

## COMMISSION FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN ENGLAND

**Minutes of the meeting of the Commission held at Millbank Tower,  
Millbank, London SW1P 4QP in the Dali Room on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor on  
Tuesday 15 September at 10.30am**

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

**In attendance:** Mr N H Jones  
Mr N J Karney  
Mr S D Jones  
Ms J Feeney  
Ms M Kelly  
Mr A L Creech

### 1. Jerry White

Tony Redmond said that this was Jerry White's last Commission meeting before his retirement on 30 September, and placed on record, on behalf of the Commission, his appreciation to Jerry White for his outstanding contribution to the work of the Commission over the past 14 years, both as Local Commissioner and more recently as Vice Chairman.

### 2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Ann Abraham, Mick King and Peter MacMahon.

### 3. Matters arising from the minutes of 28 July Commission meeting

The minutes of the 28 July meeting were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by Tony Redmond. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

### 4. Commission PIs: August 2009

CLA 1729 had been circulated.

The Commission noted the following points about the data:

- **Table 1: Initial contact:**
  - Neville Jones reported that he had investigated the reasons for incomplete supporting information in respect of 50% approx of contacts received by the Advice Team, queried by the Commission in July. Table 1 now included a new section, which gave a breakdown of written (1,238), and email (2,256) items of correspondence received in the month of August, in addition to the number of telephone calls received (3,192).

- Further work would be done to refine the presentation of the table. In particular, details on the number of calls received by the Advice Team which translated into complaints, which required additional COIN2 programming, would be available for the next Commission meeting in December.

NHJ

The Commission noted Neville Jones' report and commented that the additional information was helpful.

- **Table 5: Decisions:**

The Commission was encouraged to note the recent increase in the number of non-26(5) decisions taken by the offices – 2,798 overall in the three months ended August 2009, compared with the 2009/10 planning target of 2,556.

- **Table 6: Times (excl S26(5)s):**

The London and York offices were achieving turnaround times substantially in excess of the planning targets, especially 13 weeks (72.2% and 75% respectively in the month of August).

## 5. Budgetary control report: August 2009

CLA 1730 had been circulated. Stephen Jones began by reading out some missing text from the summary page comments, and pointed out that improvements continued to be made to the layout of the reports to address issues such as:

- The distorting effects of annual contracts, which represent a year's worth of commitments.
- The out-turn projections not reflecting the modified expenditure profile.

Stephen Jones explained that the aim was to minimise the number of manual adjustments that need to be made to the report, so that the focus would be on the budget variances.

Tony Redmond referred to the projected underspend against the 2009/10 budgets, if current expenditure trends continued, which had risen to £1.9m. Work was underway to address this underspend. Some contributory factors were outside the Commission's control, since they arose from the timing of funding for the New Initiatives projects. Tony Redmond emphasised the importance of addressing this underspend, since the year end position was likely to be taken as the baseline for future grant allocations.

In the Commission's discussion, it was noted that:

- The Deputies had been asked to identify further spending opportunities on new projects/initiatives during 2009/10, and these were set out in the 2009/10 mid-year estimates (CLA 1731).
- The expenditure schedule included provision for upgraded telephony and work was already in hand to prepare for the new wave of investigators due to be recruited and trained from January 2010 onwards.

The summary budgetary control report and comments were noted by the Commission.

## 6. 2009/10 estimates: mid-year review

CLA 1731 had been circulated. Stephen Jones presented to the Commission details of the changes that had emerged since the base 2009/10 budgets had been constructed at the start of the financial year. He pointed out that:

- The changes, which were largely due to the impact of preparations for the new areas of jurisdiction, amounted to an underspend of £806k. Additional charges against the 2009/10 budgets of £487k resulted in a net underspend of £319k.
- Taking account of other offsets, such as a grant reduction and credit transfer in respect of Making Experience Count (MEC), an overall surplus against the budget of £485k was available, assuming the programmes in the 'core' 2009/10 budgets were fully implemented and planned expenditure spent.
- Appendix C of the paper indicated how the unallocated surplus could be deployed to a number of capital projects. These had been formulated in the light of discussions with budget managers. These were shown on two bases, with either limited or more extensive work carried out in the Coventry office. The supplementary projects were however dependent upon clarification of additional funding expected from DCSF and CLG.

In the discussion, the Commission paid particular attention to Appendix C, and noted that:

- The capital premises project included approx £60k in respect of the York office.
- The majority of work in respect of the Coventry office involved relocation of the Advice Team to the first floor and the necessary work associated with that move.

The Commission **AGREED** to:

- i. note the mid-year 2009/10 estimates;
- ii. authorise Tony Redmond to approve the detailed expenditure programme, as soon as the uncertainties relating to DCSF and CLG funding are resolved. Meantime, further details of the programme would be circulated to the Commission for information.

**NJK; SDJ**

## 7. Commission corporate performance reports

CLA 1733 had been circulated. The Commission considered the four monthly performance reports from Corporate Services for 1 April – 31 July 2009 period, together with the latest listing of key projects. Nigel Karney explained that:

- The *Human Resources* and *Other corporate activities* performance reports had been combined into a single report.
- Each of the reports began with a summary page/highlights of key points, as requested by the Commission in May 2009.

## ***Communications***

Jackie Feeney reported that:

- 67 bookings for training courses had been taken so far in 2009/10, similar to last year's position. There had been a change in the type of course booked, with a big demand for the new adult social care course, particularly from London councils.
- Publicity about the Annual Report and new-style Annual reviews, published in July, had been lower than the previous year but positive.
- Media coverage on reports was also lower than during the previous year, mainly due to the fewer number of reports issued.
- The level of outreach work had gone down compared with the previous year.

The Commission noted that good progress was being made against the majority of the 2009/10 performance targets. In the discussion, Jackie Feeney pointed out that the level of interest amongst investigators in outreach work had not reduced, but a factor was the amount of administrative work involved in setting up/carrying out a training course in the absence of a Communications Project Officer.

## ***Human resources and other corporate activities***

Maureen Kelly drew attention to the high level of recruitment activity detailed in the HR section of the report (15 campaigns run).

Anne Seex commented that staff development included a range of activities in addition to formal training.

Nigel Karney referred to:

- Extensive IT work on reviewing the COIN2 specification and the migration to Office 2007.
- Facilities was now staffed to its full complement.
- FOI requests continued to run at high levels, with one corporate case taken to tribunal.
- A range of role and influence work was set out in the report.
- "Complaints about us" analyses from each office were included.

## ***Key projects summary***

Nigel Karney pointed out that:

- The summary now cross-referred to the 2009/10 business plan objectives.
- The majority of projects were ranked as medium/low risk, with little progress made in a small number of areas because of the lack of available resources, arising from the focus on the New Jurisdictions work.

Jerry White referred to the further research planned in respect of Key Project 1 “Continue to address as far as possible points raised in the 2007 Ipsos MORI customer survey”. He noted that research had not been undertaken into local authorities’ satisfaction for a number of years, and it would be timely to do this now in the light of recent initiatives such as the Advice Team and Council First. This was **AGREED** by the Commission.

NJK

## 8. Audit Committee

CLA 1735 had been circulated. The Commission noted the minutes of the 13 July meeting of the Audit Committee.

Tony Redmond commented that the Commission’s governance and scrutiny arrangements had been enhanced by the increased independent membership of the Committee.

In the discussion, Jerry White suggested that the Commission and the Audit Committee meet together once a year to discuss issues of common concern. This was **AGREED** by the Commission. Tony Redmond would consider further the arrangements for such an event.

TR

## 9. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 2 December, 11.15 am in MBT (NB: there will be a special meeting of the Commission at the October management conference on 15/16 October, to approve the final 2010/11 budget submission).

## Confidential items

## 10. New Service Design

CLA 1734 had been circulated to Commissioners and Deputies. The Commission considered the results of the consultation exercise on the New Service Design, and a recommendation from the New Initiatives Programme Board concerning children’s services.

The Commission **AGREED** to approve:

- i. The change recommended by the New Initiatives Programme Board that the proposed schools teams should be extended to include other children’s services complaints.
- ii. The New Service Design paper, subject to amendments to reflect the Programme Board’s recommendation.

## 11. Interim pension fund valuation

CLA 1732 had been circulated to Commissioners and Deputies. The Commission considered an interim valuation of the LPFA Fund in respect of the Commission as at 31 July 2009, in advance of the formal triennial valuation in March 2010.

**12. Budget 2010/11**

CLA 1736 had been circulated to Commissioners and Deputies. The Commission **AGREED** to approve the draft budget for 2010/11 for submission to the CLG as soon as possible after the meeting.