

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 16th October 2013**

Present

Members: Councillor Nicola Davies
Councillor Neil Dirveiks
Councillor Martin Heatley (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Phillip Morris-Jones
Councillor Keith Kondakor
Councillor Chris Saint
Councillor June Tandy (Chair)
Councillor Alan Webb
Councillor Chris Williams

Other Councillors: Councillor Richard Chattaway
Councillor Izzi Seccombe – Leader
Councillor Colin Hayfield, Portfolio Holder, Customers
Councillor Jeff Clarke – Portfolio Holder, Corporate
Business and Environment

Officers: Sally Baxter, Democratic Services Team Officer
John Betts, Head of Finance
Tonino Ciuffini, Head of Information Assets
Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change
Management
Andrew Lovegrove, Head of Corporate Financial Services
Jane Pollard, Corporate Legal Services Manager
Janet Purcell, Democratic Services Manager
Steve Smith, Head of Property

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Jeff Clarke who had been delayed due to poor weather conditions. It was anticipated that he would be in attendance later.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

(3) Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10th July 2013

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 10th July 2013 be signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

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2. Public Question Time

There were no public questions received or presented at the meeting.

3. Questions to Cabinet and Portfolio Holders

Members considered the Forward Plan of decisions by Cabinet and the Portfolio Holders and concluded that on this occasion, there were no questions.

4. Organisational Health Report – 2013/14

John Betts, Head of Corporate Finance, presented the Committee with an overview of Quarter 1 period of the 2013/14 financial years' report which highlighted the County Council's finance, performance, and risk information for April 2013 to June 2013. He explained the main points of the quarterly report and provided an outline of the County Council's overall financial position, together with specific service-level information including budget variations and headline data.

It was explained to Members that services were now undertaking the final year of a three year plan thus facing the greatest pressure. This would be reflected in Quarter 2 to be reported to Cabinet in November 2013.

Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change Management, highlighted that at the end of June 2013, 69% of the 54 measures were reported to be on target.

Following questioning from the Committee, the following points were noted:

- 1) Information would be provided for Members about the course of action to be taken in the event of the upcoming Fire Service strike action. The Chairman mentioned that an email had been circulated to all Members regarding strike action with alternative measures including military assistance;
- 2) Due to the number of assets disposed of in this year, it was reported that 2 million capital receipts were expected. Due to the Property Rationalisation Programme and the changing outlook, the current position was difficult to ascertain but a precise figure would be identified;

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- 3) A concern was raised that the service for Children who are both looked after and subject of a child protection plan, was forecast to miss the target thus further explanative information would be provided to all Members of the Committee.

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to:

- 1) Request that the existing format and presentation of the quarterly Organisational Health report be reviewed by John Betts, David Carter and Councillor June Tandy, to identify a more effective reporting for analysis.

5. Public Engagement in Overview and Scrutiny

Janet Purcell, Democratic Services Manager, discussed the importance of public engagement and requested Members' thoughts on the Public Engagement in Overview and Scrutiny Tool Kit. It was anticipated that the ToolKit would be adopted at the scoping stage to assist planning and the identification of engagement activity.

Following discussion and questioning from the Committee, the following points were noted:

- 1) Transparency and access to information was important at all levels and stages.
- 2) It would be advantageous to benchmark public engagement in Warwickshire with other authorities. It would establish how well Warwickshire is engaging and would facilitate the sharing of best practices.
- 3) The importance of pre decision scrutiny was noted in particular, the timing of scrutiny in relation to decision making. Successful public engagement is also dependant on public interest in the subject matter.
- 4) The leaflet design to encourage engagement in the Toolkit could be adapted to include all elements including public speaking at Committee meetings. More online services and using social media would also raise awareness. Social media had proven to be effective when engaging on particular areas of interest.
- 5) It was important to manage peoples' expectations and explain the Scrutiny process so that they are aware that decision making does not take place during this process.

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to:

- 1) Note the main points as prescribed in the Scrutiny Toolkit and;

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- 2) Reconsider the Toolkit at a future meeting after it had been considered by Group Leaders.

6. Access to Payday Loan Companies websites via the Council's Networks

Tonino Ciuffini, Head of Information Assets, directed the Committee to the report and asked them to consider the content and recommend appropriate action, if any, to be taken by the Council.

A discussion ensued about Council Services and its role when providing information to members of the public. It was conceded that whilst Payday Loan Companies operated in accordance with law, other means of finance such as Credit Unions, were preferential. Council Services could raise the profile of alternative money lending organisations that helped people with debt management not encourage long term debt.

The Committee explored possible options for action which included blocking access to payday loan companies websites from Council property or the use of a pop up containing a warning about using such services. The legal implications and Council obligations of any future action would need to be thoroughly considered.

Following discussion and questioning from the Committee, the following points were noted:

- 1) Questions were raised as to the responsibilities of Council services and whether limiting access to Payday Loan Companies websites via Council network.
- 2) The Council could encourage the companies to raise operating standards.
- 3) Clarification was provided with regards to the reported number of occasions payday loan companies websites were accessed via the Council network. The point was made that the numbers reported was in relation to people accessing the websites. Information as to why they were accessing the information was unknown.
- 4) Careful consideration for the legal implications must be considered for any suggested action, and reasons for actions would need to be carefully considered.
- 5) Further information was required from Legal services and Information Assets and discussion should include all Councillors.
- 6) The Library Service could display material informing people of alternative services such as the Credit Union.

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The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed:

- 1) Note the points contained in the report and;
- 2) Refer the matter to Council for discussion.

7. Transformation through Strategic Commissioning Programme

Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change Management, distributed a summary sheet of the Transformation through Strategic Commissioning Review Programme. All reviews were progressing in line with expectations whilst being led by Service Heads and receiving support.

He made Members aware that it had been proposed that the programme would be completed by the end of March 2014. Options to manage the closure of the programme were being explored and any decisions would be subject to democratic processes.

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and agreed to note the report.

8. Work Programme 2013/14

The Chairman presented the Committee with the proposed Work Programme for the remainder of 2013/14 and invited members to suggest additional items for consideration at future meetings.

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed:

- 1) The proposed Work Programme 2013/14 and;
- 2) The proposed Action Plan.

9. Treasury Management Outturn Report 2012/13

Andrew Lovegrove, Head of Corporate Services, introduced the Treasury Management Outturn Report for 2012/13 which incorporated the main points of investment and borrowing outturn for 2012/13.

In conclusion, it was explained that the treasury debt management had remained consistently good and the Council's investment policy had remained stable for a number of years.

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John Betts, Head of Finance, explained the principle of early redemption and the punitive effect this could have with offsetting debts. Safeguarding reserves was also explored by the Committee.

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to note the annual Treasury Management outturn report in respect of 2012/13.

10. Progress on Property Rationalisation Programme Update Report

Steve Smith, Head of Property, gave an update on the Property Rationalisation Programme with the aim to make a £4.376million contribution to the Council Savings plan by March 2015.

He reported that the rationalisation programme was in year 3 of a 4 year plan and information was provided with regards to the disposal properties, major projects currently being undertaken and achievements to date.

The focus was to adapt how the Council used buildings with the emphasis on modern and flexible working.

Following discussion and questioning from the Committee, the following points were noted:

- 1) The best market value was sought when disposing of assets regardless of the slow property market.
- 2) The adequate provision of car parking remained an issue and it was conceded that with more roles being based in Warwick centre, demand would increase. It was reported that options were being considered some of which would have financial implications attached.
- 3) In addition to car parking capacity, other travel initiatives were in place to encourage staff to use other means of travel.

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to note the progress update on the Property Rationalisation Programme.

11. Urgent Matters

There were no urgent matters raised for discussion.

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12. Date of Next Meeting

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that the date of the next meeting had been scheduled for 11th December 2013.

The Committee rose at 3.30 p.m.

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Chair