

ITEM 17(b)

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

15 SEPTEMBER 1999

MILLENNIUM ISSUES (NON-IT) ACTION PLAN

Accountable Officer and Author: John Moffoot (Head of Corporate Administration) -
MK252314

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the Council's progress towards Millennium compliance, both for its own services and throughout the community.

2. Summary

- 2.1 A number of areas of progress have been made in the Council's preparations since the last report. In particular, the Council has been able to broaden its involvement with the other public services, the business community and the voluntary sector.
- 2.2 There is no room for complacency if the Council is to achieve 'blue' status by the end of September. In particular, some areas of contingency planning, staffing cover, communications and continuity of supply need to be resolved.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the report be noted.

4. **Background**

4.1 Since the last report to the meeting on 13 July, the following significant developments in the Action Plan have taken place:

- (a) the Millennium Co-ordinator is now on maternity leave, and the work has largely passed to the Emergency Planning Officer. This has necessitated some revision of workload priorities;
- (b) the Council has been formally notified by the Government Office of the South East (GOSE) that it is regarded as a 'good amber';
- (c) GOSE has also stated that any councils which have not completed their planning by the end of September will be deemed to be putting services at risk, and could be colour-coded 'red';
- (d) inter-agency working with the emergency services and Milton Keynes General Hospital has continued;
- (e) on 8 September 1999, a major exercise (Exercise Golden Fleece) was held throughout the Thames Valley Police Authority area to check emergency communications and co-ordination systems in preparation for the Millennium;
- (f) locally, this exercise was augmented by a detailed scenario (Exercise Silver Bullet) to test the state of contingency planning and preparedness of a range of services;
- (g) an invitation has been sent to the Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise to develop a joint approach to local businesses with a view to establishing both their state of preparedness and their ability to respond to service failures in the local community over the Millennium period;
- (h) an invitation has been sent to local voluntary sector umbrella groups inviting them to offer support and resources to a 'Good Neighbour' campaign for the Millennium period. The invitation is also being extended to Parish and Neighbourhood Councils;
- (i) checking compliance of non-IT related items, such as alarms and lifts, is continuing. As there are no resources available for a comprehensive testing programme, each property is being assessed against the risk, and a detailed building checklist will be prepared for implementation at the appropriate time over the Millennium;
- (j) a detailed audit was carried out by District Audit on 9 July, and the initial results were received on 18 August. The auditor asked for more information about inventories, fire alarms, pre-printed stationery, the Council's testing strategy and final contingency plans;

- (k) the Millennium Communication Strategy is being progressed as further evidence of readiness becomes available; and
- (l) a new Audit Commission publication 'Time Waits for No-one' emphasises that the remaining tasks involve communication, testing, ensuring the availability of supplies, and providing staff cover. This is very much in line with the Council's remaining agenda.

4.2 On the 'down' side:

- (a) some services' contingency plans may not be sufficiently robust to meet all possible demands or complications. This will become more evident during testing;
- (b) there are no written contingency plans in the event of schools being unable to open immediately after the Millennium;
- (c) the availability of staff remains unpredictable, partly, but not entirely because of the lack of agreement on payment (a report on which appears elsewhere on the agenda). Consequently, it will be prudent to plan for the minimum possible staffing requirement; and
- (d) national information to the public has not been handled particularly well. An Action 2000 booklet entitled 'Facts not Fiction' was only circulated with quality newspapers in June. The Council has acquired additional copies for distribution through Council outlets.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The Council continues to make progress towards achieving Millennium compliance in its services. In many ways the Council is leading the public service response.
- 5.2 However, time is running out to complete the work within the deadlines which the public can reasonably expect, and some detailed work remains to be done. This raises the possibility of the Council being assessed as unprepared and, therefore, 'red', when the National Infrastructure Forum assesses local authorities as a whole in October.
- 5.3 It is essential to guard against both Millennium fatigue, when staff, businesses and the public simply stop getting prepared because of the intensity of the work involved, and Millennium complacency, when preparations cease to be thorough because the risk is assessed as being minimal.
- 5.4 The Council needs to be seen to be committed to meeting its objectives to the whole community, and to be aware that there is only one chance to get its preparations right.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

The Council's response takes account of the potential environmental impact of the Millennium, and plans include other agencies such as Anglian Water and the Environment Agency.

6.2 Equalities

The basis of the Council's preparations has always been that services to the whole community should be available as required over the Millennium period and beyond. Additional work is now taking place to offer further protection to the most vulnerable in society through the 'Good Neighbour' Scheme.

6.3 Financial

The costs have been kept to a minimum so far. Additional expenditure on communications, remedial work and staffing is likely, but cannot be fully evaluated at present.

6.4 Legal

The Council's state of preparedness could be the subject of legal scrutiny in the event of some failure. The main defence would be that the Council has exercised 'due diligence' in foreseeing the issues and making appropriate and reasonable plans.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

Preparatory work is being absorbed into existing workloads. A separate report is being made to the Committee on staff payments for the Millennium period.

7. **Conclusions**

- 7.1 The Council's preparations for the Millennium continue, and are being independently audited. The target continues to be that the Council should be assessed as 'blue' (ie compliant) in October.

Background Papers: Letter from Government Office for the South East dated 21 July 1999
Letter from Government Office for the South East dated 29 July 1999
Agenda for Regional 2000 Forum held on 9 August
E-mail message from District Audit Service dated 18 August 1999