

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**18 JANUARY 2010**

**SELBY BENCHMARKING VISIT**

Responsible Member	Councillor – Kit Taylor, Performance Management Board Chairman
Responsible Head of Service	Hugh Bennett -Assistant Chief Executive

**1. SUMMARY**

1.1 This report provides the Board with a summary of the lessons learnt from a benchmarking visit to Selby District Council in November 2009.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that the Council:-

- i. Note that delivering excellence requires a focus on customer service, long term outcomes and value for money (3.5).
- ii. Seek Customer Service Excellence status (3.9).
- iii. Continue with Customer First training for all staff (3.8).
- iv. Improve the format of its annual report (3.10).
- v. Produce a five year Medium Term Financial Strategy (3.10).
- vi. Align its Communications Strategy more closely with the corporate priorities 3.11).
- vii. Note that improved communications is largely dependent on having an improved story to tell, rather than changes to existing communications practices (3.12).
- viii. Introduce “birthday forums” (3.13).
- ix. Improve the frequency and profile of long service awards (3.14).
- x. Improve the service business planning template, in particular, sections on workforce planning, workforce targets and procurement planning (3.16).
- xi. Develop a change management model that builds on the learning of early shared services (3.17).
- xii. Review the town centre programme (3.19).
- xiii. Provide the new Executive Director with Selby’s Economic Development Strategy (3.20).
- xiv. Provide the new Head of Planning and Regeneration with Selby’s Development Policy Team staffing structure (3.21)
- xv. Produce a more coherent annual community engagement programme (3.22).
- xvi. Monitor efficiencies in a similar way to Selby (3.25).

**3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Selby District Council was rated “weak” in 2004 by the Audit Commission. Five years later the Council was re-rated “excellent”. Selby is similar to Bromsgrove District, in that it is essentially a rural district bordering unitary authorities, such as Leeds. It has three market towns, compared to our one and a smaller population of 80,000.
- 3.2 Councillors Steven Collela and Les Turner, along with officers, Hugh Bennett (Assistant Chief Executive) and Tony Beirne (Executive Director) visited the Selby on 05 November. The Members and officers of Selby gave up a considerable part of their time to Bromsgrove on the day and provided four CDs of material after the visit. The Assistant Chief Executive has written to Selby’s Chief Executive, Martin Connor to thank Selby for their co-operation.
- 3.3 The following sections look at some of the areas that were considered on the visit. There was a clear difference between Selby and Bromsgrove, but the overall view is that Bromsgrove needs to continue with its journey and has the right improvement actions in place. Selby is further along that journey. It should be remember that Bromsgrove was only rated “fair” in March 2009, one category above “weak”.

#### Excellence

- 3.4 A key point made by Selby’s Chief Executive was that the Selby did not aim for excellence, as defined by the Audit Commission, but concentrated on delivering the things the Council knew were important to its residents and that excellence flowed from this. Although this sounds simple, it does mean that Selby are very good at listening and equally good at delivering longer term outcomes.

#### Performance Indicators

- 3.5 This focus on longer term outcomes is really illustrated by the comparative performance of the two councils on their performance indicators. Selby’s indicators are attached at **Appendix 1**. There is no real discernable difference between the two councils’ indicators. This should not really come as a surprise. The Government Monitoring Board’s view was that a reasonable set of performance indicators was the minimum position, a bit like setting a balanced budget, and the pre-cursor to going on to deliver on a wider agenda. The main message to emerge from the trip is the need to focus on three things:-
- a. Delivery of longer term outcomes.
  - b. Excellent customer service.
  - c. Value for money.
- 3.6 In all three of these, Selby is clearly further ahead than Bromsgrove; however, our paths are similar. The governance of the two councils was broadly similar and this should not come as a surprise either, given the focus on governance at Bromsgrove in recent years.

### Customer Service

- 3.7 Selby operates a customer service centre operation, similar to Bromsgrove. Members and officers visited the one in Selby town. The centre was impressive. Good practices included: a meet and greet system, an excellent A to Z customer leaflet rack, the use of duty officers (for planning, housing and benefits), quality assurance techniques for the customer service advisers, customer service training across all parts of the Council and a Customer Service Excellence self assessment, with a view to accreditation. Selby also operate an "Access to Selby" Board, which focuses on customer service, similar to Bromsgrove's Customer First Board.
- 3.8 Bromsgrove's customer service centre is already very good and has been held up as national best practice (as part of the Worcestershire Hub) by the Local Government Chronicle, so we must not be too hard on ourselves. The Planning Service has recently migrated to the Customer Service Centre, which means we are now using the duty officer system, but there may be further opportunity for this. Bromsgrove has a good programme of customer first training (we are now in our third year). Customer First Part 3 was innovative and involved the use of customer heartbeats for each team. 2010 will focus on plain English with empathy, which is similar to the training undertaken in Selby.
- 3.9 A key difference was that Selby have just completed a Customer Service Excellence self assessment with a view to accreditation. Customer Service Excellence replaced Charter Mark and is like Investors in People, but for customer service. The Assistant Chief Executive's view is that Bromsgrove is 12-18 months away from achieving this accreditation. Bromsgrove should seek accreditation.

### Governance and Management Practices

- 3.10 Selby's governance and management practices are very similar to Bromsgrove's. It was interesting to note that their Annual Report was produced to a higher standard, being more glossy and about good news than performance indicators. Selby also operate a five year medium term financial strategy (Bromsgrove's is three years).

### Communications and Workforce Practices

- 3.11 Selby's communications strategy was explicitly written around the Council's priorities. Bromsgrove's has priorities, but is not as aligned to the corporate priorities as this. We should adopt this practice.
- 3.12 Generally, Bromsgrove's communications are effective, but one of the key things to emerge from the Selby visit is that they have a good story to tell, whereas we are yet to deliver on some of our longer term outcomes e.g. town centre, Longbridge and we have had to take a series of difficult decisions e.g. charging for green waste, increased car parking charges, closing the Museum. Communications is not the issue, having a better story to tell is.

- 3.13 One small bit of good practice that was identified was “birthday forums”. Every couple of months, the Chief Executive or senior officer has a forum with every member of staff that has had a birthday during that period. Staff have a cup of tea and a slice of cake with the Chief Executive. This brings staff from different departments together, helps further create a nice environment to work in and enables staff to raise any issues they like with the Chief Executive. We should look to adopt this practice.
- 3.14 Staying with the subject of creating a nice working atmosphere, everyone will recognise that this is important and perhaps more so, during the difficult times ahead. Selby has Long Service Awards for 20 years, 30 years and 40 years service. Bromsgrove’s is 25 years and lacks profile. We should review this area and consider a lower starting point, perhaps 10 years, as the days of “job for life” have gone.
- 3.15 Selby appeared to be further ahead with regard to workforce planning. Their business plans contained more information than ours on staff gender, age, ethnicity, disability and qualifications; however, it was less clear how this information was being used. There were also explicit targets for each department on turnover, sickness and staff satisfaction.
- 3.16 Bromsgrove has much of this information and is undertaking a comprehensive approach to workforce planning, but it needs to be further integrated into the service business planning framework, as do the targets on sickness, turnover and staff satisfaction.
- 3.17 Selby’s Change Protocol was focused around HR practices. There has been some discussion about a wider change protocol for services going through transformation at Bromsgrove and Redditch that builds on the learning from the early shared services. Such a protocol should make links to the project management methodology, HR practices, lean systems, change management approaches, service levels agreements etc.

#### Economic Regeneration

- 3.18 Selby town centre re-development is further advanced. The major redevelopment of the town was started by the relocation of a school from existing Victorian buildings (the Parkside listing remains a damaging set back for Bromsgrove). The town has benefited from a new school, a new civic centre and a community hospital. The Council’s main offices are due to move and Tesco’s set to expand (subject to planning permission) and will require highways and junction improvements.
- 3.19 Clearly, there are lots of parallels to Bromsgrove and it is uncanny that the start of Selby’s programme was linked to a school. The similarity between the two programmes suggests that Bromsgrove’s programme is broadly correct. The new Executive Director will need to familiarise himself with the town centre programme and a “performance clinic” that brings him up to speed, but also provides an opportunity to review the programme would seem appropriate at this juncture.

- 3.20 It was interesting to note that Selby had no Economic Development Officer. Selby's view was that the area did not need promoting, as major businesses would already be aware of the retail opportunities that exist; however, Selby considered the availability of retail sites through strategic planning key. A pre-cursor to this is to understand the level of demand for these sites by the retail sector through a retail study.
- 3.21 Selby does have an Economic Development Strategy in place and this should be provided to the new Executive Director. The Strategy is supported by comprehensive Retail, Commercial and Leisure study, as a pre-cursor to Area Action Plan and Core Strategy. Similarly, information supplied by Selby on the Development Policy Team, should be passed to our team, as part of their work on the I&DeA Peer Planning Review, which identified capacity as an issue.

### Community Engagement

- 3.22 Bromsgrove scored three out of four for prioritisation in its Comprehensive Performance Assessment and the Audit Commission commented favourable on how community engagement had fed into the decision-making process of the Council. Bromsgrove has many positives, like "U Decide", PACT, Budget Jury, Disabled User Group, Equalities and Diversity Forum. All of that said, the practice at Selby was impressive and possibly more high profile.
- 3.23 Selby's approach was very focused around the annual business cycle. Community engagement starts with the Leader giving a "State of the District" address at Full Council, which kick starts a three month programme of engagement, which includes all access channels e.g. public meetings, postal, e-mail, web surveys, press coverage etc. Bromsgrove probably needs to get better at using all channels, having a coherent programme, a wider audience and feeding back. For example, Selby's audience included:-
- a. 1,000 local businesses;
  - b. 450 plus community groups;
  - c. All parish councils;
  - d. Staff;
  - e. Partner agencies;
  - f. A youth council; and
  - g. A citizen's panel.
- 3.24 As Selby pointed out they "consult with the community in its entirety". Selby noted that public meetings tended to "attract a small core of committed individuals"! We should be wary of committing ourselves to too many such meetings, as they involve a lot of time and resource to set up,

in order to reach a small number of people. Juries, electronic engagement, the use of the press etc. are more effective.

#### Value for Money

- 3.25 At the time of our two respective CPA, Selby were clearly further ahead than Bromsgrove. Reducing expenditure levels was explicitly identified in Selby's VFM Strategy, whereas Bromsgrove has been building capacity in order to catapult its way out of a "poor" rating. We can now start work on becoming leaner. Efficiency gains and procurement plans are both explicitly identified in Selby's business plans, a practice we should adopt. The corporate savings and efficiency strategy is very explicit and is reported on using a traffic light system (see **Appendix 2**) we may be able to learn from this too.
- 3.26 Selby had already got shared services in place for Building Control, Internal Audit, ICT, Payroll and procurement; however, Selby noted that further opportunities may be more limited due to the willingness of otherwise of its partners. Selby had also successfully outsourced: streetscene and leisure services (an attempt to outsource planning had not been successful and Selby were open about that).
- 3.27 Selby's VFM vision was to be a commissioning council. It was interesting to note that there was very little mention of quantitative benchmarking e.g. cost per 1,000 population etc. The Audit Commission is keen on this type of benchmarking, but the Selby visit would suggest a focus on activities that are actually going to reduce costs.
- 3.28 Bromsgrove has made significant strides in this area since the CPA. We now have shared services for: community safety, payroll, elections services and procurement. We will have a single management team for Bromsgrove and Redditch, which goes live on the 20 April and we are due to host the new County Regulatory Services function (along with Redditch) through the Worcestershire Enhanced Two Tier (WETT) programme (Internal Audit and Property Management are also due to be transferred as part of WETT). With the single management team in place, we can then expect a three year programme that delivers a full range of shared services for the two councils.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 None.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 None.

#### **6. CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- 6.1 CO2 – Improvement.

#### **7. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

7.1 The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:

- Not delivering our Vision of being an excellent council.

7.2 These risks are being managed as follows:

- *Delivering Excellence:*

Risk Register: Corporate

Key Objective Ref No: 12

Key Objective: Ensure the Council achieves an improved rating under CAA regime

12.2 – Deliver a process for what excellence looks like.

## 8. **CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Recommendation on seeking customer service excellence accreditation.

## 9. **EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None arising from this report.

## 10. **VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 See section on VFM.

## 11. **CLIMATE CHANGE AND CARBON IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 None arising directly from the report; however, climate change is one of our priorities and we will need to deliver long term outcomes on this priority, in particular, significant reductions in our CO2 emissions.

## 9. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Procurement Issues N/A
Personnel Implications N/A
Governance/Performance Management N/A
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998 N/A
Policy N/A
Environmental N/A
Equalities and Diversity N/A

## 10. **OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

Portfolio Holders	<b>Via E-Mail and at PMB.</b>
Chief Executive	<b>Via e-mail.</b>

Corporate Director (Services)	<b>Via e-mail.</b>
Assistant Chief Executive	<b>Yes</b>
Head of Service	<b>Via e-mail.</b>
Head of Financial Services	<b>Via e-mail.</b>
Head of Legal & Democratic Services	<b>Via e-mail.</b>
Head of Organisational Development & HR	<b>Via e-mail.</b>
Corporate Procurement Team	<b>No</b>

## **11. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Selby's Performance Indicators  
Appendix 2 – Corporate Efficiency Reporting

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

2008/09 PMB Work Programme.

## **CONTACT OFFICERS**

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