



Scrutiny Board

Minutes - 21 October 2014

Attendance

Members of the Board

Cllr Peter O'Neill (Chair)
Cllr Ian Angus
Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Claire Darke
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss
Cllr Lorna McGregor
Cllr Arun Photay
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr John Rowley
Cllr Stephen Simkins
Cllr Paul Singh
Cllr Wendy Thompson

Employees

Adam Hadley	Scrutiny and Transparency Manager
Charlotte Johns	Head of Policy
Jonathan Pearce	Graduate Management Trainee
Martyn Sargeant	Head of Democratic Services
Mark Taylor	Assistant Director, Finance

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Findlay.
- 2 Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 Minutes of the previous meeting (16 September 2014)**
Resolved:
That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 4 Matters arising**
Clarification was made that an update on the risk register will be given at the Scrutiny Board meeting in December. There were no other matters arising.

5 **Employee performance appraisals**

Peter Farrow introduced the Internal Audit Report – Performance Appraisal Scheme, noting that there had been considerable problems with the previous approach. This included a poor uptake of appraisals; confusion about appraisal numbers; uncertainty as to who should be conducting appraisals, partly due to the Council's staffing reshuffle; and even a lack of publicity on the Council's intranet.

Mark Taylor provided the updated figures from the performance appraisal scheme. He noted that the previous appraisals process was unsatisfactory and improving this was now a Council priority. This sentiment was echoed by several Councillors. From April, all managers including the Managing Director, will have to sign a budget and accountability contract to hold them responsible for their general performance. Part of this accountability will also include appraisals, thus ensuring there is an identifiable employee responsible for each appraisal. Managers who don't comply will face disciplinary measures.

Mark summarised that whilst there has been a significant improvement across the board for staff appraisals, the quality and quantity of data being received remained too low. In an attempt to improve this data the Council will implement the following strategies:

- Appraisals to be considered over a 12 month rolling score to provide a more holistic view.
- 'Data cleansing' whereby casual staff who may perform one-off jobs for the Council are not included in the data.
- New starters not to be included in the data during their first six months.
- An induction for new managers to ensure that they have received full appraisal training.

Mark summarised by giving reassurance that the on-going Council restructure will not affect appraisals and that all levels of management can be held to account. Any forthcoming restructure changes that may affect Council procedures will be reflected in the Constitution to ensure clarity of accountability.

Resolved:

- (1) To note the current position in relation to the performance appraisal of the Council's employees.
- (2) To recommend that accountabilities and responsibilities are clearly reflected in the Constitution.
- (3) To review progress at a future meeting.

6 **Tracking and monitoring of scrutiny reviews**

Keren Jones introduced the Monitoring and Tracking Scrutiny Review report, to draw the Board's attention to the progress and outcomes arising from the scrutiny reviews:

- (1) Child poverty.
- (2) Maintaining and building relationships between the local authority and academies and free schools.

Keren focused on child poverty and drew the Board's attention to the large number of measures that had been successfully implemented in order to combat child poverty.

Andrew Campbell gave further evidence of improvements, highlighting childcare provision. It was noted that affordable childcare provision was sufficient for parents wanting to access childcare. However, it was mooted that raising parental awareness for extra entitlements would be beneficial for many people. He suggested it would be helpful to draw attention to the following:

- 15 hours free childcare for children under two years old.
- Access to tax credits.
- Voucher schemes.

Keren Jones stressed the challenges of child poverty for the Council, noting both the causes and consequences of poverty need addressing. This will be a priority particularly for the Economic Inclusion Board, which will examine a number of poverty issues whilst liaising with a range of external partners. Targets will be set at the Board's November workshop and there will be annual reports on progress.

Councillors noted the need to address the skills gap in the fight against poverty. This need will be met by a high level commission, which will run as an independent process over next six months. It will identify how the Council is supporting local people. The Enterprise and Business Scrutiny Panel's meeting on 2 December will be specifically considering this issue.

Attention then moved to the issue of maintaining and building relationships between the local authority and academies and free schools. Councillors expressed a need for accountability wherever Council money is invested. This was seen as particularly challenging in academies where the Council has diminishing control. Schools will need to be monitored closely by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel, and Ofsted also plays a key role.

Resolved:

- (1) To keep open and monitor the child poverty review and revisit progress in six months.
- (2) To sign off the remaining actions and close the maintaining and building relationships review.

7

Work programme

The Scrutiny Work Programme 2014/15 was presented to the Board for Councillors' suggestions for development and review. Charlotte Johns confirmed that the joint session on the Care Act had yet to be scheduled and there will be liaison with chairs about the date.

Resolved:

To reschedule the following agenda items on the work programme to spread the workload more evenly over the following months:

Scrutiny Board

- Tracking and Monitoring of scrutiny review: welfare reform communication 2012-13 (moved to 27 January 2015).
- Update on the Council's Risk Register (moved to 27 January 2015).

Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

- Report of the Specific Reserves Working Group – moved to 4 February 2015.
- Eugene Sullivan report – moved to 4 February 2015.
- Complaints and FOI report data update – included in the performance report to Scrutiny Board.