measures in order to be able to prioritise child protection work. However, the Board was concerned that the reduction in preventative measures would see an increased need for more services 'further down the line' in the future.
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Community Services

Councillors Taylor
(Chairman), Howson,
Martin, Scott and Wilson;
and Mr Sam Gregory

RPR board on 17 December 2008:

The board acknowledged:

- Front-line services are being protected; redundancies and job losses are not anticipated in these areas.
- Self-service facilities are planned for more libraries; this will permit more efficient deployment of staff for short-notice cover.
- The Library Contact Centre will be launched in 2009 which will deal with telephone calls through a single telephone access network; this will provide a more efficient service for telephone enquiries and allow staff in libraries to focus more on face-to-face enquiries.
- £20,000 savings in Trading Standards will be achieved through the staffing restructure currently being implemented and will not impact on the service provided.
- The recent change in tobacco legislation is not expected to affect the Trading Standards budget; however the Head of Trading Standards is applying for grant funding to cover any unexpected pressures.
- Savings within ICT will be met by increasing income in 2009/10. The team is looking to develop the existing ICT package to schools to meet part of this target; they are working closely with schools to provide a more attractive package which will hopefully achieve a higher take-up rate. If ICT Services fail to generate the projected income, savings will have to be achieved elsewhere.

The Board endorsed the following one-off funding bids to:

- extend the 'loan sharks scheme' outside Hastings; and
- support the Trading Standards Local Life Show in Eastbourne and encourage more local Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to participate in the event.

Transport & Environment

Councillors
Daniel
(Chairman),
Stogdon and St
Pierre.

RPR Board on 16 December 2008

Board commentary on the specific savings proposals:

- (a) Highways maintenance new signs and lines – savings target £50,000: assurance received that this would not impact on new developments or safety works; however scrutiny requested detail of public requests for new signs and lines and examples of the types of works currently being implemented/requested which could be dropped in future to enable this saving to be made (in due course).
- (b) Waste Management – re-tendered leachate contract savings target of £40,000: scrutiny requested a map of the East Sussex closed landfill sites and further information on scale of the leachate operation (in due course).
- (c) Passenger Transport: savings target £65,000: scrutiny to look at the detail of this proposal when available.
- (d) Overtime payments savings target £50,000: assurance received that there would be no impact on officers attending meetings in local communities.
- (e) Rights of way and countryside savings target £25,000: scrutiny acknowledged this target and requested further detail in due course.
- (f) Departmental training savings target £30,000: assurance received that ongoing staff training would not be affected.
- (g) Traffic engineering schemes savings target £20,000: scrutiny requested a future update on the shared space proposals arising from the earlier scrutiny review of speed limits, in particular clarification as to whether shared space schemes are in general likely to be less expensive than other types of scheme.

The Board reaffirmed the importance of Transport and Environment as a set of services which reaches and directly affects every resident in East Sussex and as such should be high priority for any one-off additional resources; the Board suggested the following priority order for bids from any one-off pot that becomes available (with 1 being top priority) for 2009/10:

- (1) Pedestrian crossings – £200,000 to implement six rather than just three new pedestrian crossings
- (2) Highway ‘village gangs’ – £200,000 to provide an extra team in each area
- (3) Rights of Way: bridges, stiles and surfaces – £200,000 to address the highest priorities
- (4) Dropped Kerbs – £100,000 to provide additional dropped kerbs further to the scrutiny review of dropped kerbs carried out earlier in 2008

	(5) Community Transport – £100,000 to implement the recommendation of the best value review of passenger transport for pump priming grants and the development of a community transport strategy to include community engagement and consultation.
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Reconciling Policy and Resources

**Consultation with Trade Unions
12 January 2009**

Attendees: Councillors Bill Bentley, David Elkin, Keith Glazier, Peter Jones (Chairman), Bob Tidy.

Officers: Cheryl Miller, Sean Nolan, Andrew Ogden, Matt Dunkley, Rupert Clubb, Rita Stebbings and Deb Emery

Trade Union Representatives:

Unison

T Watson
Amanda Parks

National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of women teachers (NASUWT)

R Bellingham

General, Municipal Boilermakers & Allied Trade Union (GMB)

Rachel Lyons

Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)

J Pryke

National Union of Teachers (NUT)

David Brinson

1. Introduction

1.1 Councillor Peter Jones summarised the overarching aims of the Council highlighting some of the successes of the previous year and thanks were given to the Trade Unions for their positive engagement and contributions. He highlighted that Children's Services had received the highest Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of any County Council and that we were now in the top 7% of all authorities.

1.2 Good news relating to the Adult Social Care Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) star rating was reported, that reflected an improvement against the PAF indicators.

1.3 This was followed by an introduction by Sean Nolan summarising the financial position of the Council and its financial targets. It was noted that the Council had been awarded a Formula Grant increase of 3.3%, however the

additional budget pressures due to the current financial climate were emphasised.

1.4 It was noted that Treasury Management under spend amounted to £3m and would be allocated as one off funding to particular areas, decided at Cabinet in February. It was hoped that a significant sum of the money could be used to help stop some of the impact of the recession on the County.

2. Issues raised by the Trade Union Representatives

2.1 The Trade Union representatives welcomed the Council's strong leadership throughout the year and acknowledged the benefits of the Reconciling Policy and Resources process.

2.2 The Trade Union representatives raised concerns that budget savings would put additional pressure onto already hard working staff. The additional challenges arising from the 'Baby P' case were also highlighted. The 'Baby P' case was estimated to have increased referrals to the Duty and Assessment teams by 25%. A bid had been submitted for one off funding from the £3m Treasury Management under spend as a 'Baby P contingency' and an increase of £250k in front line social work posts to help mitigate the risks.

2.3 Concerns were raised by Union representatives about the number of restructures that the Council were undertaking and the impact that they were having on the recruitment and retention of staff. However, the work with casual workers was commended. It was recommended that the staff suggestion scheme be re-instigated and that the promotion of occupational health and health and safety could be on the front page of the intranet. The use of external consultants should also be minimised. Union representatives stated that when departmental restructures had involved Personnel they had worked more effectively and smoothly. The support provided by Personnel and Training over the last year was highly praised by the Unions.

2.4 The Trade Unions were reassured that whilst restructurings were necessary, East Sussex County Council was offering far more stability, job security and fewer redundancies than other authorities in the current economic climate. It was recognised that continuing constructive dialogue between the Council and the Unions would help to reassure employees of their position. It was acknowledged that it was always important to ensure the skills of existing staff were being utilised before a decision was taken to appoint external support.

2.4 The meeting discussed the suggestion, from the Government, that up to £8m of grant could be brought forward from 2010/2011 into 2009/10. Despite having looked with CRD to see if any programmes could be brought forward it did not seem like a feasible option. The monies would not be additional, just brought forward and it was preferred to continue with our current two year plan.

2.5 The Trade Unions commented that they hoped the cap on library stock levels would not be a permanent fixture for budget savings. It was noted that the levels of book stocks had been increased for the last four to five years.

2.6 The reduction in purchase of resources and range of activities undertaken by 14-19 and PSHE teams was highlighted. It was reported that scaled against the whole budget the reduction was minor and it was also an area that attracted a lot of additional funding from other sources.

2.7 The meeting also discussed the possibility of a County Council building being located in Polegate. It was advised that despite numerous press releases stating that this move would not be happening in the foreseeable future, but was a vision and part of possible economic regeneration, it continued to be misrepresented in the media. It was agreed that emails reassuring staff would continue to be issued.

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