

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 15 July 2015**

Present

Members: Councillor John Appleton
Councillor Nicola Davies
Councillor Neil Dirveiks
Councillor Peter Fowler
Councillor John Holland
Councillor Keith Kondakor
Councillor Phillip Morris-Jones
Councillor Chris Saint
Councillor Matt Western (Chair)

Other Councillors: John Beaumont, Alan Cockburn, Jenny St John, June Tandy and John Whitehouse.

Officers: Elizabeth Abbott, Business Partner – Planning, Performance and Improvement (Acting)
Sally Baxter, Democratic Services Officer
David Carter, Strategic Director, Resources Group
Holly Hiorns, County Land Agent
Tricia Morrison, Acting Head of Service, Service Improvement & Change Management
Steve Smith, Head of Physical Assets
Geoff Taylor, Estates and Smallholdings Service Manager
Paul Williams, Democratic Services Team Leader.

1. General

(1) Apologies

None

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

- i) Councillor John Whitehouse declared a non-pecuniary interest in so far he was the Chairman of the trustees of Kenilworth Centre.
- ii) Councillor John Beaumont declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5 in so far he was involved in the Bulkington Community Centre, Bulkington Library and Whitestone Community Centre.

(3) Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 February 2015 and the minutes of Annual Council held on 19 May 2015

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2015 and the minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 19 May 2015, be signed as a correct record.

It was noted that information regarding NUCKLE was still outstanding. This would be followed up by officers. **Sally Baxter to action.**

2. Public Question Time

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

3. Questions to Cabinet and Portfolio Holders

In response to a question, Councillor Alan Cockburn clarified that a public consultation had commenced with regard to Eastboro Way and the response to the consultation would dictate when it would be considered by Cabinet however, it was anticipated for Autumn 2015.

Further information was requested regarding the disposal of land at Orton Road; it formed part of the Smallholdings portfolio being considered by the committee. Information would be provided in due course.

4. 2014/15 One Organisational Plan – End of Year report

Elizabeth Abbott, Business Partner, introduced the One Organisational Plan End of Year report. She highlighted areas where performance targets had not been met and the overall position of the One Organisation Plan at the close of the first year of the 4 year plan in so far 4 of the 5 targets had been met and the savings planned for 2014/15 had been delivered. Progress had been made on taking forward the savings planned for future years. She explained the documents appended to the report which included the report considered by Cabinet on 11 June 2015, dashboard information and detailed business unit background information relevant to the remit of the Committee.

Some discussion ensued about the availability of information for committee members in which it was highlighted that the information is in the public domain upon the publication of the agenda and papers when considered by Cabinet. The committee suggested that a

presentation accompany the report at future meetings. The addition of the Head of Service commentary of variances outside of tolerances (Appendix B) was agreed to be a useful addition and the committee would welcome the presentation of more reports in a similar format.

Tricia Morrison, Acting Head of Service, Service Improvement and Change Management, raised awareness of the Member Dashboard which was available for members to use to look at performance measures and monitor progress. Officers would be available in the Ante Chamber before the meeting of Council on Tuesday 21st July 2015, to answer any questions and provide assistance.

The following responses were provided to member's questions and requests for further information:

- Data was collected from across Warwickshire to inform performance indicators and assess how well the authority is doing as a whole and recognises regional variance. The Member Dashboard would further assist members by giving them the tool to access information at a micro level so that they can drill down into performance data.
- High levels of sickness absence were reported with stress related illness being the reason. The Chair suggested that a comparison over a period of 3 years presented in a bar graph would be helpful so as to enable the identification of trends.
Tricia Morrison to provide for next committee meeting.
- Information was requested about the 5 districts/ borough council's arrangements to pool business rates. **To be provided to the committee.**
- The Cabinet received quarterly reports on 'uncontrollable elements' of the budget and this information would also be provided to the Corporate Services overview and Scrutiny Committee. **Information to be provided to the committee.**
- Funding had been secured to create a systems replacement reserve to help replace IT systems over the next 2 years. The committees' concerns regarding compatibility of systems had been recognised and thorough investigation of existing and potential systems, were taking place to ensure compatibility.
- In response to the reported slippage of projects, it was acknowledged it needed to be better managed and to achieve this, building projects would be managed in phases. The majority of projects were funded by the Capital Programme however, some utilised revenue and therefore could not be commence ahead of schedule to mitigate against slippage.
- Transport and Highways had reported an underspend (8.4%). Members discussed the service provision and the issue with delaying projects, especially those funded by Councillor delegated budgets. It had been suggested that inaction was attributed to the lack of staff because vacancies could not be

filled because the private sector offered more attractive opportunities. The Chair agreed to meet with the Chair of Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss further. **Councillor Matt Western to meet with Councillor Philip Johnson and report back to committee.**

The committee noted the importance of monitoring performance and being aware of potential factors, in particular, changes to Social Care provision following the Social Care Act 2014 and the effect on council resources.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report and appendices in the One Organisational Plan Year End progress report.

5. Property Disposal Protocols and Concessions according to Social Value

Steve Smith, Head of Physical Assets, introduced the report and appendices (1 – 4) which contained: the staged process for disposal, the concept of undervalue/concessions, a criteria to assess and a list of properties that has community interest or declared as surplus now or in the future and /or possible community transfer or undervalue.

He reported that following committee consideration on 25th November 2014, the protocol had been amended to take into consideration comments made by the committee. Councillor Alan Cockburn acknowledged that the community value aspect of the report stemmed from the interest in peppercorn rents. He assured the committee that there was no will to remove peppercorn rents; their importance for community value was understood.

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

- 1) The protocols identified that member engagement would be sought at an earlier stage to address inconsistencies with members awareness of disposals. Community interest would also be discussed at an earlier stage.
- 2) Property identified as being of community value is advertised and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) are able to bid for any on the market. The list distributed with the report refers to property already identified as being of community benefit therefore does not limit opportunities or properties. The Golden Rule dictates that there is a balance between achieving the market value and the social value of the property and Steve Smith was confident that the test used satisfied this requirement. Other models were operated by neighbouring authorities such as Birmingham City Council their

model was based on freehold property and Warwickshire's model was based on leasehold. It was important to consider models already being used by other authorities and as such, Councillor Jenny St John was invited to explore the different models with Steve Smith, Head of Physical Assets. **Steve Smith to look at other models.**

- 3) The protocol was encouraging and a consistent approach would help the VCS plan for the medium term, not the short term, which could raise uncertainty for some organisations. It was highlighted that the VCS organisations could be consulted to gauge opinion and an appeals process might need to be factored into the protocol in the event an agreement cannot be made at the bidding stage.
- 4) Following consideration by the committee, VCS would be informed of the process following approval at Cabinet; any recommendations made by the committee would be considered.
- 5) Community groups would be informed of rent payable after any concessionary period before any lease commenced. This was to provide greater stability to the VCS and help them plan for the future.
- 6) The importance of being flexible on how VCS delivered services was important and the authority should give consideration to allowing several services operate out of the same building. This would help services share the cost.
- 7) A clear way of communicating with the VCS would be welcomed including a flow diagram of the process to ensure that the process was transparent and easy to understand.

Cabinet was scheduled to consider the report in September 2015 with implementation over Autumn 2015.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report, the proposed protocols and criteria to assess rent concessions.

6. County Farms and Smallholdings Strategy 2015 - 2025

Steve Smith, Head of Physical Assets, provided a reminder of what the committee recommended when they considered the strategy in November 2013 in that they agreed to keep the portfolio and continue with the strategy however, they requested further information about the financial performance which was attached to the report at Appendix B.

Further information regarding performance was attached to the report; Appendix A contained the draft revised Strategy and Appendix C provided a summary of capital receipts generated from the disposal of smallholdings land and future forecasts. It was reported that the levels

of rental income was rising and the amount of outstanding debt was reducing.

Councillor Alan Cockburn reported that performance of the smallholdings had been successful in so far it supported the rural economy and provided a start for young people coming into the farming industry. Furthermore, houses on smallholdings had been brought up to the 'Decent Homes' standard which would result in less investment in future years in terms of maintenance, and provide a good level of accommodation for tenants.

In summary, the smallholdings and County Farms Estate was performing well with substantial capital receipts expected from Smallholdings within the next 12 months. Estate maintenance would still be required.

The committee acknowledged good performance and capital receipts and with this in mind suggested that the expansion of smallholdings might be a consideration for a long term strategy. It was clarified that the use of proceeds from capital receipts would be for the council to decide on an annual basis and that it was intended that an area of 5,000 hectares would be retained.

The committee urged a more collaborative approach to working with districts and boroughs to ensure that Local Plan's did not conflict with the approach taken by the council. It was important to maintain geographical diversity and it was expected that the strategy supported this.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report and supports the draft revised Smallholdings Strategy.

7. Work Programme 2015/16

The Work Programme Event held on 24 June 2015 gave committee members in attendance the opportunity to speak with Heads of Service and Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Customers, to ascertain potential areas within the committees remit, to be added to the work programme. Advice was provided on ongoing areas within services and projects that would benefit from member input.

The importance of timely consideration of projects was highlighted and with this in mind, the Chair and Spokes met to devise a draft work programme for 2015/16 including outcomes from the Work Programme Event. The committee was asked to look at the attached draft work programme for 2015/16, approve and make any additional comments or changes as required.

The committee provided support for the proposed work programme and in particular welcomed the inclusion of looking at how the One Organisational Plan (OOP) was reported and that it should be prioritised on the work programme. More information and work on Capital Slippage was of interest as was looking at HR and Health and Safety, and Project management and major projects. Councillor Whitehouse added context to this area informing the committee that a review into the Rugby Western Relief Road project was held in 2012 and resulted in policy formulation. The committee, if inclined, could use this as a starting point.

The Chair and Spokes would schedule the timing of reports for committee consideration and report back to the committee meeting scheduled for 17 September 2015.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree the additions to its work programme, as contained in Appendix B, to the Work Programme 2015/16 report.

8. Urgent Matters

There were no urgent matters raised for discussion.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee was confirmed as 17 September 2015 at 2p.m. in CR2, Shire Hall.

Closed 5.15 p.m.

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Chair