

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 4 September 2014**

Present

Members: Councillor John Appleton (Vice Chair)
Councillor Nicola Davies
Councillor Neil Dirveiks
Councillor Keith Lloyd
Councillor Phillip Morris-Jones
Councillor Keith Kondakor
Councillor Chris Saint
Councillor June Tandy (Chair)
Councillor Alan Webb

Other Councillors:

Councillor Alan Cockburn, Deputy Leader of
Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Kam Kaur, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for
Customers, Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Jeff Clarke, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for
Environment, Warwickshire County Council.

Officers: Sally Baxter, Democratic Services Officer
John Betts, Head of Finance
Kushal Birla, Head of Customer Service
David Carter, Strategic Director, Resources Group
Tricia Morrison, Acting Head of Service Improvement and
Change Management
Jenny Butlin-Moran, Safeguarding Social Care – Service
Manager
Karen Smith, Customer Relations Manager
Steve Smith, Head of Property
Geoff Taylor, Estate and Smallholdings Service Manager
Jenny Wood, Head of Social Care and Support.

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillors Peter Fowler and Izzi Seccombe.

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

None.

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**(3) Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Overview
and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 May 2014**

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 May 2014 be signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

Information regarding the disposal of WCC HEP's was forwarded to Councillor Phillip Morris-Jones as requested but he asked that information be presented to all Councillors before a decision was taken at the next Cabinet meeting scheduled for 18 September 2014. In light of the timescales, a suitable mode of information sharing would be looked into.

It was clarified that a briefing note was emailed to members of the committee regarding additional expenditure on Council office buildings. Further information would be requested from the Property Rationalisation Service.

Maps had recently been distributed in relation to BDUK to assist Councillors when informing individuals but Councillor John Appleton raised concern that the maps were illegible. Councillor Kam Kaur assured the committee that large scale maps would be provided on request.

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.

In response to a question regarding the future for libraries in Warwickshire, Councillor Kam Kaur confirmed that there were not any immediate plans that affected the service however this did not mean that the service would not be reviewed in the future.

The importance of member engagement early in the decision making process was emphasised with Councillor Kam Kaur assuring that full consultation would be sought in light of any future changes to services.

In response to a question, Councillor Alan Cockburn confirmed that the Coventry and Warwickshire LEP (CWLEP) had appointed a Managing Director of the Coventry and Warwickshire Growth Hub following a recruitment process and interview conducted by CWLEP. Councillor

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Izzi Seccombe had requested that the appointment be reviewed after 6 months and Warwickshire County Council (WCC) would be involved in the review process.

CWLEP had secured funding for the KNUCKLE Project however, there bid for funding cycle infrastructure was unsuccessful. It was disappointing and it was suggested that bids usually outweighed availability and could be contributed towards the unsuccessful bid.

Members were reminded that items to be considered at Cabinet would receive full consideration and information was available via reports going to Cabinet. PRP2 Storage Rationalisation would be considered at Cabinet on 18 September 2014.

Information was requested by the committee regarding the process undertaken when approving grant schemes. Following discussion it was agreed that information regarding the Rural Growth Network in terms of the eligibility criteria for applicants, would be circulated to the committee.

Information would be provided to interested Members with regard to the Jaguar Land Rover Fen End Testing Track.

4. Year End 2013/14 Organisational Health Report

The committee considered the information contained in the report for the Year End 2013/14 Organisational Health Report.

It was noted that the Organisational Health Report had been superseded by the One Organisational Plan (OOP) and as such, information would be reported in a different format.

A discussion ensued with regard to services underspend with the committee noting that this was considered at Cabinet in July. Further consideration had been undertaken at Corporate Board who identified a system to support managers budget monitoring and management. This would include more regularised scrutiny and monitoring to ensure that services were budgeting accordingly.

The committee raised concerns regarding the service areas that had underspent and suggested that further work be undertaken to ensure that the services were providing all necessary services within their areas. It was agreed that a cross committee chair and spokes meeting would be arranged by the committees' chairman, to take a fact finding approach with regard to service underspend. Councillor Alan Cockburn and John Betts would also be invited to attend.

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

- 1) A further £8 million had been awarded to complete the KNUCKLE Project. Information as to the expected date of completion for KNUCKLE would be circulated to Members.
- 2) It was noted that the three services overspent in 2013/14 provided the most vital services for some of the most vulnerable people in the community and agreed with the use of general reserves to rectify the position.
- 3) It was noted that a report would be considered at Cabinet with regard to corporate borrowing and municipal bonds, to attract a lower interest rate for borrowing in relation to the capital programme.
- 4) It was suggested that a wider scoring table be applied when scoring risk to ensure that greater differentia is reported.
- 5) Net red risks and their reporting was considered to be misleading. The current form and wording gave the impression that the service was unable to react when in reality, it was the services inability to take risks. The form and content on how risks would be reported in the future would be reconsidered.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1) Notes the Year End 2013/14 Organisational Health Report and;
- 2) The Chairman will arrange a meeting with all Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman, Vice Chairman and Spokes, to discuss service under spend.

5. County Farms and Smallholdings Strategy 2010 - 2025 Review

A historical overview of the strategy was provided including the Council decision taken in 2010 with regard to the management and future direction of the Estate.

The committee was asked to consider the existing strategy in light of the estate profiles and comment upon the strategy. Four strategic options were detailed in Appendix 4.

The Chairman thanked the Estates and Smallholdings Team for organising the site visits undertaken by members of the committee. It had provided a useful insight into how some of the smallholdings operated and the achievements and challenges of the team and tenants.

The committee discussed the importance of encouraging the rural economy by providing opportunities to younger generations and

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diversification of business opportunities. The current strategy was considered to work well with the committee seeing first hand, the opportunities available for tenants especially developing new enterprises in under developed rural communities.

Further opportunities were identified such as small scale renewables which allowed bio diversity but also other uses creating new opportunities for the rural economy.

Concerns were expressed with regard to capital sums and caution was advised as to not over engineer smallholdings and estates. It was suggested that capital receipts be utilised to regenerate smallholdings to make them more viable and attractive for younger generations of tenants.

The amalgamation of estates could also present problem for younger generations entering the agricultural horticulture and rural enterprises because a larger estate required experience and skills to manage.

Financial consideration of the estate and smallholdings would need to be considered in depth. Considerable investment had taken place and would be helpful to have an analysis of the returns.

Councillor Alan Cockburn noted the concerns raised with regard to amalgamation and assured the committee that the strategy is moving away from Life time tenancies towards fixed business tenancies to provide opportunities for younger generations.

Investment had been used to renovate some of the houses on the estates to bring them in line with housing standards. The rental income from smallholdings had increased by 30%.

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

- 1) The current strategy was working well to develop smallholdings and help rural communities' economy by providing new opportunities and sustainability.
- 2) The committee supported an approach which retained the status quo whilst exploring estate enhancement opportunities. However, it was acknowledged that opportunities would be limited in light of budget pressures.
- 3) An in depth financial analysis would be provided to the committee, when completed.

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Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee support a strategy for County Farms and Smallholdings which retains the status quo but incorporates estate enhancement , in terms of investment, to support the rural economy .

6. Social Care Complaints Handling: Improvement Plan

Kushal Birla, Head of Customer Service, introduced the report which was in response to Members' concerns raised at Cabinet about why the plan adopted by the Council to address the timeliness of responses to social care complaints, do not appear to have met the targets.

The committee was referred to the report which explained the measures taken to address the issue of timeliness and cross service working to manage risk. A number of measures are collectively being analysed and the committee were assured that the service was working towards meeting the targets.

It was noted that complainants had reported that they felt staff were not attentive however, it was encouraging to see the amount of work being undertaken with regard to customer service and experience. The committee understood the importance of keeping an ongoing dialogue with customers to manage expectations and to help staff manage difficult complaints. Jenny Wood, Head of Social Care and Support, agreed that this may have been the case for some complainants where they had not been informed of the steps being taken to address their concerns but public perception may also be a factor. The service receives a larger volume of compliments than complaints.

Following discussion it was acknowledged that this issue was relevant in a wider context across the authority therefore it was important that measures were taken to manage expectations of the public and enforce the importance of keeping service users informed of action being taken to address their concerns.

Consideration was given to the existing targets and benchmarking exercise that had been undertaken. Due to deteriorating performance, questions were raised as to the accuracy of the targets set and whether benchmarking with other authorities would add any value to the process and, whether the authority had the right staff and measures in place.

It was acknowledged that with the implementation of the Care Act 2014, timescales may require revision and it was difficult to benchmark in an area such as Adult Social Care but despite this, it was useful to

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see what other authorities were adopting to address issues and whether they were comparable with those faced by WCC.

It was suggested that the focus should be on improving services' performance year on year as opposed to looking at authorities and benchmarking. In response to a question from the committee, it was reported that other systems were used for the reporting of complaints involving safeguarding children therefore assurance was given that high risk and social care issues were addressed and a robust assessment process was in place.

Early resolution was encouraged and WCC operated a system whereby service users could report and resolve issues before they are recorded as complaints. This helped manage the complaint to reduce the possibility of concerns becoming complex however this strategy was not reflected in the report.

Karen Smith, Customer Relations Manager, explained the process of monitoring progress of resolving complaints within the set targets. She explained that due to the complex nature of some of the complaints, especially with children's services, targets were unachievable. Adult Social Care did not have set timescales. Instead, decisions were made on a case by case basis with the complainant. It was noted that this approach may change to mirror the corporate complaints timescales.

The measurement of timeliness was discussed and explained. The report included the 10 working days target and the 100 day's time point which led the committee to raise concerns about whether complaints were picked up and resolved within the two time points. If this did not happen, cases would remain unresolved longer than necessary.

Reducing targets would not help the organisation get to the root cause of complaints. Instead, a framework based on experience would help the authority manage expectations. A training programme had been designed to equip staff with the skills to deal effectively with customers' expectations and complaints.

Councillor Kam Kaur informed the committee that a lot of work had been undertaken with regard to the customer journey which was not reflected in the report customer satisfaction and ways to manage dissatisfaction, would be considered when introducing new policies and procedures. She suggested that customer complaints may increase in the future because of the introduction of the Care Act 2014 and the impact of the Children's Act 1996 regulations.

Following discussion and questions from the committee, the following points were noted:

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- 1) Better dialogue between the services and service users was required to build a constructive relationship.
- 2) It was encouraging that where a complaint was upheld, lessons were learned by using a customer champions' network and reporting quarterly to the leadership team.
- 3) It was important to try and improve year on year and have a grading system that captured the different complexities of a complaint.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the improvement actions taken in the last financial year and plans underway to improve performance in this financial year.

7. Work Programme

The committee considered the work programme. Members were invited to identify potential topics which could be fed into chair and spokes meetings. Other topics would be identified at the chair and spokes meeting to be held on the rising of the committee meeting.

Ideas identified at the Overview and Scrutiny Event held on 30 July 2014 would be considered and brought to a future meeting if the committee.

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed:

- 1) The proposed Work Programme 2014/15 and;
- 2) The proposed Action Plan and;
- 3) Topics identified at the Overview and Scrutiny Event would be considered by the Chair and spokes and reported at a future meeting of the committee.

8. Urgent Matters

There were no urgent matters raised for discussion.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that the date of the next meeting had been scheduled for 25 November 2014 at 10 a.m in CR2, Shire Hall.

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Chair