



Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Minutes – 21 November 2013

Attendance

Members of the Panel

Cllr Rita Potter (chair)
Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Craig Collingswood
Cllr Jasbinder Kaur Dehar
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal
Cllr Milkinder Jaspal
Cllr Zahid Hussain Shah
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Martin Waite

Cabinet Members

Cllr Paul Sweet, Governance and Performance
Cllr John Reynolds, City Services
Cllr Andrew Johnson, Resources

Other Members

Cllr Malcolm Gwinnett - item 5 (0138)

Employees

Mark Taylor	Assistant Director – Finance
Alistair Merrick	Assistant Director, Central Services
Steve Woodward	Head of Service Public Realm
Charlotte Johns	Head of Policy
Steve Wright	Head of Operational Services
Chris Huddart	Head of Commercial Services
Michelle Howell	Finance Manager
Claire Nye	Finance Manager
Deb Breedon	Scrutiny Officer

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Paul Singh and Mrs Wendy Thompson

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

MEETING BUSINESS ITEMS

Chair's announcements

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Members and Officers and advised that agenda item five relating to the budget review would be considered as the first item.

2. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting (10 October 2013)**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

5. **Budget Review – Five Year Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 to 2018/19**

Mark Taylor provided a report on the proposed budget review including the proposals for investment in services and the savings proposals which fall in the remit of the Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel.

Panel considered the budget items on a line by line basis:

0077 Restructures and renegotiation of commercial contracts across the Delivery Directorate.

In response to a question by Cllr Martin Waite the panel was advised that the renegotiation of large contracts would be when they are coming up for renewal and that WCC would negotiate a way round to ensure savings going forward to achieve the £3M efficiency savings.

0104 Revenues and benefits reconfiguration of mail services.

Panel asked for more information on this efficiency saving and were advised that an external company can reduce postage costs in revenues and benefits and that WCC is looking to make similar efficiency savings across the whole Council in the future.

0107 Health and Safety Team Employee Reduction

Cllr Collingswood asked if there would be an impact on the number of health and safety audits carried out. The Cabinet Member advised that he was confident as can be that there would be no impact. Alistair Merrick clarified that Occupational Health team will report to the Chief Human Resources Officer.

0106 Rationalise the contract terms for school bus drivers.

In response to Cllr Shah's comment, the Cabinet Member advised that the efficiency saving related to out of school payments. Drivers will work 40 weeks and have four weeks holiday, essentially a reduction of eight weeks salary for every driver.

Cllr Waite indicated that discussions should take place with trade unions.

0125 Restructure of facilities management function.

In response to panel concerns relating to the impact on the service, Alistair Merrick advised that the efficiency savings relates to the reduction in management and supervisory staffing and is not expected to impact on service delivery.

0126 Reduction in corporate provision for bad debts

The Cabinet Member advised that the efficiency savings look to 2017-18 to improve the collection of debts and change the policy to reduce the amount of bad debts written off. He advised that the CAB is providing early intervention work. Cllr Milkinder Jaspal suggested the Council could take the same approach as businesses and take a deposit for services. The Chair indicated it may be better to recover some money rather than none. Panel felt there may be some support for this approach and requested more information about placing deposits for services.

0135 Democratic Services Electoral Services employee reduction and

0141 Electoral Services Project manager post deletion.

Panel asked how the reduction in posts would impact on the electoral process. The Cabinet Member advised that the post deletion was part of a restructure and that capacity would not be adversely affected due to online voter registration which will give additional capacity.

0192 Efficiencies in service delivery across the Delivery Directorate.

Cllr Milkinder Jaspal wanted assurance that some of the efficiency savings in delivery are not being counted elsewhere and was advised that this was the case. It was confirmed that efficiency savings will be achieved through major programmes such as FutureWorks and FutureSpace which will develop and eventually produce these savings.

0199 Centralisation and Rationalisation of services – Central Services.

Panel was advised that centralisation and rationalisation of services has made efficiency savings already and as more services are brought into one place, such as ICT services and Health and Safety, the Council is using less resource to do the same work.

0161 Policy team restructure

0187 Centralisation and rationalisation of service provision

Charlotte Johns advised that this was a similar proposal to the 0199; there are currently pockets of policy seated around the organisation and in order to make efficiency savings they need to be in one place. In response to a concern raised by Cllr Shah relating to specialist policy teams Charlotte Johns advised that the policy officers would not lose specialism if co-located.

0196 Communications Service Review

In response to a question from Cllr Milkinder Jaspal members were advised that there would be a review of corporate communications, including mobile phones, Public Relations Team and marketing.

Questions were raised relating to the recent establishment of a senior post in Communications Team. Panel was advised that the post will bring someone with a particular set of skills to rationalise and restructure the communication function. Cllr Sweetman welcomes the idea of making policy and communications teams more efficient and felt that by reducing staffing we can improve the quality.

Panel was advised that growth avoidance items are items where money has been built in to the budget and the Council is now seeking to avoid growth.

0025 Removal of growth – Carbon Reduction Commitment

In response to questions by Cllr Martin Waite and Cllr Collingswood, Alistair Merrick explained that energy efficiency will reduce carbon credits we buy. Mark Taylor explained that also factored in is that WCC will have fewer buildings and smaller satellite offices. Cabinet Members added that there is a move to make all other buildings efficient, if we do not do this we would pay more for carbon credits and that it is a balancing act.

0022 Removal of growth – Increase in pension costs of former employees.

In response to Cllr Jasbir Jaspal's question it was clarified that the Council currently top up the bill and that this is factored into the medium term financial strategy. The saving is as a result of the rate of deaths off setting how long people draw pension.

0015 Internal audit services income generation.

Panel were informed that the income generation is due to Audit Services doing more work for other organisations and making the work more commercial.

0119 Improve collection rate for Council Tax.

Panel were advised that there is a consultation planned to consider proposals for new Council Tax collection schemes and that this would be considered by full Council.

0091 Fees and Charges Review – Bereavement Services.

The Cabinet Member advised the increase will be 10% in the first year and a minimum of 2% in following years, this is comparable to neighbouring authorities and keeps WCC competitive.

0138 Review the function and extent of the Mayoral Office.

The Chair invited Cllr Malcolm Gwinnet to join the meeting for discussion of this item and to outline his concerns. Cllr Gwinnet outlined the excellent service the mayoral team bring to support the Mayor and to facilitate many major functions throughout the year, including evening and weekends functions.

The Cabinet Member advised that the detail of the proposal had yet to be worked through, he indicated that the work of the Mayoral Team was not widely known about and acknowledged for those involved in the Mayoralty the level of work and dedication was appreciated.

Cllr Milkinder Jaspal, in his role of current Mayor, indicated that there could be improvements and that WCC should potentially look to investigating new ways of working and income generation through better use of the Mayoral Suite.

Cllr Waite suggested that the 300-400 mayoral functions per annum may not fully reflect the organisation and many people do not see what the Mayor does. Panel considered the Mayor's role and where it fits with corporate priorities and considered that Mayoral functions should not be accepted unless it is directly related to the corporate priorities, thereby modernising the Mayoral functions and making it fit the business of the local authority rather than just a ceremonial function.

Cllr Andrew Johnson acknowledged the comments and suggested that there is room to consider alternatives to this cut in service but that the saving must be made one way or another therefore there should be a very robust business case to set out alternatives.

Cllr Sweetman liked the idea of ensuring that the Mayor as a strategic function gets involved in selling Wolverhampton and attracting inward investment and suggested this should start from the premise of Communications Team, Economic Development Team and Mayoral Team working together to question the function and how it could be part and parcel of Wolverhampton's outward face. Cllr Shah added that scrutiny should consider the robust business case.

Cllr Sweet indicated that the debate had raised some interesting points. Cllr Gwinnet thanked the panel for opportunity to speak and indicated that there is room to manoeuvre on this proposal.

0139 Reduce the number of councillors.

Panel considered whether Wolverhampton really needs 60 councillors and suggested that Cabinet should seriously look at reducing numbers in light of the previous discussion and the importance of the Mayoral role. The Mayoral function can look to bring resource and investment to the City especially when linked to the corporate priorities and alternative uses for the mayoral suite.

0040 Reduce research activity

Charlotte Johns provided more information in response to councillor's questions; she advised that efficiencies can be made by reducing the sample size and frequency of the research work such as the residents's opinion survey.

Councillor Bolshaw asked a question about the use of facilities by people who are not residents of Wolverhampton.

Cllr Johnson said there were two aspects to this question, firstly the amount

visitors bring to the local economy and the other side being those who come into the City to use facilities such as tipping rubbish. The shared rubbish disposal site with Dudley Council in particular is something we may have to look at more closely in future.

Panel considered the 'Wolverhampton leisure card', which would ensure that visitors paid the full rate and that residents could benefit from a discount rate when using facilities.

Cllr Sweet indicated the importance of community facilities charging appropriate rates when hiring rooms and facilities to local groups and business enterprises. Panel agreed that the room hire rates should be revisited to generate income where possible.

Cllr Milkinder Jaspal suggested that WCC should look at bringing money into the City Centre and maximise the impact of the Town Centre; the Grand Theatre; the Art Gallery and the Civic Halls and encourage them to be self-sustaining. He suggested that should the Grand Theatre invest in a restaurant next to the theatre it would increase its income and the Council could reduce subsidy and likewise the Art Gallery could start to charge for special exhibitions.

Panel agreed that attractions should be encouraged to find a commercial way to raise funds, using capital resource to bring inward investment to the City.

Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman welcomed the collaborative ideas suggested that WV One should be doing more to encourage this approach.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the budget review.

Resolved:

That a summary of the Panels observations relating to the draft budget 2014-15 and medium term financial strategy (appendix1) be reported to Scrutiny Board and Cabinet

6. **Work Programme 2013-14**

Deb Breedon provided a report which enabled review and development of the work programme for Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel.

Resolved:

1. That the work programme is noted.

Termination of meeting 19:32

Inflationary Pressures		
Reference	Budget Pressure	Comments
Delivery		
PI-Del01	Public Conveniences Contract	No Comment
Corporate		
Corp04	Anticipated rise in NNDR	No Comment
Corp05	Anticipated rise in gas prices	No Comment
Corp06	Anticipated rise in electricity prices	No Comment
PI-Corp02	Introduce utility/other contingency (other to be used with the agreement of Budget Working party)	No Comment
Del01	Carbon Reduction Commitment	No Comment
Del02	Supplementary increase in Landfill Tax announced by the Government.	No Comment
Del03	Increase in Pension Costs of former employees (Savings Proposal)	No Comment

Developments		
Reference	Budget Pressure	

Delivery		
D-Del02	FutureWorks - annual expenditure	This item relates to the implementation of Aggresso system and the on-going costs of supporting it. D-Del02 balances out budget item 0023 Removal of growth – future works

Summary of Savings Proposals 2014-2015 - Efficiency		
Ref.	Saving Proposal Title	Comments
	Delivery	
0020	Internal Audit Services Employee Reduction	No comment
0028	Legal Services Restructure	No comment
0030	Depot Rationalisation - Environmental Services	No comment
0032	Creation of a council temporary staffing agency	No comment
0077	Restructures and re-negotiation of commercial contracts across the Delivery Directorate	The contracts would be renegotiated when coming up for renewal to ensure savings going forward.

0086	Revenues & Benefits Technology Improvements	No comment
0090	Risk Management and Insurance - Revision to workflow, process and procedures	No comment
0096	Risk management and insurance - review of service provision	No comment
0097	Review the Repair and Maintenance Budgets across Bereavement Services	No comment
0099	Rationalisation of Staffing Levels in Bereavement Services	No comment
0102	Review the Management Structure within City Services	No comment
0104	Revenues & Benefits Reconfiguration of Mail Services	More information revealed that an external company can reduce postage costs in revenues and benefits and that WCC is looking to make similar efficiency savings across the whole Council in the future.
0106	Rationalise the Contract Terms for School Bus Drivers	Discussions should take place with trade unions in relation to the reduction of eight weeks out of school term payments for the drivers.
0107	Health & Safety Team Employee Reduction	Concerns about the potential impact on the number of health and safety audits carried out with the reduction of one post.
0111	Review of Fees and Charges - Registrars	No comment

0115	Review of Vehicle Hire Costs	No comment
0117	Information and Communication Technology Service - Renegotiation of Software Contracts	No comment
0122	Information and Communication Technology Service - Externalise Management of Mobile Phone Contract	No comment
0124	Public Toilets Review	No comment
0125	Restructure of Facilities Management Function	Reduction relates to supervisory posts and should not impact on service delivery.
0126	Reduction in corporate provision for bad debts	More investigation needed relating to placing deposits for services.
0127	Remove Property Services vacant posts that were due to be filled as part of the restructure	No comment
0129	Democratic Services Reduction in Councillors' Allowances	No comment
0130	Democratic Services Reduction in Councillor Training Budget	No comment

0131	Reduce the staff directly employed in the delivery function of Property Services	No comment
0132	Democratic Services Employee Reduction	No comment
0135	Democratic Services Electoral Services Employee Reduction	The post deletion was part of a restructure and capacity will not be adversely affected due to online voter registration which will give additional capacity.
0141	Electoral Services Project Manager Post Deletion	As 0135 above
0164	Rationalise Public Realm Administrative Support	No comment
0190	Centralisation of budgets for external legal fees	No comment
0192	Efficiencies in service delivery across the Delivery Directorate	Efficiency savings will be achieved through major programmes such as FutureWorks and FutureSpace which will develop and eventually produce these savings.
0199	Centralisation and Rationalisation of services - Central Services	Efficiency savings have been made already and as more services are brought into one place, such as ICT services and Health and Safety, the Council is using less resource to do the same work.
	Office of the Chief Executive	
0161	Policy Team Restructure	Pockets of policy seated around the organisation will be in one place. The policy officers would not lose service specialism when co-located.

0187	Centralisation and rationalisation of service provision	As 0161 above.
0196	Communications Service Review	A review of corporate communications, including mobile phones, Public Relations Team and marketing. The senior post in Communications Team recently advertised will bring someone with a particular set of skills to rationalise and restructure the communication function.

Summary of Savings Proposals 2014-2015 – Growth Avoidance

Ref.	Saving Proposal Title	Comments
	Delivery	
0019	Removal of the Historical Contract Growth Costs for Grounds Maintenance and Street Scene Contracts	Consultation is planned to consider proposals for new Council Tax collection schemes and this will be considered by full Council.
0022	Removal of growth - Increase in pension costs of former employees	WCC currently top up the bill and that this is factored into the medium term financial strategy. The saving is as a result of the rate of deaths off setting how long people draw pension.
0023	Removal of Growth - FutureWorks	No comment
0025	Removal of Growth - Carbon Reduction Commitment	Energy efficiency will reduce the number of carbon credits we buy. WCC will have fewer buildings and smaller satellite offices. There is a move to make all other buildings efficient, if we do not do this we would pay more for carbon credits and that it is a balancing act.

Summary of Savings Proposals 2014-2015 – Income Generation

Ref.	Saving Proposal Title	Comments
	Delivery	
0015	Internal Audit Services Income Generation	Income generation is due to Audit Services doing more work for other organisations and making the work more commercial.
0091	Fees and Charges Review - Bereavement Services	The increase will be 10% in the first year and a minimum of 2% in following years, this is comparable to neighbouring authorities and keeps WCC competitive.
0101	Revenues & Benefits Increase Charges for Liability Orders	No comment
0108	Council Tax Single Person Discount Review	No comment
0119	Improve collection rate for Council Tax	There is a consultation planned to consider proposals for new Council Tax collection schemes and that this would be considered by full Council.
0128	Democratic Services Income Generation	No comment

Summary of Savings Proposals 2014-2015 - Cut in Service

Ref.	Saving Proposal Title	Comments
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	Delivery	
0076	Review the use of organists at Bushbury Crematorium	No comment
0085	Revision to insurance programme	No comment
0109	Review of the Bereavement Advice Service (Non-Statutory)	No comment
0112	Revise Eligibility for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme	No comment
0114	Information and Communication Technology Service - Removal of Desktop Warranty Agreement	No comment
0120	Information and Communication Technology Service - Reduction in Telephone Lines	No comment
0123	Reduce cleaning hours by 10% across non-educational sites across the City	No comment
0133	Reduce the level of Discretionary Rate Relief	No comment

0138	Review the Function and Extent of the Mayoral Office	<p>Look to investigating new ways of working and income generation through better use of the Mayoral Suite. Modernising the mayoral functions and making it fit the business of the Local Authority rather than just a ceremonial function. Mayoral function gets involved in selling Wolverhampton and attracting inward investment and suggested this should start from the premise of communications team, economic development team and mayoral team working together to question the function and how it could be part and parcel of Wolverhampton's outward face. The mayoral function can look to bring resource and investment to the City especially when linked to the corporate priorities and alternative uses for the mayoral suite.</p>
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Summary of Savings Proposals 2014-2015 - Cut in Service

Ref.	Saving Proposal Title	Comments
0139	Reduce the Number of Councillors	Panel suggested that Cabinet should seriously look at reducing numbers in light of the previous discussion and the importance of the mayoral role.
0140	Reduction in Temporary Polling Stations	No comment
0181	Grounds Maintenance West Area contract - Bring the Service back in-house	No comment
0194	Reduction in Trade Union Costs	No comment
	Office of the Chief Executive	

0040	Research Activity Reduction	Efficiencies can be made by reducing the sample size and frequency of the resident's opinion survey.
0046	Review use of software systems (TEN, Local Information System)	

General Comments: To feed to Scrutiny Board – not specific to Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

CCC 1	Use of facilities by people who are not residents of Wolverhampton.	The shared rubbish disposal site with Dudley Council in particular is something we may have to look at more closely in future
CCC 2	Wolverhampton leisure card	Visitors pay the full rate and that residents could benefit from a discount rate when using facilities.
CCC 3	Community facilities room hire charges	Importance of charging appropriate rates when hiring rooms and facilities to local groups and business enterprises. The room hire rates should be revisited to generate income where possible.
CCC 4	Maximise the impact of the Town Centre; the Grand Theatre; the Art Gallery and the Civic Halls and encourage them to be self-sustaining.	Encourage Grand Theatre to invest in a restaurant next to the theatre it would increase its income and the Council could reduce subsidy and likewise the Art Gallery could start to charge for special exhibitions. Encourage attractions to find a commercial way to raise funds, using capital resource to bring inward investment to the City.WV One should be doing more to encourage this approach.