

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 26 February 2014**

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 Izzi Seccombe – Leader of Warwickshire
County Council

Officers: Sally Baxter, Democratic Services Officer
John Betts, Head of Finance
David Carter, Strategic Director, Resources Group
Sue Evans, Head of Human Resources and Organisational
Development
Tejay De Kretser, Business Development and Improvement
Manager
Tricia Morrison, Project Manager, One Organisational Plan
2014-18 Project.

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors
Clarke, Cockburn and Hayfield.

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

None

**(3) Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Overview
and Scrutiny Committee held on 11th December 2013**

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

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 26 February 2014**

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. Councillor Izzi Seccombe clarified that the Homes for Elderly People were operated by Warwickshire Care Services with the buildings leased to them from Warwickshire County Council. Further information would be provided to Members on request.

The Warwickshire Local Welfare Scheme that replaced the government's Social Welfare Fund, had not received the level of up-take as anticipated particularly over the winter months. The scheme had been advertised on the Warwickshire County Council website to ensure that those in difficulty were aware of available assistance. Funding would be provided for the 2014/15 municipal year however, it was unknown whether central government would provide funding after this period. The Committee agreed that a report would be considered at a future meeting.

A question was raised regarding leases that were coming to an end of their peppercorn rent period in particular, what was being put in place to support community buildings to ensure that they remained available to provide community services. Councillor Izzi Seccombe reported that discussions were being held with services to ascertain a business case and assist groups to ensure sustainability. It was acknowledged that it was not feasible to continue financial support by maintaining buildings.

The Committee identified that Community and Youth Centre's would also potentially be affected and would find it difficult to put forward a business case. There was a period of 12 months left of the peppercorn rents and it was agreed that a report would be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

4. Transformation through Strategic Commissioning Programme

David Carter, Strategic Director, Resources Group, provided an update on services which had completed the review process and those that would be undertaken before the completion of the programme at the end of the 2013/14 financial year.

A comprehensive spending review report would be considered at the April meeting of the Corporate Board. The report would be cascaded to the relevant committees. It would also be cross referenced with other information. The outcomes had informed the One Organisational Plan

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 26 February 2014**

2014/18 which had received approval at the Council meeting held on 24 February 2014.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1) Notes the update and;
- 2) Agrees that a further report containing the outcomes of the Transformation through Strategic Commissioning Programme would be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

5. Organisational Health Report – 2013/14

The Chairman explained that the Organisational Health Report had been reformatted taking into consideration comments made previously by the Committee. The report included information on performance in terms of how the authority was delivering on its key performance measures, the financial management of resources and in managing and responding to significant risks.

Exception reporting was considered to be a preferred method of providing information to the Committee. This allowed for clear information and identification of areas that were not meeting targets. It was suggested that the current spreadsheets distributed with the report, could be electronically distributed to Committee Members in advance for their consideration and exceptional reporting could form the body of the report considered at the Committee.

John Betts, Head of Finance, suggested that in light of the One Organisational Plan, a different approach would be taken to monitoring performance. A different style of reporting to the Committee could also be adopted to include exception reporting.

The Committee supported the suggestions made and asked that they receive more in depth reports on services to aid investigation and allow for greater scrutiny of services.

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

- 1) Reporting on the 2013/14 Reserves Position would be made clearer and provide more explanation so as to ensure effective monitoring.
- 2) An explanation of the Catering Equalisation Account was provided and the Committee noted that the reported figures highlighted whether a surplus or deficit had occurred at the end of the financial year.

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 26 February 2014**

- 3) The costs associated with the fire damage at Higham Lane School would have been the responsibility of the school because it was an Academy and would have had insurance in place to cover the costs.
- 4) Expenditure on the refurbishment of Council office buildings had increased to incorporate feedback from employees who had been the first tranche to use the open plan offices. In response to their feedback, alterations had been made to the next stage of refurbishment which had resulted in an increase to expenditure. The relocation of staff from Wedgnock House to Barrack Street would save the Authority money in the long term.
- 5) Response to timescales with regard to Adult's and Children's Services had not met targets again in Quarter 3. An intensive programme had been put in place to help increase the percentage of complaints responded to within agreed timescales. The Committee noted that the nature of some complaints were complex therefore may take longer to respond to.
- 6) Small- holdings were discussed by the Committee and it was agreed that it was important to assess their performance even though targets were being met. A number of points were raised including the importance of encouraging the next generation of farmers and to ensure that a sustainable strategic view was in place.
- 7) The percentage of corporate projects which deliver CO2 reductions would continue to be monitored.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agrees:

- 1) To note the points contained in the report;
- 2) Receive a briefing note to explain and provide a breakdown of the additional expenditure on Council office buildings;
- 3) To undertake site visits to some small holdings in Warwickshire to gain a better understanding of their operation ;
- 4) To organise a seminar regarding small- holdings for Committee Members for information.

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 26 February 2014**

6. Customer Service Excellence

Tejay De Kretser, Business Development and Improvement Manager, provided up to date information about the stage at which Warwickshire County Council was at regarding the Customer Service Excellence Award.

In addition to the outcomes stated in the report, Fire and Rescue had been assessed in February and had been awarded the Customer Service Excellence Standard. The Corporate assessment had taken place on 24 February but the outcome was yet unknown.

To be awarded the standard, a service was required to be fully compliant in 46 criteria, have no 0 non compliances and be partially compliant in no more than 11 criteria. To date, of the 4 assessments undertaken, each group had achieved full compliance in 54 of the 57 criteria. Areas had been identified for improvement as highlighted in the report and, a plan would be developed for each area with the expectation that partial compliance would shift to full compliance within 12 months.

A 3 year development plan would be developed once the corporate body had been assessed which would support and sustain areas in which the authority had achieved well in and improvement to others. In addition to this, complainants were being asked to provide feedback on their experience using the complaints system so as to inform the 3 year pilot scheme in maintaining and help increase customer standards.

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

1. Benchmarking had been undertaken in some areas using other authorities as a comparison. Further work would be undertaken and reported back to a future meeting of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
2. Information regarding the number of complaints upheld was included in the Annual Report. Service users were encouraged to use the informal complaint process to resolve issues earlier and quicker but the informal complaints process was not included in the Annual Report.
3. The time scale for confirmation of the outcome of the corporate assessment was 15 working days and would be considered at Cabinet scheduled for 5 June 2014.
4. It was clarified that the 'Deal Effectively with Problems' contained in the criterion framework for achieving the Customer Service Excellence standard, was based on the complaints process, not the outcome.

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 26 February 2014**

Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1) Notes the report;
- 2) Agrees to receive a report with regards to benchmarking with other authorities at a future meeting of the Committee.

7. Human Resources and Organisational Development

Sue Evans, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, presented information as to the structure of Human Resources and Organisational Development.

The service is divided into the following categories:

- 1) Strategic HR and OD
 - The HR Business Partnership and;
 - Organisational Development and;
 - Learning and Development.
- 2) Operational HR and OD
 - Employee Relations and;
 - Health and Safety and;
 - Equality and Diversity.
- 3) Transactional HR
 - Recruitment and Selection and;
 - Administration and;
 - Service Development and;
 - Information.
- 4) Cost Effective HR and OD
 - Ratio of HR Personnel against the national average (both private and public sector) and;
 - Associated costs per HR employee.

Following a discussion and questions by the Committee, the following points were noted:

1. Warwickshire County Council operates a number of different employment arrangements. Zero hours contracts are in operation however, they were in accordance with statutory guidelines and the majority were in place to provide short term cover of positions. The number of short term positions had been reduced.
2. It was acknowledged that long term absence was problematic and arrangements were in place to manage absence such as back to work interviews, letters to

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 26 February 2014**

employees from Sue Evans if they have been absent for 2 weeks or more and the active involvement of Occupational Health. It was anticipated that the number of absences would increase due to stress and additional pressure on employees and in response to this a development package would be introduced to help employees recognise the signs of stress and effective ways to manage this.

3. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and medical checks were undertaken for each new employee.
4. A redeployment service was available to help employees find alternative opportunities within the organisation. If an alternative role could not be identified, they could access support provided by HR to secure new employment such as help in CV writing and interview skills.
5. Career break opportunities would be investigated if employees expressed an interest and would be considered on a case by case basis.
6. In light of the financial climate, additional pressures would be placed on employees and the Committee identified that a report regarding different departments would be considered at a future meeting.
7. The number of employment appeals was low due to effective mediation between parties supported by HR.
8. Sue Evans invited Members of the Committee to visit HR and see the department in action. The Chairman asked that the invitation be extended to all Elected Members. Sue Evans would email an invitation to all Elected Members.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1) Notes the information contained in the presentation;
- 2) Agrees to receive a report regarding department budgets and workforce information.
- 3) Requests that an email would be sent to all Elected Members inviting them to visit HR.

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.

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 26 February 2014**

A discussion ensued regarding the remaining items and future areas of Committee consideration which could potentially lead to more in depth scrutiny. The following areas were identified:

- 1) Human Resources (HR) and;
- 2) Small Holdings and;
- 3) Libraries and Community buildings and;
- 4) Law and Governance and;
- 5) Communications and marketing.

The Committee stressed the importance of considering BDUK at the next scheduled meeting in light of the recent announcement that additional funding would be available to increase the level of coverage of superfast broadband across Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire. A report regarding progress to date would be considered and BT would be invited to attend.

Members would undertake site visits to a number of small- holdings across the county to gather information and form a better understanding of how they operate.

A presentation would be provided regarding Traded Services to Schools.

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed:

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

9. Urgent Matters

There were no urgent matters raised for discussion.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that the date of the next meeting had been scheduled for 7th May 2014 at 2p.m.

An alternative date would be sought for the Committee meeting in July and would be confirmed to members of the Committee.

The Committee rose at 12.10 p.m.

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 26 February 2014**

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Chair