

**Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 25th
January 2012**

Present:

Members: Councillor John Appleton (Chair)
“ Jeff Clarke (Vice Chair)
“ Les Caborn
“ Peter Fowler
“ Tim Naylor
“ Jerry Roodhouse
“ John Ross
“ June Tandy
“ John Whitehouse
“ Chris Williams

Co-opted members: Councillor Bill Gifford (Warwick District Council)
Councillor John Haynes (Nuneaton and Bedworth
Borough Council)
Councillor Pickard (North Warwickshire Borough
Council)

Other Councillors: Councillor Alan Farnell, Leader
Councillor Colin Hayfield, Portfolio Holder, Customers,
Workforce and Partnership
Councillor Martin Heatley, Portfolio Holder Improvement
and Workforce
Councillor David Wright, Portfolio Holder Finance,
Governance and IT

Officers: Elizabeth Abbott, Performance and Improvement Officer
Georgina Atkinson, Democratic Services Team Leader
Tonino Ciuffini, Head of Information Assets
John Betts, Head of Finance
David Carter, Strategic Director, Resources Group
Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change
Management
Jim Graham, Chief Executive
John Parmiter, Schools ICT and Network Manager
Janet Purcell, Democratic Services Manager

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Dave Shilton and Sue Main (Stratford-on-Avon District Council) and Janet Smith (NHS Warwickshire).

(2) Members' Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

(3) Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 20th December 2011

The Board agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 20th December 2011 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Page 7, Item 7 – Progress on Property Review

In response to a question raised, the Board was advised that the Development Brief for Old Shire Hall and the Courts was scheduled for publication in February 2012.

Page 9, Item 9 – Work Programme and Scrutiny Review Progress Report

Councillor Caborn advised that a meeting to discuss patient access issues at the University Hospital had been arranged with the Chief Executive of the Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust for 1st March 2012.

2. Public Question Time

None.

3. Questions to the Portfolio Holder/Portfolio Holders Update

Councillor David Wright

1. Councillor Whitehouse queried the performance of the Council's invoicing system and whether payments were cleared on time. He was concerned that a particular instance of a delayed payment had had a negative impact on Kenilworth Youth Centre. In response, Councillor Wright confirmed that overall he was very satisfied with the speed and performance of the service; however, he acknowledged that due to the scale of transactions undertaken by

the Council, there would be occasional issues.. John Betts, Head of Finance, added that due to the implementation of a new financial system, there had been a number of issues with payments to utility companies in November and December. He agreed that overall, the Council had a very good record with payments.

2. Councillor Naylor requested further information with regard to the Council's internal employee network 'Yammer'. It was agreed that Tonino Ciuffini, Head of Information Assets, provide a briefing note for the Board which would include an overview of the network, the usage by employees, the benefits of the network and user monitoring.
3. A general enquiry was raised with regard to car parking provision for Members for the next meeting of Council. David Carter, Strategic Director of Resources, undertook to ensure adequate arrangements were made for the Council meeting on 7th February 2012.

4. Strategic Commissioning

Phil Evans, Head of Service Improvement and Change Management, circulated a proposal to the Board with regard to the engagement of scrutiny members in the Transformation Programme, which included:

1. A standing item on each Overview and Scrutiny Board agenda to provide an overall progress update on the Programme;
2. An opportunity for scrutiny members (Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat spokespersons) to meet with the Programme Office at the scoping stage of each service review to capture members' views. The outcome of those discussions would be shared with the appropriate Strategic Director and Supporting Strategic Director as the scoping exercise was completed. Phil Evans confirmed that the overall timetable for each review would be available at the scoping stage.
3. At the discretion of the Chair, and on a case-by-case basis, the Full Business Case following the completion of the review would be presented to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, prior to consideration by Cabinet. It was anticipated that this would, on occasion, require a special meeting of the Committee to convene to consider the Final Business Case to avoid delay in the process. Recommendations or comments raised by the Committee would be subsequently referred to Cabinet for consideration.

With regard to the implementation of recommendations arising from the Public Service Reform Task and Finish Group, Phil Evans advised that

these would be addressed through the Transformation Programme and would be considered during the first commissioning review.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to:

1. Note the verbal report;
2. Implement the process for scrutiny member engagement in the Transformation Programme;
3. Add a standing item to each Overview and Scrutiny Board agenda to consider an overall progress update on the Programme;
4. Inform the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees of the agreed member engagement process; and
5. Request that members be provided with an access link to the web pages which provided information in relation to the Transformation Programme.

5. Treasury Management Monitoring Report

John Betts, Head of Finance, provided the Board with an overview of the Treasury Management Monitoring Report. He advised that the Council had adopted a low risk, high quality investment approach.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

1. At 31st December 2011, the Council had £129.9 million invested in in-house fixed term deposits, £46.1 million with Aviva and a further £10 million in an instant access account with the British subsidiary of Santander Bank. The investment with Santander Bank had been agreed for a 12-month period at an interest rate of 1.25 per cent.
2. The use of consultants to provide predictions on interest rates was considered to be significantly advantageous to the Council as it provided external financial expertise.
3. Due to the level of money which was invested in an in-house deposit scheme (£129 million) the overall investment of £186 million was considered to be relatively low risk. Although both Santander Bank and Aviva Investors had 'AAA' ratings, it was acknowledged that any increased investment in external banking institutions would increase the overall risk. In light of this, John Betts advised that the Council was receiving the greatest investment returns for the level of risk it was willing to take.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to note the report.

6. Quarter 3 Integrated Finance and Performance Report (April – December 2011)

John Betts provided an overview of the Quarter 3 Finance Report for the period April to December 2011. He advised that at the end of Quarter 3, the projected revenue outturn position for the Council was an underspend of £5.108 million.

With regard to the Quarter 3 Performance Report, Phil Evans reported that the Council was broadly on track to deliver the Aims and Ambitions as outlined in the Corporate Business Plan. He added that 73 per cent of performance measures relating to the Corporate Business Plan had been forecast to meet the end of year performance targets.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were noted:

1. Performance charts should be clear and easy to understand when printed in black and white text.
2. A query was raised regarding the underspend in Early Intervention and Family Support (£1.833 million) and Transport and Highways (£2.937). A member was concerned that an 'underspend' was not the same as a 'saving' and requested clarification on whether the underspend had been as a result of significant service cuts which could potentially create long-term problems. Councillor Farnell explained that the service underspend was largely related to the early achievement of the overall savings that were required by Year 3 of the Medium Term Financial Plan. It was considered important that the Medium Term Financial Plan be considered alongside Revenue Budget reports.
3. The language in the reports should be consistent throughout and easy to understand.
4. The integration of the Communications service was at an advanced stage and it was anticipated that the agreed posts would be transferred by April 2012.
5. The Complaints Review had identified that the requisite £50,000 saving could be achieved if the service was able to sell complaints advice to external bodies; however, without this staff redundancies would be required.
6. The £10.412 million overspend in the Dedicated Schools Grant was as a result of schools accessing their individual reserves which were held by the Council. John Betts advised that this had no impact on the Council and would only affect the future budgets of individual schools.

7. The Council was committed to only borrowing at a level in line with the amount of debt it was repaying. Future expenditure of capital funds would be carefully considered to ensure that optimum value for money was achieved.
8. The Stoneleigh Park link road was unlikely to go ahead, which would create a reduction of £11.8 reduction in the Capital Budget; however, as this would have been a developer funded scheme the money was not a loss to the Council. John Betts explained that any capital projects over a certain level were added to the Capital Budget, regardless of the source of funding.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to:

1. Note the report and forward the comments raised to Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 26th January 2012;
2. Request clarification on how the decrease in anti-social behaviour had been predicted; and
3. Request that a briefing note on the Complaints Review be circulated to the Board.

7. Local Broadband Plan

Tonino Ciuffini, Head of Information Assets, provided the Board with an overview of the Local Broadband Plan which would be delivered in partnership with Coventry City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. It was reported that a capital bid for £3.5 million was to be submitted to Council on 7th February 2012 to deliver the Plan, which would achieve significant improvements to the county's broadband infrastructure.

The Government had granted the partnership £4.07 million subject to matched capital funding being secured at a local level. Of this amount, it was anticipated that Warwickshire County Council would allocate £2.9 million and a further £1 million would be provided by the Warwickshire District Councils to address specific broadband issues in local areas. The Board was advised that the capital funding was yet to be approved by each local authority.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

1. Consultation with residents had been undertaken via the Community Forums, online surveys and discussions with community representatives. A number of Members stated that they had been unaware of the consultation and had not recalled the topic being raised at the Community Forums.

2. It was anticipated that the total £8.14 million project would attract up to an additional £12 million in private sector funding. It was considered that without this funding, private sector improvements to broadband infrastructure would focus predominantly on heavily populated areas which would create a greater digital divide between town and rural areas. Without Government aid and private sector investment, the Council would not be in a position to implement the Plan.
3. The Government had been specific that the project should be match funded by public sector funding and therefore, the Local Enterprise Partnership would not be allocating funding to the scheme. Private sector investment would be achieved through the implementation of the improved broadband structure.
4. Warwickshire villages that were on the border of the county and did not have a Warwickshire telephone connection would fall within the Broadband Plan of the neighbouring authority.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to:

1. Note the report and comments raised with regard to the Local Broadband Plan; and
2. Request a copy of the map which identified the areas of the county which currently had poor broadband provision.

8. Work Programme and Scrutiny Review Progress Report

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to:

1. Endorse the Work Programme;
2. Establish a Task and Finish Group to review the recent Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services and the Improvement Action Plan. The Group would report directly back to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
3. Establish a Task and Finish Group to review the Street Lighting Energy Saving Plan; and
4. Establish a Task and Finish Group to consider alternative governance arrangements. To avoid delay, an electronic copy of the Scrutiny Review Outline would be circulated to the Board for approval.

10. Any Other Items

None.

11. Dates of Future Meetings

Agreed.

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Chair

The Board rose at 3.33 p.m.