

MILLENNIUM ISSUES (NON-IT) ACTION PLAN

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1. **Purpose**

1.1 To update the Committee on Millennium issues and to advise on future actions.

2. **Summary**

2.1 Whilst the Council is following the Audit Commission process and is aware of the issues, there is not a consistent approach and/or support to ensure all objectives are achieved. Generally, the Council is progressing well and needs to remain focused, to maintain detailed monitoring of the process and to be fully committed to the completion of the process.

3. **Recommendations**

3.1 That the Strategic Director Resources, in conjunction with the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee, be given delegated authority to make decisions over the next six months.

3.2 That the Council's commitment to completing its preparations to ensure that 'Due Diligence' is observed, be confirmed.

3.3 That the Policy and Resources Committee be requested to consider the Union's submission for additional payments for staff required to work over the Millennium period once the staffing requirements have been identified.

4. **Background**

4.1 A Millennium Co-ordinator has been employed on a casual contract basis. She took up post on 18 January 1999 and is currently employed until 16 July 1999. Since January the project has:

- (a) developed and implemented a full and regularly updated Action Plan;
- (b) held regular meetings of the Project Steering Group;
- (c) compiled an outline Risk Register with specific plans to address the risk issues;
- (d) prepared a draft Communications Strategy and outline timetable;
- (e) locked into the LGA monitoring process;
- (f) identified finance and budget issues;
- (g) established membership of GOSE Regional Forum; and
- (h) identified Insurance and Due Diligence issues.

4.2 Target dates, agreed on the Action Plan, have not been met for both risk assessments and contingency plans. Workshops and one to one meetings have been held to ensure consistency within the Council and to address all the issues identified. The response to workshops has been mixed and there has been little response to 1:1 meetings. Each Strategic Director has been given a current position statement for their Directorate and has been asked to compile an action plan to ensure each Directorate is prepared for the Millennium period.

4.3 A decision was made early on in the project that the Millennium Co-ordinator and the Emergency Planning Officer would work closely together and with the Emergency Services. Internally, there appears to be confusion over Millennium specific issues, Emergency Planning and Risk Management. Whilst accepting that all are separate issues, it must be recognised that they cannot be worked on in isolation.

4.4 There will be a joint Millennium focused Emergency Planning Exercise in September 1999.

4.5 Two meetings have taken place with the Chamber of Commerce to look at working with the Business Community. Two issues are being discussed with them: raising awareness with small and medium sized businesses and looking at whether there is a business opportunity for related trades people over the period itself. Abbey National, in-conjunction with Action 2000, will hold workshops for around 40 local companies.

4.6 There have been several internal meetings to discuss awareness raising (a) generally (b) with the Business Community and (c) to ensure the Vulnerable in the Community are informed and cared for. Initial discussions have taken place with representatives of the voluntary organisations regarding their possible involvement.

4.7 There have been 3 meetings with a Members Sounding Board comprising Councillors Ellis, Hardwick and Lewis to update Members of issues as they arise.

4.8 Work was undertaken last year to check compliance of non IT items, for example alarms and lifts. Identified problems were actioned. Further work has been undertaken this year to check compliance and as things stand at present, there is no budget to take any corrective action.

5. **Issues and Choices**

5.1 Whilst regular responses to the LGA questionnaire have been submitted, we have not shown as much progress as we had hoped. We have had to record the fact that our timetable has slipped on Contingency Planning and that, as a result, we currently have no programme for testing of equipment.

5.2 Government Departments (DfEE and DETR) have issued various information for Education and Highways. All schools have been approached to assist them in their preparations, but, at present, no contingency plans exist if schools are unable to open immediately after the Millennium.

5.3 Of those areas which have undertaken detailed risk assessments and are developing contingency plans, many have identified availability of staff and additional payments as a key issue. At present, there are no plans to pay staff beyond normal bank holiday payments, although the trade unions have submitted a claim for premium payments.

5.4 Raising awareness with (a) the Business Community, (b) generally and (c) with the vulnerable in the community has a cost. The Home Office has recently issued a booklet which was circulated with national Sunday newspapers on 13 June, and further copies are being acquired for use in reception areas, libraries etc.

5.5 The Council's state of preparedness could be the subject of legal scrutiny, if people suffer as a result of the Millennium date change. Legal advice suggests that the Council's defence in such a challenge will be that 'due diligence' was observed. To maintain this position, the Council needs to continue to pursue the established programme to a conclusion.

5.6 Because of the need to keep Members informed, an informal 'Sounding Board' was agreed by Groups Leaders, and Councillors Ellis, Hardwick and Lewis have now held three meetings with key officers to review progress. It is suggested that this group should continue and that the Strategic Director Resources, in conjunction with the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee, be given delegated authority to make decisions on Millennium related issues over the next six months.

5.7 A number of Council owned properties were inspected last year to check compliance of non IT items. On that initial work a budget was given last year, to undertake corrective action. However, a more comprehensive programme of work is required. There is no budget identified for testing and/or correction of non IT issues and this could be a cause of considerable embarrassment to the Council, particularly in ensuring 'due diligence'.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

The Millennium programme includes contact with the various agencies responsible for ensuring that the potential environmental impact of the date change is taken into account.

6.2 Equalities

All members of the community need to be informed of, and aware of, Millennium issues. Failure to communicate with the vulnerable in the community and/or ethnic minorities could have implications and be seen as a failure of Due Diligence.

6.3 Financial

The costs of the preparations have been kept to a minimum so far. The IT impact has been the subject of Committee approvals. There will be further expenditure required, and this will need to be approved by the proposed Panel.

6.4 Legal

The Council must demonstrate 'Due Diligence'.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

Securing appropriate staff cover may be an issue as currently there are no plans to pay beyond normal Bank Holiday payments.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 There are a number of outstanding issues which need to be resolved quickly in order to progress the plan of action and to fully meet the objectives.

Background Papers: Audit Commission "A Stitch in Time" and the Local Government Authority quarterly questionnaire.