

## COMMISSION FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN ENGLAND

### Minutes of the meeting of the Commission held at Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4QP in Room 1, 20<sup>th</sup> floor on Tuesday 23 October 2007 at 10.30am

**Present:** Mr T Redmond (Chairman)  
Mr J R White (Vice Chairman)  
Ms A Seex  
Ms A Abraham

**In attendance:** Mr N H Jones  
Mr N J Karney  
Mr M King  
Mr P MacMahon  
Ms J Feeney  
Ms S Ruckwood  
Mr R P Rundle

#### **1. Matters arising from the minutes of 11 September Commission meeting**

The minutes of the 11 September were confirmed as an accurate record. [They were signed by Tony Redmond after the meeting.]

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

#### **2. Commission Pls: August 2007**

CLA 1613 had been circulated.

The fall in the number of incoming planning complaints was noted, as was the continuing gradual rise in both adults' and children's social services cases.

Peter MacMahon said that the London office was gradually improving the timeliness of 26(5) cases.

The Pls were noted by the Commission.

#### **3. Commission Business Goals quarterly performance reports: September 2007**

CLA 1614 had been circulated.

##### ***Human resources***

Sharon Ruckwood said that the format of the HR quarterly report had been revised following comments at the previous Commission meeting.

Jerry White said that the report was really useful; Nigel Karney said that producing the reports for the Commission was also a very valuable exercise for corporate services units as it helped them to monitor progress systematically.

Anne Seex said she was concerned about the practicality of achieving IIP (Investors in People) accreditation for the whole Commission as early as December 2008.

It was **AGREED** that this issue should be revisited following discussion at the Management Conference at the beginning of November and the corporate services reassessment in January 2008.

**NJK; SR**

### ***Communications***

Jackie Feeney said that the number of local authority training courses booked or delivered for the year to date had risen to 104 since the report was compiled.

There had been better coverage of the annual letters (in terms of story quality) this year. There had also been particularly good coverage of a couple of Ombudsman Reports.

Jerry White said that this was again very useful. He suggested that we should include some of the data from this report in next year's annual review, and this was **AGREED**. He also pointed out that, under website stats, the explanation for 'pages' should be deleted.

**JF**

Anne Seex asked for the joint letter to all bodies in jurisdiction from PHSO and LGO about the RRO (Regulatory Reform Order) to be placed on the intranet.

**JF**

### ***Other corporate activities***

#### **a) IT strategy**

Nigel Karney said that there was good progress with the IT strategy, such as COIN. It was disappointing that the 'Identisafe' system was not yet in use but this should be operational very shortly.

#### **b) Freedom of information**

One ICO's (Information Commissioner's) decision relating to a Coventry complaint was being taken to appeal. All the offices had experiences of being requested by the ICO to disclose trivial internal documents and in previous instances these had been acceded to on the basis that a protocol was being developed and the release of the information was not prejudicial to the investigation.

It was **AGREED** that until there was a decision on the appeal and greater clarity in this area, officers should send draft letters (responding to FOI applicants) to Nigel Karney, so that he could ensure consistency in approach.

Ann Abraham said it was important that there was close co-ordination between the LGO and PHSO on this issue. Rebecca Milne would be Nigel's contact with PHSO.

**NJK; Deps; AA**

#### **c) Role and influence**

Ann Abraham asked for the table of summary of responses to consultation activity to indicate where the response had been a joint one between LGO and PHSO. This was **AGREED**.

**NJK**

### ***List of key projects***

Nigel Karney said that, although the new table repeated some information from the other quarterly reports, he hoped the broad summary would be useful.

Jerry White suggested that an additional column should be added showing risk assessment, and this was **AGREED**.

NJK

**a) Human rights**

Anne Seex asked for an overview on training relating to the 'who, what and when'. She said it was important to avoid training plan congestion, and to ensure that the crucial matters received priority.

Peter MacMahon said there was no progress on human rights training at present, and it was being scheduled for 2008/09.

It was **AGREED** to consult PHSO (Trish Longdon) concerning their strategy and an action plan.

PM

**b) RRO development**

It was **AGREED** that training and guidance following the RRO should be a joint project with PHSO.

PM

**4. Budgetary control report: September 2007**

CLA 1615 had been circulated, and was noted. Tony Redmond said that the financial situation was sound, and that at the end of the year there may be a lesser call on reserves than previously anticipated.

Jerry White asked for a note to be added on the state of the reserves to future budgetary control reports and Tony Redmond indicated that this would form part of the planned revisions to the statement.

Peter MacMahon asked that the net cost per complaint be restored to the report.

Tony Redmond would speak to Stephen Jones about these matters.

TR; SDJ

**5. Revenue budgets and grant application 2008-11**

CLA 1616 had been circulated and it was **AGREED** subject to amendments. The final grant application had to be submitted by 15 November 2007.

Anne Seex said there was not enough emphasis on the importance of replacing Comtrac quickly. It was **AGREED** to increase the emphasis on this.

NJK

Anne Seex asked if there was a chance of making a capital bid for phase 2 of COIN, should this prove necessary. Tony Redmond said there was, but this was, in part, dependent upon the Local Government Bill receiving royal assent.

**6. Three year corporate plan 2008-11**

CLA 1617 had been circulated. Nigel Karney handed out copies of comments from the Staff Side. Anne Seex commented that that it was good to have the Corporate Plan in a concise, accessible format. Having noted the tabled comments from the Staff Side the text was **AGREED** subject to comments and specific amendments.

**Chapter 1:** Add reference to recognise staff input on horizon scanning.

**Chapter 3: page 5, bullet point 3:** delete the first 'public' and 'general', and move it up to be the first bullet point in the list.

**Chapter 3: page 5, bullet point 4:** change 'dispute resolution arrangements' to 'the system of justice' (ie in the wider administrative justice landscape).

**Chapters 4-8: Business goals:** consider including more targets on output (eg measures of sound decisions) as opposed to input.

NJK

## 7. HR Strategy - Investors in people (IIP)

Sharon Ruckwood explained that this was the first HR Strategy, and that it brought together all the relevant plans and strategies to underpin the Corporate Plan.

Ann Abraham pointed out a drafting error on the covering paper, which referred to the Commission comprising "... the UK Parliamentary Health Service Ombudsman". This should read "... the Parliamentary Ombudsman".

SR

### ***a) IIP assessment target***

Tony Redmond asked if the December 2008 target for the Commission-wide assessment for IIP accreditation was realistic. Sharon Ruckwood explained that this was hard to say: the premise was for one of culture change.

Anne Seex was concerned that the changes to procedures being made would not have been *embedded* by December 2008, and so not necessarily familiar to staff. There was a need to assess how far away the Commission was from being an IIP organisation.

Nigel Karney suggested that the reassessment of Corporate Services in January 2008 could act as a barometer.

Ann Abraham noted that the IIP standard had got much tougher recently. She asked what information was available on where the Commission is now against the IIP standards, and how different it needs to be to become successful in accreditation. She asked how familiar the Commission was with the standards.

Jerry White added that it would be helpful to see what effect there had been from changes made since the April 2006 assessment.

Ann Abraham said that, in PHSO, there was a reference group, chaired by a director, to support the management team where it needed help. Sharon Ruckwood said that such a group had also been set up within the Commission.

It was **AGREED:**

- that the issues would be discussed at the November Management Conference to include all managers within the debate;
- that a staff survey to assess staff attitudes in advance of IIP assessment would be held at the beginning of 2008/09;

- that, following the results of the staff survey, Nigel Karney would report to the Commission on 'where we are now', so that the Commission could review the target date; and
- to approve the HR strategy (pages 1-5 of the document).

SR; NJK

***b) Action plans***

Sharon Ruckwood said that the action plan had been updated (but not otherwise amended) since it had last been seen by the Commission in December 2006.

**Learning and development indicator 2.1:** Anne Seex said that it was essential that the LGOs increase the level of their involvement in the Learning and Development Strategy in order to meet the standard.

It was **AGREED** to recognise the action plan as an appropriate working document.

***c) Learning and Development (L&D) Strategy***

Nigel Karney explained that the L&D Strategy had been approved by the Deputies. It was consistent with the HR Strategy.

Anne Seex commented that it was important that the training resources were directed to the Commission's priorities.

It was **AGREED** that the Ombudsmen would send any comments on the L&D Strategy to Nigel Karney and Sharon Ruckwood; the Deputies would then review the Strategy in the light of these comments.

LGOs; AA

**8. Concessionary days 2007**

CLA 1618 had been circulated. The Staff Side had requested an additional concessionary day on Monday 24 December, and cited a number of factors to support this request.

Tony Redmond said that the usual three concessionary days for 2007 had been decided as:

Thursday 27 December  
 Friday 28 December  
 Monday 31 December (New Year's Eve).

Following discussion of the options, it was **AGREED** to grant the request, on the understanding that no precedent would be set for future years.

**9. Customer satisfaction survey 2007 (exempt from FOIA under s22)**

CLA 1619 had been circulated. It was **AGREED** to note the report in the light of forthcoming consideration in detail at the November Management Conference, where MORI will do a presentation.

Jerry White said that he had seen no better argument for the introduction of the Access and Advice Service than the findings of the MORI report. Anne Seex agreed, but added that the Access and Advice Service was not the only area to be considered.

**10. Date of next meeting**

Tuesday 11 December 2007 at MBT, following the Audit Committee meeting.