

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 20th December 2011

Present:

Members: Councillor John Appleton (Chair)
“ Sarah Boad (replacing Jerry Roodhouse for this meeting)
“ Jeff Clarke (Vice Chair)
“ Les Caborn
“ Peter Fowler
“ Tim Naylor
“ John Ross
“ Dave Shilton
“ June Tandy
“ John Whitehouse
“ Chris Williams

Co-opted members: Councillor Bill Gifford (Warwick District Council)
Councillor John Haynes (Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council)
Councillor Sue Main (Stratford-on-Avon District Council)

Other Councillors: Alan Farnell, Leader
Martin Heatley, Portfolio Holder Improvement and Workforce
Heather Timms, Portfolio Holder Child Safeguarding, Early Intervention and Schools
David Wright, Portfolio Holder Finance, Governance and IT

Officers: Georgina Atkinson, Democratic Services Team Leader
Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change Management
Nick Gower-Johnson, County Localities and Communities Manager
Bob Perks, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Janet Purcell, Democratic Services Manager
Steve Smith, Head of Property

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Bernard Kirton, Jerry Roodhouse (replaced by Councillor Sarah Boad for this meeting), Derek Pickard (North Warwickshire

Borough Council) and Cabinet Members Colin Hayfield and Martin Heatley.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Councillor Sarah Boad declared a personal interest with regard to Item 8, 'Big Society Fund Applications', the nature of the interest being that she was a member of the Management Committee of the 'Can Do' group which had submitted an application.

(3) Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 14th September 2011

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 14th September 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

Page 3 – 1 (3). Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 20th July 2011

Councillor John Ross pointed out that the Chairman had confirmed at the meeting of the Board on 20th July 2011 that Councillors Farnell, Hayfield, Heatley and Wright would attend all meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. It was acknowledged that Councillor Heatley had tendered his apologies for medical reasons; however, the absence of Councillors Hayfield and Wright would be noted. Councillor Alan Farnell advised that the Portfolio Holders would endeavour to attend meetings of the Board.

2. Public Question Time

None.

3. Questions to the Portfolio Holder/Portfolio Holders Update

Councillor Alan Farnell

1. Councillor Tim Naylor requested a summary of the Council's current financial position with regard to the 2011/12 budget. Councillor Alan Farnell advised that at its meeting on 17th November 2011, the Cabinet had considered the Mid-Year Financial Report which confirmed that the projected £8.750 million revenue underspend was currently on target and that the projected savings of £21.9 million would be delivered with an

over-achievement of £600,000. With regard to the capital budget, there would be slippage of approximately £9 million due to delays with a number of contracts. The Quarter 3 Financial Monitoring Report would be considered at the 26th January 2012 meeting of the Cabinet and, at present, there were no immediate concerns. Councillor Alan Farnell added that future considerations in respect of the budget included the localisation of Council Tax Benefit from April 2013 and the 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review.

2. Councillor Tim Naylor expressed his concern with the recent recommendation by the Head of Finance that the level of the Council's reserves be increased to £13.1 million. He asked for clarification on the potential risks to the Council of implementing the increase. Councillor Alan Farnell confirmed that there was no particular risk associated with the increase. He added that the most significant risk to the Council was the continued squeeze on local government funding and that, in light of this, the Council needed a seven-year savings plan to mitigate that risk.
3. With regard to the Council Tax Relief Grant, Councillor Tim Naylor queried whether the Council's acceptance of the grant, as a one-off for 2012/13, would conflict with the principles of the Medium Term Financial Plan. In response, Councillor Alan Farnell advised that it would be a difficult decision to take he welcomed suggestions for alternative options.

The Chair thanked the Leader for his responses and requested that the Quarter 3 Financial Monitoring Report be presented at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting, scheduled for 25th January 2012.

4. Performance Management

Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change Management, invited the Board to submit views regarding the delivery of effective performance management and methods to improve the role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the monitoring of performance indicators. Furthermore, clarification was required on the setting of performance targets and whether it was appropriate for scrutiny members to be involved in that process.

He reported that similar discussions with each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees had indicated the need for improvements to the way that performance information was presented to members. Furthermore, it was considered that performance data needed to enable scrutiny members to undertake their roles more effectively. Issues raised by the Committees had included the frequency of

performance reports, the presentation style of information, the context of data and the level of information provided.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

1. That there should be a clear distinction between the role of the Cabinet and the role of OSCs with regard to performance management. Members considered that it was the role of the Cabinet to set key performance targets and the role of the OSCs to monitor the achievement of those targets.
2. Scrutiny members had a role in suggesting what key performance areas should be monitored by the OSCs. Each OSC should focus on key service areas in order to closely monitor performance and identify issues. There should also be a clear link between performance targets and the Council's Strategic Aims and Ambitions.
3. Reporting on an exception-only basis was more useful than full reporting, with only issues of under performance being presented to the OSCs.
4. Members considered the Performance Hub difficult to use and extract the relevant detail required to understand performance data; therefore, information needed to be presented in an open and user-friendly way, so that it could be understood easily by all users.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to:

1. Note the verbal report and the points raised with regard to Performance Management;
2. Seek advice from the Centre for Public Scrutiny in respect of how to achieve effective performance monitoring; and
3. Receive a report at a future meeting of the Board which would outline feedback from the OSCs and key proposals for improvements to performance management for scrutiny members.

5. WCC's Transformation Programme – Achieving Our Ambitions

Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change Management, reported that the Transformation Programme had been endorsed by Cabinet at its meeting on 17th November 2011 and had subsequently received Council approval on 13th December 2011.

The Board expressed concern that the Transformation Programme had already been approved prior to being considered by the Board, thereby removing the opportunity for scrutiny members to comment on the

proposals. The Board was advised that the report had been scheduled for its 30th November 2011 meeting; however, due to the industrial strike action on that date, the meeting had been cancelled. Councillor June Tandy repeated the concern that she had raised at Council on 13th December 2011 that the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board should have been rescheduled to ensure that the proposals on the Transformation Programme could have been considered by the Board prior to receiving Council approval.

In response to a query raised, Phil Evans advised that a stringent timetable for conducting each of the four tranches of the review had not been established. He explained that it was difficult to determine the length of time required to conduct each of the reviews. However, it was anticipated that the first two service reviews would take 16 weeks to complete. Prior to each service review, a thorough scoping exercise would be undertaken to identify which stakeholders (e.g. partners, services users) could need to be consulted.

Phil Evans acknowledged the view of the Board that it was important for all elected members to be involved in the process. It was anticipated that the Portfolio Holders would act as a conduit in the process and would attend OSC meetings in order to provide progress updates and respond to questions raised by scrutiny members. He explained that due to the speed of the review process and the timescales involved with the cycle of OSC meetings, it would be difficult to guarantee that the right information would be presented to the OSCs at the right time. In light of this, he suggested that a more informal approach to scrutiny member involvement aside from the OSC meetings might be more appropriate. He considered that there was scope for scrutiny members to be involved within the parameters of the process which had been formally approved by Council and a further discussion to explore options would be undertaken at the Leaders Liaison Group.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

1. Members were concerned that the involvement of scrutiny members was not a formalised part of the review process and considered that review proposals should be presented to the Board and OSCs prior to the Gateway 3 stage.
2. With regard to the feasibility of reviewing particular services which could not be commissioned externally, Phil Evans explained that those services would undertake a 'light-touch' review focusing on the delivery of key outcomes and the alignment of the service to the Council's key priorities.
3. One Member was concerned that the transfer of staff from existing services to the Corporate Programme Management Office would leave those services further stretched, at a time when there was

already increased pressure on staffing resources. Phil Evans acknowledged the members' concern and explained that it was essential that the Council had a dedicated team to conduct the Transformation Programme.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to:

1. Note the report and the comments raised in respect of the Transformation Programme;
2. Express its disappointment that the Board was unable to comment on the proposals prior to approval at Council and that formalised scrutiny involvement had been omitted from the process;
3. Request that review proposals be presented to the Board and OSCs prior to the Gateway 3 stage; and
4. Request that regular reports on the overall progress of the Transformation Programme be presented to every meeting of the Board and that the OSCs receive progress reports on specific services reviews relevant to their Terms of Reference. OSCs would be encouraged to request regular reports on service reviews and question the Portfolio Holders on progress.

6. Staffing reductions – reducing workforce numbers, maintaining capacity, training and development and staff morale

Bob Perks, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, presented an update report on the schedule of staffing reductions and its impact on the workforce.

During the ensuing discussion the following was noted:

1. In response to a query raised, Bob Perks advised that a number of employees had accepted early retirement or voluntary redundancy offers for 2012/13 and 2013/14 which would mitigate the number of compulsory redundancies; however, compulsory redundancies would be inevitable in light of the level of staffing reductions required.
2. Further offers of early retirement would need to be considered by the Head of Finance to consider feasibility and the consequent strain the pension fund.
3. The majority of redundancies in 2011 had been to part-time, low paid, localised posts. In many cases, the redeployment offers had not achieved the specific employment requirements of those staff which had resulted in a relatively low number of redeployments. The majority of successful redeployment employees were those in

office-based administrative roles who were able to work in other areas of the county.

4. Workplace stress remained a significant concern and it was acknowledged that the sickness absence figures did not provide an accurate indicator of actual stress levels among staff. Stress awareness material and a confidential support service were offered to employees to help address the issue.
5. The number of proposed redundancies had decreased from 1,855 to 1,549 due to the refinement of the initial savings proposals, such as changes to the Youth Service and the decision to dispose of residential care homes rather than implement closure.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board endorsed the report.

7. Progress on Property Review

Steve Smith, Head of Property, provided the Board with an update on the Property Rationalisation Programme, together with an overview of the expected capital receipts.

During the ensuing discussion the following was noted:

1. The aim of the programme was to consolidate existing offices and customer contact centres into fewer buildings. A number of Local Centres would be established as a main contact point for the Council in a local area. For the Nuneaton area, this would need to be a sizeable building, given the numbers of staff dispersed across the area. Four options were currently being considered. For the Bedworth area, Kings House would be retained with a further analysis of the Bridgeway Centre.
2. Proposals for the Local Centres would be submitted in early 2012 and the Board was advised that all elected members would be regularly informed of proposed changes.
3. The capital receipts document had altered slightly and an updated version would be circulated to the Board.
4. The Property service had been required to absorb some costs in cases where departments had been unable to allocate a budget for their relocation.
5. At its meeting on 15th December 2011, the Cabinet had considered a report on the future options for Old Shire Hall and the Courts and had agreed to lease out the building to a third party to operate as an events venue. A Development Brief would be published in due course to invite market responses to leasing the building.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to:

1. Note the progress report and comments raised with regard to the Property Rationalisation Programme; and
2. Receive a further update report on the Property Rationalisation Programme in six months.

8. Big Society Fund Applications

Nick Gower-Johnson, Localities and Partnership Manager, provided the Board with an overview of the review process and allocation of the Big Society Fund 2011/12. The Board was asked to consider feasible options for scrutinising the impact of the Fund in 2012/13.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

1. The continuity of community-based services would need to be carefully monitored to mitigate any issues regarding service delivery and to support volunteers in their roles. Nick Gower-Johnson confirmed that Area Office staff would be assigned to assist groups.
2. Support should be provided to all groups, including those who did not score sufficient points to be awarded a grant in order to provide advice on reapplying in future. Nick Gower-Johnson confirmed that the application process had been intentionally straightforward and that support and advice had been available to all interested groups.
3. The Board should scrutinise the impact of the Fund, the performance of the community group and the effectiveness of the service.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to:

1. Note the progress report and comments raised with regard to the Big Society Fund 2011/12; and
2. Receive the first monitoring report in 12 months, which would include information on the impact of the Fund, the performance of the community group and the effectiveness of the service.

9. Work Programme and Scrutiny Review Progress Report

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to:

1. Endorse the Work Programme;

2. Canvass support from scrutiny members regarding a proposed Task and Finish Group to consider potential savings and benefits arising from a move to the Committee-system model of governance;
3. Councillors Les Caborn and Bob Stevens to report back on the issue of patient access at the University Hospital following their meeting with the Chief Executive of the Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust;
4. Receive a report on the Local Broadband Plan at its meeting scheduled for 25th January 2011;
5. Add the Transformation Programme to the Work Programme and suggest that the OSCs incorporate progress updates on services reviews into their respective Work Programmes;
6. Note a potential Task and Finish Group by the Communities OSC in March 2012, in respect of the Council's forthcoming streetlighting review; and
7. Request a progress report regarding Cabinet's implementation of recommendations arising from the Public Service Reform Task and Finish Group.

10. Any Other Items

None.

11. Dates of Future Meetings

Agreed.

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Chair

The Board rose at 4:55 p.m.