Minutes of the meeting of the
Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 21 January 2016

Present:

Members of the Committee
Councillors John Appleton, , Peter Fowler, John Holland, , Keith Kondakor,
Phillip Morris-Jones, Chris Saint, Matt Western (Chair)

Other County Councillors
Alan Cockburn, Deputy Leader
Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder, Customers
John Whitehouse
Wallace Redford
Howard Roberts

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Democratic Services Officer
David Carter, Strategic Director, Resources Group
Tonino Ciuffini, Head of Information Assets
Andy Dunn, HR Business Partner (Communities)
Sue Evans, Head of HR and Organisational Development
Stephanie Gardner, Corporate Projects Delivery Manager
Allison Lehky, Workforce Strategy and Organisational Development Manager
Andrew Lovegrove, Head of Corporate Financial Services
Ian Litton, Strategy Programme & Information Manager
Rob Moyney, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Gill Page, Project Officer, Customer Service
Jane Pollard, Legal Services Manager
Harpreet Rai, PA to the Chief Executive
Ruth Wilkinson, Corporate Health, Safety & Wellbeing Manager
Paul Williams, Democratic Services Team Leader.

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillors Nicola Davies, Neil Dirveiks, Bernard Kirton, Izzi Seccombe

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

Regarding item 3, Councillor John Whitehouse declared a non-pecuniary interest as Chair of the Kenilworth Centre.

Regarding item 5, Councillor Peter Fowler declared a non-pecuniary interest as Vice Chair of two North Warwickshire Citizens' Advice Bureaux.

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2015

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2015 be signed as a correct record.

The following points were made under matters arising.

- Councillor John Appleton requested an update on progress with the Warwickshire MASH project. It was agreed that a report should be presented to the committee's 17 March meeting although any matters pertaining to the IT architecture for the MASH project could be picked up under item 8 of the 21 January agenda.
- Updates were provided on briefing notes requested previously. It was noted that a note on "slippage" remained outstanding.
- It was requested that consideration be given to the presentation of a report on peppercorn rents and the impact of the reduction of their provision being presented to the March 17 meeting.
- The committee was reminded that it had previously agreed that reporting on performance against the One Organisation Plan targets should be based on exceptions. There had been some confusion over this at the December meeting.

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 from Councillor John Whitehouse the committee was informed that the Cabinet report on property disposal protocols had been deferred to February or March 2016 as more time was required to refine its content. Councillor Alan Cockburn (Deputy Leader) emphasised the need to ensure that any protocol addressed the issue of social value and that any organisation benefiting from a peppercorn rent could demonstrate that its activity was of value to the community.

Councillor Keith Kondakor requested that when bidding for European funding to support the development of broadband a balance be struck between rural areas and urban areas. He added that whilst there is rightly a drive to provide a fast broadband service for rural areas, there remain a number of urban areas that are poorly served by broadband.

4. Work Programme 2015/16

Councillor Matt Western (Chair) explained that given the short period that had elapsed since the previous meeting of the committee it had been decided not to request a further report on performance against the One Organisation Plan for this one. The committee requested an update report in March.

From the published work programme the Chair drew attention to the three matters scheduled for consideration on 17 March. These were,

- Project management and major projects
- The One Organisation Plan update
- Emerging Local Plans and their implications for Councils.

There followed a brief discussion on developer funding. On the advice of the Chair it was agreed to defer the debate pending the report in March.

Councillor Matt Western reminded members that they had received a briefing note on the "City Deal" and the Local Enterprise Partnership. Whilst he welcomed the

headline messages contained in the note he suggested that a full report should be provided to the committee detailing how the LEP resources are being used and how this is benefitting local communities. Following a request from Councillor Kondakor it was agreed that the report should provide a geographical breakdown of where the resources are being used.

The committee was reminded that a briefing note on the move by Government of fire and rescue services to the Home Office had been circulated by the Chief Fire Office. It was also reported that a proposal was being considered for fire and rescue services to come under the control of Police and Crime Commissioners. Members requested that consideration be given to a report on these two aspects of the Fire and Rescue service be presented to the March meeting.

Resolved

That the Committee:

1) Agrees the update 2015-16 Work Programme and makes any additional comments or changes, as required; and

2) Notes the scheduled future meeting dates.

5.   **Update Report on the Warwickshire Local Welfare Scheme**

David Carter (Strategic Director, Resources) introduced the report explaining that the scheme was both reactive (supporting people through any crises they might encounter) and proactive (seeking to develop initiatives that can help people avoid getting into a crisis situation). Gill Page (Project Officer, Customer Service), responding to questions from Councillor Phillip Morris-Jones, informed the committee that food for the Local Welfare Scheme comes as donations from supermarkets and the public. The "FareShare Food" scheme sources food stuffs which for a number of reasons cannot be sold despite being fit for consumption. This can include wrongful coding of products. Councillor John Holland observed that the problems some people encounter are the result of a series of challenges in their lives. There is, therefore, often a need to address a combination of issues and not just one.

Regarding the fourth bullet point in para 2.5, Councillor Keith Kondakor expressed the view that work to develop affordable credit solutions across the county was dis-jointed and too slow. In response the committee was informed that work on this area was being undertaken by officers of the Localities and Partnership Team. It was agreed that they would be requested to provide an update to members.

It was agreed that Gill Page would provide a briefing note updating members on take up of the scheme by district.

It was noted that the "Lunch for Free" scheme had been introduced prior to the launch of universal free school meals but that it will continue to the end of the academic year.

Resolved

That the Committee notes the report.

6. Consultation and Engagement

Stephanie Gardner (Corporate Projects Delivery Manager) introduced the published report summarising its key elements.

Councillor Keith Kondakor welcomed the report but suggested that whilst there are examples of good consultation undertaken by the County Council there are also some that are not satisfactory. In particular he cited the recent consultation exercise concerning the Bermuda Connection project in Nuneaton which he considered to be skewed in favour of one particular option. The committee was particularly keen to see greater consistency of consultation across the authority.

Councillor John Whitehouse suggested that consultation around Road Traffic Orders would be enhanced if it sought responses both for and against proposals. (Currently only objections are sought). This was noted although the committee was informed that the wording of Traffic Order notices was set out by legislation.

Councillor John Whitehouse suggested that many people regard consultation, not as a genuine desire to establish peoples' views but as a statement of intent. A possible solution is to present people with open questions rather than presenting them with closed statements. In addition it is important to provide feedback to consultees explaining why a particular decision has been taken.

The importance of consultation on local (as opposed to county-wide) issues was highlighted. Attention was drawn to the Local Councils Charter and the expectation that Parish and Town Councils will be fully consulted on proposals that affect them. The use of social media (eg Facebook) was commended but caution was advised as the views expressed by these methods may not always be representative of the whole community.

Resolved

That the Committee notes the report outlining the process and procedure for consultations.

7. Treasury Management Monitoring Report

Andrew Lovegrove (Head of Corporate Financial Services) introduced the published report.

In response to a question from Councillor Saint the committee was told that investments in the money market/external funds give a lower return than property because they are short term. They provide a degree of flexibility but as a consequence are not eligible for higher rates of interest.

Members asked for information regarding returns from property and the impact of the Property Rationalisation Programme. David Carter informed the meeting that most of the property vacated by the County Council had either been leased or was in poor condition.

Regarding the in-year capital financing requirement the committee was informed that whilst appearing to "spike" in 2015/16 (Appendix A) this is due to reporting methods and is not due to in-year slippage.

It was acknowledged that despite previous forecasts, interest rates are unlikely to rise in the short or medium term.

Resolved

That the Committee notes the report on Treasury Management in respect of 2015-16 to date.

8.   **WCC IT Systems – Fitness for Purpose**

Ian Litton (Strategy Programme & Information Manager) introduced the report setting out the key elements regarding partnership working, data management, the needs of a modern and flexible workforce and the development of high quality on line systems. The challenges presented by silo-based working were explored as were upcoming issues around devolution and combined working. In order to help understand the IT landscape Councillor Western requested that officers provide an IT map. This should indicate how different IT systems communicate with each other and with partner agencies.

The committee was told that the Clinical Commissioning Groups were developing "digital road maps" to demonstrate the links between health and social care.

Councillor John Holland asked whether it would be possible to develop a mapping system that indicates to officers, councillors and the public projects that are planned or underway. In response, members were informed that this is already done for highways maintenance works. However other information is not necessarily contained in compatible databases.

Members commended the work undertaken to date but questioned how far along the journey the council was. There was also the question of how much engagement end users have in the IT development process. With regard progress the committee was informed that whilst the Council is ahead of others, there remain a number of "legacy systems" eg HRMS, that remain to be addressed. The social care system is currently being moved after 20 years and a considerable amount of work has been done with the highway maintenance contractors to ensure effective IT compatibility.

Councillor John Appleton suggested that the key to effective IT is usability and reliability. He added that whilst commonality is a commendable objective the use by organisations of different systems will make this a major challenge. This was acknowledged by Tonino Ciuffini (Head of Information Assets) who stated that organisations will need to be prepared to surrender aspects of their systems if they are to be able to work effectively together. TechUK is working to develop a charter for commonality and there is a move to work only with suppliers who themselves are working towards commonality of systems.

Councillor Kondakor suggested that IT at the County Council is ten years ahead of some district and borough councils. He reminded members of the "Open Data" initiative that had been promoted previously adding that this could be revisited.

Resolved

That the Committee endorses the approach being taken to improve the quality of our IT Systems.

9.   **Operational Performance of Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service**

Rob Moyney, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, informed the committee that in 2014/15 the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service was the best performing Service in the country. It had the lowest level of accidental dwelling fires in the country and the second lowest level of non-domestic fires.

Councillor Phillip Morris-Jones welcomed the results but, highlighting high levels of deliberate fires, asked what could be done to address these. In reply the committee was informed that there is currently no technology that can reduce these figures. However the Fire and Rescue Service is working with partners in particular areas; accessing hard to reach locations by bicycle and focusing on key communities.

It was agreed that a note would be provided to the committee setting out the geographical distribution of fires and other incidents.

Regarding road traffic accidents there remain around a dozen locations that can be considered hot-spots. Work is ongoing with partners to identify what action can be undertaken to reduce the dangers at these sites.

The benefits of sprinkler systems in domestic properties were acknowledged. Recognising that current regulations do not require the installation of sprinklers in new-build properties Councillor Peter Fowler undertook to ask the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety to write to Government requesting fresh consideration of th matter.

Resolved

That the Committee notes the contents of the report.

10.   **Absence, Health, Safety and Welfare**

Allison Lehky (Workforce Strategy and Organisational Development Manager) explained the regular reporting of absence and health and safety performance to the Council's Staff and Pensions Committee.

The Council's approach to managing stress was outlined to members. It was noted that those who work in teams experience lower levels of stress than those who work alone. People experiencing stress may be referred the Occupational Health Services although it needed to be acknowledged that not all stress arises in the workplace.

Where teams are moving towards modern and flexible working, HR staff work to assist them on the transition. To date no evidence has been found that Modern and Flexible working has led to health problems and increased absenteeism.

Considerable efforts have been made to address issues around manual handling and the injuries this can cause. Training is provided to staff as well as the right equipment which itself is subject to a maintenance programme.

Comparison of absence figures between the public and private sector is not easy owing to the different ways it is measured. For example small private companies may not use the same robust approach to recording sickness that the public sector is required to follow. Regarding comparisons between Warwickshire Councils, members asked that the data for sickness levels at Warwick District be provided. Andy Dunn agreed to this.

Resolved

That the Committee notes and supports the performance information in relation to employee sickness absence, health safety and wellbeing as detailed in the reports.

11. Urgent Matters

None.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee was confirmed as 17 March 2016 at 2 p.m. in CR2, Shire Hall.

The meeting rose at 15.58.

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Chair