



Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 10 September 2014

Attendance

Members of the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Ian Angus
Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal
Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Andrew Wynne

Employees

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Cllr Craig Collingswood who is attending official council business as a member of the West Midlands Fire & Rescue Authority and Cllr Christopher Haynes.

- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest

- 3 **Minutes of previous meeting**
Resolved:
 That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

- 4 **Matters arising**
Minute 7. - Future Works Programme

Councillors referred to the Agresso system and reported that there had been some negative feedback from employees and schools using the Agresso system. Cllr Alan Bolshaw requested an update on the current position relating to feedback from

schools, statistics about distribution and payment of invoices, and any snagging issues

Cllr Johnson advised that there had been some problems with invoicing at the launch of the new system but feedback now is that using the system is clearer and better. He advised that leave booking had recently been gone live and that it was timely for a comprehensive update report.

Mark Taylor gave a verbal update relating to Agresso roll out. He advised that how two academies and Wolverhampton Homes payrolls had been paid out of Agresso and that dual processes would continue being run to ensure that everyone is paid at the end of September when there will be a full payroll parallel run, he confirmed that payments would definitely be transferred by October payroll.

In response to questions about problems during the August payroll run, Mark Taylor advised that WH payroll has 800 employees and that there had been the normal number of enquiries about pay. The phased approach identifies any issues which can be adjusted and should there be a real issue the dual process ensures everyone is paid from the existing payroll.

Charlotte Johns advised that an update report is programmed for the next panel meeting, 1 October 2014.

Resolved:

That an update report be submitted to the 1 October 2014 Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel.

Minute 4 – Matter Arising

Cllr Milkinder Jaspal referred to the Audit Investigation and indicated that he had previously requested a report on this item. The Chair advised that the minute indicated that Audit Committee had previously received an exempt report which indicates that Audit Committee has oversight of the outcomes of the audit investigations including a series of recommendations which have been or were in the process of being implemented. She said there was no resolution to bring a report back to the Scrutiny Panel.

Resolved:

No further action

5 **Budget Update and Review**

Cllr Andrew Johnson and Mark Taylor presented a report which provided information about the Council's finances which had been reported to Cabinet and Cabinet (Resources) Panel.

The Panel considered the arrangements for ensuring adequate identification and management of budget risks and budget planning and forecasting for future years.

Cllr Andrew Johnson said the report was very comprehensive and detailed. He referred to the highlights contained under paragraph 3, 'managing the budget cuts –

the next phase', and the requirement to identify £25 million of additional savings for 2015-16. He indicated that £18.1 million of savings had been identified for 2015/16 and that work is continuing to identify a further £1.7 million of savings. He advised that a further £35 million of additional savings has to be identified taking the total to be identified to £60 million, in order to address the projected budget deficit over the medium term to 2018/19.

Councillors noted the enormity of the task, recognising that it is one thing saying and identifying the saving and another thing achieving it. Cllr Andrew Wynne asked if the savings were across the board or service specific.

Cllr Andrew Johnson advised that the detail is in the 25 June 2014 Cabinet report, Budget next phase table 1 and that savings were indicated in table 6.

Cllr Rita Potter asked if the Council is meeting its legal duties. Mark Taylor confirmed that this is the case, the budget was agreed in March 2014, at that time the Council resolved it would make the savings; it is currently identifying the way to do that. Cllr Rita Potter asked about the risk of additional unexpected resource implications, such as increasing looked after children (LAC) numbers. Mark Taylor said there was no spare capacity in the budget and that in those circumstances the council would have to consider additional savings from other services.

Councillor Andrew Johnson advised that the council was pursuing early intervention, trying to prevent children coming into care and also trying to reduce the numbers of council fosters carers and use agency foster carers. Other interventions are being considered such as trying to get specialist foster care placements for the more difficult cases. Mark Taylor advised that there are robust plans to underpin the savings put forward. The Community directorate are taking plans forward; Cllr Andrew Johnson advised that he is meeting with the Director and Cabinet Member every six weeks for specific budget meetings.

Mark Taylor said that in relation to the budget the Council has to be satisfied, Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) need to be convinced and Councillors have to be convinced that the budget and savings are achievable, somewhere between prudent and not too ambitious.

Cllr Sweetman advised that when using her iPad the links on Modern.gov to the budget report are broken. Mark Taylor acknowledged the broken links and agreed to report this back to the Democratic Services Manager.

Resolved:

1. That the Budget update and review be noted.
2. That Confident Capable Council Panel receives regular Budget Update reports.

6 **Independent Review of process for Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget**

Cllr Andrew Johnson and Mark Taylor provided a report to enable the Panel to review the recommendations from the independent review of process for the medium term financial strategy and budget, and the action plan developed to address those recommendations.

Cllr Andrew Johnson highlighted the positive comments at paragraph 3.2 of the report relating to approach and construction of the Councils process for medium term financial strategy and budget.

Cllr Andrew Johnson summarised that overall it is a really good report but there are some issues and recommendations to be addressed of how to make the budget more transparent to a wider group of people. He outlined the seven recommendations and said that this is a good chance for scrutiny to get involved in ensuring that they are implemented. Particularly in relation to recommendation 2 relating to 'the assumptions', scrutiny can really add value by giving greater challenge to the assumptions.

Mark Taylor indicated that the Council has been very open to this review, several recommendations have been made and will be taken up, however it was recognised by the review that the Council is largely doing things right.

In response to comments relating to ear marked reserves, Charlotte Johns confirmed that a report to confirm the membership of the Ear Marked Reserves Working Group will be considered at the next meeting 1 October 2014.

Cllr Sweetman referred to the comments made about the presentation of reports and the need to represent the facts in graphic form. She suggested that there is a need to show:

- this is what we spend
- to indicate what impact this would have if the finance is reduced
- to indicate that as we make decisions, we understand the implications

Mark Taylor referred Panel to [Cabinet \(Resources\) School Balances report 9 September 2014](#), he indicated that the approach suggested has been used in the report.

Cllr Ian Angus congratulated officers he found the report reassuring and suggested using some of the comments in the report to respond to public requests for information.

Resolved:

That the Panel endorse the comments, recommendations and actions developed to address the recommendations.

7 **Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 2014-17**

Dawn Phillips presented a report to provide the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Strategy 2014-17. The Panel considered the report

Cllr Rita Potter asked if an overload of work could trigger some stress and pressure in the workplace. Dawn Phillips advised that the Council is in the process of developing a health and wellbeing strategy. She said it would build on current interventions such as workshop for managers to help them recognise stressors, stress risk assessment tool kit, counselling and work with managers who can offer

mentoring services. Essentially it is up to managers to recognise potential stressors in their employees and take early action if there is a specific health issue work with the employee.

Cllr Rita Potter asked if there would there be arrangements available to have a gradual return to work. Dawn Phillips advised that the fit note enables employers to look at what tasks the individual is able to do, even if they are not fully fit. Wherever possible the manager will provide support to enable an early return to work, which could include alternative work as long as the employee can safely carryout the tasks, in order to get them back into work.

Charlotte Johns indicated that this links to the HR policy for management of attendance.

Cllr Rita Potter asked if there would be training available and if there would be a budget. Dawn Phillips informed the panel that the strategy takes account of this and is building on what training resource is available at the moment, including the e-learning programme.

Cllr Milkinder Jaspal asked when the panel will we get an update on management of attendance and to seek assurances that even in financially difficult times want to know we are on track. Cllr Jaqueline Sweetman suggested that scrutiny should be forensic and investigate what is not working and why.

Dawn Phillips advised the panel that the performance indicators contained within the strategy are deliberately aimed to protectively manage health and safety to prevent a failing and that we continue to measure failure which include accident and incidents, HSE involvement, number of success liability claims etc.

If we have HSE involvement the corporate health and safety team will support management to investigate the incident, as a breach of health and safety can be expensive (£124 an hour for HSE to come and investigate) if HSE identify a breach and come to investigate. Charlotte Johns advised that the number of near misses reported was incredibly low and that it is important to register near misses to avoid accidents happening next time.

Dawn Phillips advised that the new accident and incident software system iCASS allows managers to report in real-time and the corporate health and safety team to pick up any emerging issues promptly. Managers can now use the intelligence and can identify their own trends.

In response to further points raised panel was advised:

- That liability injury claims can also be an indication of improvement.
- The number of working days lost and related corporate indicators will be reported to Scrutiny Board next week, this is a good news story.

In relation to paragraph 9.3 briefings on the roles and responsibilities for managers and their work requirements to produce operational health and safety work plans. Panel was advised that no deadline has been agreed. Panel suggested that assistant directors can start this immediately.

Resolved:

1. That the proposed development and the implementation of a health, safety and wellbeing strategy to establish a clear vision for the further development of health and wellbeing policies, procedures and measures in the Council to ensure the full discharge of senior management responsibilities.
2. The work plans for the initial implementation of the strategy, which identify the key supporting activities at both corporate and business levels of the organisation.
3. That an update on performance and management of attendance is included in the work programme.