



Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Minutes – 23 January 2014

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
Cllrs Paul Singh
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Mrs Wendy Thompson
Cllr Martin Waite

Cabinet Member

Cllr Andrew Johnson

Other Members

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre

Employees

Keith Ireland	Strategic Director, Delivery
Sue Davies	Head of Human Resources
Mark Taylor	Assistant Director, Finance
Polly Sharma	Policy and Equality Manager
Adam Hadley	Scrutiny and Transparency Manager
Deb Breedon	Scrutiny Officer

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Christopher Haynes

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 Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of interest**

Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman declared a discloseable pecuniary interest in item 11 relating to Single Status update and left the meeting during discussion of the item.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting (21 November 2013)**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:

Page 4 minutes - Cllr Sweetman welcomed the idea of making policy and communications teams more efficient. She felt that this gives us an opportunity to review skills needed to be more effective.

Page 5 minutes - Cllr Sweetman liked the idea of ensuring that the Mayor, in a strategic role of the Council, gets involved in selling Wolverhampton and attracting inward investment.

4. **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

5. **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.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

6. Equalities work programme update

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Equality Councillor Champion presented a six monthly update report on the Equalities Work Programme. He advised that he had overseen the delivery of the work programme which had also been regularly reported to the Equalities Advisory Group.

He reported that significant progress had been made against all of the 21 actions in the work programme, 13 actions were complete, one finished subject to a further meeting and seven were progressing well. He highlighted the following actions:

- The development and adoption of a new Equality Analysis toolkit to ensure equalities issues are understood in the development of policies and procedures.
- Development and roll out of a best practice monitoring form for equalities.
- Creation of an equalities e-learning course which is now compulsory for all employees and Councillors.

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre encouraged all panel members to undertake the e-learning training, available on the Learning Hub; he advised that the appendix to the report detailed other key activities relating to equalities that have taken place in 2013.

He thanked Chris Trynka, interim Equalities Manager for her work and stressed that there had been significant progress against the equalities work programme and that it is important that not to lose momentum moving forward.

In response to questions raised councillors were advised that:

- Equality training is online, no additional resource is required.
- Take up of training is slow; six out of 60 councillors, 550 staff out of 6,659 as at December 2013.
- Previous face to face equality training is relevant but e-training is compulsory and should be completed by all employees and elected members, everyone should be reminded that the facility is there.
- Evidence of organisational trends uncovered during work will be checked by the equality team and monitoring will continue.
- Equality team will check relationship between the Equality Act 2010 and Trade Union membership.
- Equality objectives action plan can be found on the Council Website which details the Councils equality objectives.

The Scrutiny Panel Chair welcomed the report and congratulated the Equalities Champion and Equalities team on their work.

Resolved:

That the progress against the Equalities Work Programme and update from the Equalities Councillor Chair be noted.

7. **HR Quarterly update report**

Sue Davies provided an update on the general progress made on the work streams within the Human Resources (HR) improvement plan. She highlighted the progress being made by the three reference groups which have played a significant role in aligning new policies and policy consultation process:

- Managers reference group
- Human Resource reference group
- Trade Unions

In response to scrutiny panel members questions Panel was advised that:

- Employees are adjusting well to the new HR policies; there has been no adverse re-action.
- In relation to sickness information; 1500 management of attendance meetings had been undertaken and this figure is decreasing.
- 43 employees were at stage three of the HR sickness management process.
- The work involving schools and corporate HR is much improved as a result of the stronger working relationship between Assistant Director Jim McElligot and Sue Davies.
- Triggers for sickness absence:
 - Stage 1 – three separate occurrences in a rolling 12 month period
 - Stage 2 – accumulate a total of 12 days in a 12 month period
 - Stage 3 – an unacceptable pattern of sickness

Panel were advised that the Wolverhampton absence management process is more robust than the Bradford factor.

- With regard to the impact of budget cuts Panel was advised that there were potential reductions to the apprenticeship and graduate programme, which had not yet been approved by Cabinet.
- Employee appraisal scheme has been implemented and audits are to be undertaken soon. There is much greater emphasis on performance in the organisation.

Keith Ireland indicated that there is good progress being made based on the new policies. Cllr Mrs Wendy Thompson thanked the officers for an honest and encouraging report.

Resolved:

That Panel note the progress on delivering the work streams within the HR improvement plan.

8. **Budget and financial matters**

Cllr Andrew Johnson provided a report which informed Panel about the Council's finances that had recently been reported to the Cabinet and Cabinet (Resources) Panel. He invited feedback on the update to the draft five year budget and medium term financial strategy 2014/15 to 2018/19.

Cllr Andrew Johnson explained that the Government grant had been reduced by 52% and as a result of the increased deficit Cabinet approved the adoption of an adapted revised strategy requiring services to be cut deeper and faster than had been expected. He outlined the proposals and invited any comments:

- a) Cease expenditure during the remainder of 2013/14 on all but absolutely essential items, in order to limit the call on general balances.
- b) Accelerate the implementation of some of the 165 saving proposals to bring forward a minimum of £4 million into 2014/15, in time to incorporate into February 2014 Cabinet Budget report.
- c) Identify a minimum of £5 million of new savings proposals, or increases in the value of existing 165 proposals for 2014/15 in time for February 2014 Cabinet Budget meeting.
- d) Identify a further minimum of £10 million of new savings proposals or increases of existing 165 proposals for 2015/16 in time to be incorporated into the July 2014 Cabinet Budget report.
- e) Cabinet to consider a report to change the terms of the Councils redundancy policy to statutory minimum. Employees may not be guaranteed access to a full pension between the ages of 55 and 60 after March 2014.
- f) The treasury management strategy is to be reviewed; the low interest rates have had an affect here.

Cllr Andrew Johnson advised that it is difficult to get an accurate figure to work with, it had been made very clear in an earlier report that the settlement could change and it may change again. The projected figures vary considerably LGA futures indicating £44 million, LG Futures indicating £21 million, the problem being if we predict too deep the Council could be accused of scaremongering; a balance needs to be struck. Mark Taylor clarified that even following the additional savings for year two and three a further £40 million will be taken out of the budget before 2018-19.

In response to questions the Scrutiny Panel were advised that:

- The Council pays £10 million per annum interest on loans. Previous Government gave credit based on what it gave you permission to borrow, and then you got a grant from the Government. A figure of £22 million referred to includes debt charges.
- Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) have provided an annual review to Audit committee which reported that the Council projections were reasonable and the budget process and internal audit cycle had been demonstrated to be robust.
- In terms of all the possible factors including variation in inflation, rising numbers of LAC, we did not predict the reduction in Government grant.
- Parkfields site is still being looked into. There are options to consider but the costs are prohibitive to repair, other options for the future of the Parkfields site will be considered at a future meeting early in March 2014. The Cabinet Member advised the overall site would be reconsidered but at this time was awaiting legal opinion and declined to comment.
- Cabinet deferred consideration of the Voluntary Sector grants report to enable the equality analysis, which had been submitted late in the process, to be given due consideration.
- Specific reserves have been reviewed to release funds into the efficiency reserve.
- Panel were assured that every effort is being made to reduce rising numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) as it was highlighted as a real problem. Panel heard that working closely with partners and agencies a number of early intervention initiatives and a New Operating Model (NOM), were being put into place to tackle rising numbers of LAC and address the overspend.
- Currently each LAC costs an average £40,000, the Council had reduced costs from £44,000 per child last year. LAC costs can fluctuate depending on the needs of child and direction from the Court - at the top end of the chart one child could cost as much as £250,000 per annum and another a may be minimal costs by being placed with a relative or grandparent – both equally important as the Authority must meet its duty. There was concern that the numbers of LAC had risen from 680 in December 2013 to 747 in January 2014, but recognition that we have a duty to carry out and that we have to find ways to intervene earlier to save costs in the longer term.

Panel Members thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their hard work.

Resolved:

That Panel note the arrangements for ensuring adequate identification and management of budget risks and budget planning for future years and request the Cabinet Member to consider the Panels comments and update the report accordingly.

9. **FutureWorks update**

Keith Ireland provided a report which gave an update of progress on the FutureWorks programme since Agilysys was appointed in April 2013. Panel heard that all tasks were either complete or on target. Panel welcomed the good news.

Resolved:

Panel reviewed the progress to date on the Future Works programme and thanked the programme team for their work.

10. **Exclusion of press and public**

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within the paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Act set out below:

<i>Item No.</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Applicable paragraph</i>
11	Single Status	4

Part 2 – exempt items, closed to the press and public

11. **Single status update**

Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman declared a discloseable pecuniary interest in this item and left the room.

Sue Davies provided a progress report relating to the single status programme, indicating that much of the programme has now been delivered with implementation in April 2013 and protection ending 31 March 2014. The majority of appeals were now complete with schools based appeals planned in the coming months. She advised that the Assistant Director Education and Enterprise, Jim McElligot had played a large part in working to unravel issues with schools in relation to single status.

Resolved:

Panel agreed to note the update on single status implementation.

The meeting ended at 19:27