

Overview and Scrutiny Reconciling Policy and Resources (RPR) boards 2009/10

Summary of the outcomes, observations and findings of the scrutiny RPR Boards held in December 2009/January 2010.

<p>Scrutiny Committee / RPR Board membership</p>	<p>Notes / key outcomes</p>
<p>Adult Social Care Councillors Waite (Chairman), Belsey, Healy, Mrs Tidy and Webb (substituting for Councillor Scott)</p>	<p><u>RPR board on 17 December 2009</u></p> <p>1) In response to questions and comments the Board were informed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantial increases in the numbers of people requiring a service in the future would mean that efficiency savings alone could not meet the gap in funding. Significant changes to the way in which services are provided will be needed. The department faces two future options: a) change the eligibility criteria, which would mean that some people who are currently eligible would no longer get a service, or b) retain the current eligibility criteria but provide ‘smaller’ packages of care to all service users. The preferred option is b), which is seen as carrying the least risk. • A shift in resources from working-age adults to older people services is vital to meet forecasted demand for services. High cost placements for working-age adults would need to be procured more cheaply and, if necessary, re-commissioned from a different provider. • Joint commissioning with health and closer working with districts and boroughs on housing for vulnerable people would be vital for achieving efficiency savings in the future, particularly on reducing management costs. • ‘Reablement’ services are key in helping cut admissions to hospital, reducing the need for residential care and reducing the demand for ongoing support services; these services will therefore need to expand in the future. Joint work with Health on promoting such services to hospitals and GPs is required to ensure suitable people are targeted. • There are no high impact risks associated with any of the proposed efficiency savings as services are not being removed. However, services would have to be provided differently or at a reduced level to meet the necessary efficiency savings.

	<p>2) The Board requested that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) a report on Social Capital be brought to the March 2010 Scrutiny Committee meeting; and b) outcomes of the service reviews be brought to the Scrutiny Committee in due course. <p>3) The Board acknowledged the potential increased pressures upon Adult Social Care as a result of two recent developments. Possible legislation to direct the provision of free personal care to all (for up to 18 hours) would result in an additional financial burden for the Department of at least £2.5m. Secondly, a government reduction in funding for residential care is also likely to lead to a further £2.5m reduction in funding for the Department.</p> <p>4) The Board understood the rationalisation behind the savings to be made for 2010/11 but expressed concern about future developing risks facing the department. Members requested that they were kept informed as future developments unfolded.</p>
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<p>Audit & Best Value</p> <p>Councillors Sparks (Chairman), Birch and Ensor</p>	<p><u>RPR Board on 5 January 2010</u></p> <p>The Board considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That whilst significant savings have been made over the last few years in Chief Executive's and CRD, these have primarily been achieved by 'salami slicing' budgets because of the very limited scope to cut entire activities within these departments. • That the plans and budgets for 2010/11 seemed stable, and the proposed savings carried acceptably low impacts on services. However the extremely difficult challenges likely to be faced across the Council during the following three years means that there is a need to identify opportunities for savings and efficiencies in the coming year to minimise the longer term negative impacts. • In respect of Policy Steer Performance Measure 1.1 a) (<i>Supporting continued regeneration work in Hastings through the Task Force, Hastings and Bexhill Renaissance Limited and the development of the Bexhill–Hastings Link Road</i>) the Board expects to see greater clarity in the final wording of the targets for this performance measure to reflect the future regeneration of Hastings including options for Hastings and Bexhill Renaissance Limited. • Good progress has been made in addressing problems previously highlighted by Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Committee with staff appraisals and sickness absence, particularly in reducing long term
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	<p>sickness absence levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In respect of Policy Steer 1.6 f) – <i>Improved public awareness of, and access to, decision-making processes</i>: the Board considers that ‘Webcast usage’ is not a good indicator when measuring public access to decision making processes, and proposes that a wider perspective be taken using, for example, residents’ surveys and the Citizens Panel.• A scrutiny review board would shortly be examining any links between compensation claim levels and highways maintenance.• Property Management improvements have been put in place.• In respect of the impact of any savings plans on the internal audit service, particularly given the potential increase in risks the authority would face over the medium term, the Board was assured that that whilst all support services would need to respond to the 10% savings challenge set by Cabinet including the internal audit service, the Director would aim to ensure Internal Audit retained adequate capacity to meet satisfactory coverage in the light of the current and changing risk profile. But, he would need to explore all potential opportunities; such as sharing specialist resources and maximising productivity, to help achieve that aim.
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Children's Services

Councillors Ensor
(Chairman), Field, Ost
and Webb.

Parent Governor
representative – Sam
Gregory

RPR board on 14 December 2009

1. The Board acknowledged the increased pressures upon Children's Services due to the increasing costs of home to school transport and the affects of the 'Baby P' case, which had resulted in increased numbers of children with child protection plans, increased court costs for care proceedings and increased numbers of children in care.

2. In response to questions and comments the Board were informed that:

- The current overspend on home to school transport would not be ongoing. A review of the use of taxi journeys had recently been carried out and overuse of single journeys would be reduced through re-procurement of services.
- The 2010/11 Looked After Children pressures was an estimated figure based on the numbers of children still going through the system and could be subject to change.
- The number of qualified social worker posts in the department had been increased to around 175 (from 150) with the additional resources. However, there were still approximately 30-35 vacancies at present. The Department is seeking to fill these vacancies by April 2010 through a recruitment campaign in Canada and Australia. Staff are being recruited through an agency initially and would then become permanent Council employees.
- Current grants for Early Years provision and other direct government grants are only guaranteed until April 2011 and there is a likelihood that they will reduce after then.
- The distribution of the 'Headroom' funding will be agreed by the Schools Forum on 20 January 2010. Initial work with the Sub Group had gained support for the suggested areas of funding and the department was confident that the Forum would endorse these.
- The Human Resource strategy changes will be carefully managed. Operations managers would make the final decision on any changes to working arrangements to ensure that they did not impact on the delivery of services.

3. The Board endorsed the approach taken by the department of prioritising safeguarding/child protection and the prudent channelling of grant funding streams, flexible use of schools budget funding and targeted service reductions.

4. The Board requested that an update on the value for money reviews be reported to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2010.

Community Services

Councillors Taylor
(Chairman), Howson,
Shing and Pragnell

RPR board on 11 December 2009:

The Board was reassured that:

- Front-line services are being protected and back office efficiencies will be maximised.
- New staff structures will have a positive impact on savings over the next four years. A reduction in legal staff will not increase risks to the legal service and it will remain robust and sufficient.
- Savings within ICT will be met by reducing the number of different software packages and systems, and introducing a 'pay as you use model' of ICT systems to reduce service level support costs.

The Board:

- Recognised the difficult financial situation and choices ahead and endorsed the savings for 2010/11 proposed and the review of priority services.
- Requested that through the planned services reviews the Committee is advised of any major changes in strategy and/or services that may be required given the financial constraints ahead and is advised of anything that cannot be achieved.
- Reiterated the request of the November 2009 Scrutiny Committee that adequate funding for the Local Life Show event should continue.

Transport & Environment

Councillors
Stogdon
(Chairman) and
Freeman

RPR Board on 8 December 2009

Road Safety

Scrutiny's observations and recommendations on road safety focus on the quality, clarity and interpretation of the supporting evidence behind the proposed courses of action:

- The list of solutions highlighted in both the commentary to the 'red' KSI indicators in the performance management report and under the 'future services' section of the RPR papers provides an extensive list of actions to improve road safety. However, evidence provided to the Road Safety Scrutiny Review Board, as to which are the best and most cost effective options to pursue, is sketchy, incomplete and not wholly persuasive.
- The "What we will do" list, as presented, implies an already agreed strategy. However, the Board recommends that this list ought to be regarded as a list of *possible* initiatives from which the choice of action would eventually be supported by the consolidation of available evidence. Whilst the newly formed Casualty Reduction Board will decide upon the action components of the eventual strategy, the scrutiny Board is seeking assurance that the choice of actions will be based on clearly-expressed evidence not least because the stringent financial situation is likely to prevent every possible initiative on the list being undertaken.
- Until now, the approximate £3m capital budget for integrated transport and road safety has been split roughly in proportion, two thirds for integrated transport schemes and one third for road safety schemes. Combining these elements into one budget and abolishing the LATS (Local Area Transport Strategies) process will require very careful thought to be given to the revised set of criteria used to prioritise transport schemes in future. A programme for consulting relevant stakeholders, including scrutiny and Members, will be required. The Board considers that greater emphasis on road safety measures would be required in any future combined budget.
- Given that the Casualty Reduction Board has been tasked with deciding which initiatives to pursue to address road safety, the funding for any emerging initiatives will presumably be reconciled with a combined capital budget. It is not clear to the Board how these two prioritisation processes would operate alongside each other.
- 'Operation Crackdown' is proposed as an efficiency saving based on an assumption that the scheme for which the funding is to be withdrawn is associated solely with the public reporting of abandoned vehicles. However, the scheme was extended in 2008 to include public reporting of *antisocial driving*. Preliminary indications, reported by the police to the Scrutiny Committee Chairman, are that the anti-social driving element is effective. The Board considered that Operation Crackdown may turn out to be very a cost effective method of improving road safety in comparison to other road safety initiatives. It recommended that any decision to cut funding

should be dependant on a careful analysis of the comparative evidence by both scrutiny and the Casualty Reduction Board.

Highways Maintenance

- The proposed move towards planned, rather than reactive, maintenance is endorsed.
- The current highways maintenance contract expires in 2012 which provides an opportunity to consider different options for the future strategy for highways maintenance - various models will be assessed. Scrutiny Members wish to be kept abreast of the arguments and options surrounding this critical decision.

Climate Change

- The September Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee queried whether the target reduction of 75,000 tonnes (NI 186) per capita emissions over three years was sufficiently challenging; the same target reappears in the current documentation and should be reviewed again.

General

- The Board considered, both from its recent experience in committee as well as evidence supplied to this RPR Board, that some parts of the department urgently need to adopt a more business-like approach towards meeting policy steer objectives whilst dealing with the scale and nature of the serious financial challenges ahead.
- It stressed the need for the department to be clear and realistic about its plans for the future and to keep such plans distinct, when communicating with Members and the public, from the plethora of aspirational but probably unrealistic ideas reverberating through the department currently. The Board noted the following list by the Director when asked to provide his key realistic, ongoing current initiatives for the Department:
 - (a) Bexhill/Hastings Link Road – regarded as the number one priority.
 - (b) Rail Utilisation Strategies - lobbying as an efficient way to influence the rail infrastructure.
 - (c) Eastbourne/Hailsham Triangle – developing a planning framework to bring this about.
 - (d) South Wealden Transport Strategy (A27 and A22) – a facilitating role, evidence gathering to support the LDFs.
 - (e) Uckfield Master Plan - the planning process for this is well advanced.
 - (f) LTP3 – demonstrating needs and costs.
- The Board has a number of concerns as to the cost implications of these aspirations, particularly in relation to items (b) to (e) and whether there is a sufficiently focussed awareness within the department generally in regard

to costing all aspects of its activity.

Waste and minerals

- The Board expressed concerns about the way in which the Waste and Minerals Strategy has been presented for consultation and believe considerable benefits could have been derived by the plan having been reviewed in detail by Scrutiny prior to public consultation.

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Reconciling Policy and Resources

Consultation with Trade Unions

1. Introduction

1.1 Cabinet members and Chief Officers met with Trade Union representatives on the 15 January 2009 to discuss the Reconciling Policy and Resources proposals.

The following Trade Unions were represented

Unison

T Watson, A Parks and P Black

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

I Thomas

Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)

J Pryke

National Union of Teachers

D Brinson and N Childs

2. Summary of meeting

2.1 Councillor Peter Jones, Leader of the Council, summarised the overarching aims of the Council and set out his concerns about the future financial position of the Council. He highlighted that the Council had already put in place strong mechanisms and processes to deal with the financial forecast. He recognised that the next four years would be difficult but that he had faith in the organisation to face a tough future. The financial forecast had brought forward the need to work closely with our neighbouring authorities to deliver efficient shared services and to make sure that all public services in East Sussex were effectively managed for the residents of East Sussex.

2.2 He was followed by an introduction by Sean Nolan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources, summarising the financial position of the Council and its financial targets in more detail. He set out the financial plan for the next four years and highlighted the following issues as high risk areas for the next year:

- The Council response to the Baby P case
- Government proposals for free personal care
- Highways issues arising from the recent adverse weather.

2.3 Councillor Reid emphasised that despite the depressed economy, the Council should have a positive approach and needed to take the opportunities that the future changes would offer.

3. Issues raised by the Trade Union Representatives

3.1 The Trade Union Representatives recognised the financial position of the Council and the work that had been done to manage it. They asked that consideration be given to potential staffing tissues beyond 2014. They were concerned that the Council may be left with a demoralised workforce and they emphasised the importance of retaining the current terms and conditions of service for staff rather than changing them to create savings options.

3.2 Councillor Jones emphasised that delivering services jointly with other authorities was crucial to improved efficiency and that he hoped that it could provide opportunities and security for staff. Trade Union representatives agreed that it was important to explore different forms of shared services and that it was important to keep the workforce motivated.

3.3 The Trade Union representatives requested that some of the £2.5m fund due to be allocated is used to deal with the outstanding single status issues. Andrew Ogden, Director of Law and Personnel, reported that work was underway to agree a way forward for single status and that a report would be presented to the next meeting of the Governance Committee.

3.4 Concerns were raised about the implications on staff and services following the introduction of the new National Park. Rupert Clubb, Director of Transport and Environment, responded and said that a number of issues were still unclear and that a shadow Park Authority was being established which would provide the opportunity to resolve them over time.

3.5 The Trade Union requested that the staff suggestion scheme be reintroduced. Becky Shaw, Director of Policy and Communications, responded that a new staff suggestion scheme would be launched on the 25 January specifically asking staff to identify opportunities for savings.

3.6 The importance of promoting the Council in a positive light was discussed together with the need to promote the work that the Council does. Cheryl Miller stated that the new branding had gone some way to achieving this and felt it was important to work with other public sector organisations locally and nationally to promote public services overall.

3.7 In summary, Councillor Jones thanked the Trade Union representatives for their contribution and welcomed the positive relationships that the Council had with the Unions and highlighted the importance of this relationship in the years ahead.

4 Consultation with business partners

4.1 As in previous year, the views of the business rate payers have been sought on the budget proposals. At this time, no responses have been received.