

Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 7 October 2015

Attendance

Members of the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz
Cllr Andrew Wynne (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Harbans Bagri
Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal
Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Payal Bedi

Cllr John Reynolds - Cabinet Member for City Economy

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Claire Nye	Chief Accountant
Sam Axtell	Consultation and Community Involvement Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

- | <i>Item No.</i> | <i>Title</i> |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Chairs Announcement
The Chair paid tribute to Councillor Thomas (Bert) Turner who recently passed away. The meeting stood for a minutes silence in his memory. |
| 2 | Apologies
There were no apologies for the meeting. |
| 3 | Declarations of interest
There were no declarations of interest. |
| 4 | Minutes of previous meeting (22.7.15)
That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair. |

5 **Matters arising**

Minute 5 - Future Money - making the most efficient use of financial resources

The panel commented on concerns about Agresso and the delays in payment of invoices to suppliers. The panel discussed the issue and requested a briefing paper and report to a meeting on 2.12.15 on the proportion of invoices paid within the target of 30 days and other relevant performance information.

The panel welcomed the report on income generation and the opportunity to consider the issue in detail.

6 **Future Money - Income Generation (Savings Proposals)**

Claire Nye, Chief Accountant, presented the report. The report provides an update on work done during the previous years and also going forward to generate income towards meeting the Council's budget savings target.

Chief Accountant explained that £26 million of additional income had been generated during the period 2011/12 to 2015/16. Chief Accountant explained that £14 million of additional income had been generated through Council Tax increases and changes to the local scheme. Chief Accountant explained that the building of each new house generated new income from council tax and New Homes Bonus grant. Over the period reported, New Homes Bonus totalled £3.8 million for the Council.

Chief Accountant noted that significant income is generated through fees and charges and that a report will be presented to Cabinet Resources Panel on 20 October with proposed changes for 2016/17.

Chief Accountant explained that the Treasury Management Team is supported by specialist advice from Capita. Recent discussions with Capita confirmed that the Council's strategy continues to make the right balance between minimising the cost of borrowing and maximising returns on investment.

The report also includes specific savings proposals for income generation detailed in Table 2 which had been considered by Cabinet on 22 July 2015. A report will be presented to Cabinet on 21 October which will consider further income generating proposals. The Council will continue to monitor the situation and explore opportunities to generate additional income.

The panel queried the policy as regards the setting of fees and charges and specifically if they are based on a flat rate increases or based on more detailed work.

Chief Accountant explained that a flat rate is not applied and that financial modelling is undertaken to assess the impact of different levels of percentage increase and the effect on demand.

The panel queried the challenge in achieving the outstanding savings target for 2016/17 of £5.1 million that had been reported to Cabinet in July and the progress made towards meeting this aim. Chief Accountant explained that significant progress had been made and that an update will be reported to Cabinet on 21 October 2015.

It was noted that there is uncertainty about the level of funding for 2016/17 and that the Government's Autumn Spending Review on 25 November will provide further information.

The panel queried the savings figure quoted in Table 1 – Savings proposals classified as income generating (2011/12 to 2015/16) and the reasons for the reduction in savings for the period 2015/16 compared to the period 2014/15.

The panel queried Table 2 - Savings proposals classified as income generating 2016/17 and the reason that no savings were expected in 2017/18 and 2018/19 for bus lanes phase 2.

Chief Accountant explained that in both instances the table shows the annual increase and these figures do not represent the cumulative change.

The panel discussed the need for more detailed information about the individual savings proposals. Chief Accountant explained that more detailed reports will support the report to Cabinet on 21 October.

Resolved:

The panel to receive a briefing paper and report on the performance of Agresso in paying suppliers to the panel meeting on 2.12.15.

7 **Employee Volunteering Scheme - progress report**

Cllr John Reynolds, Cabinet Member for City Economy, briefly outlined the background to the aims of the employee volunteering scheme. Cllr Reynolds commented on the benefits of volunteering to the individual and business objectives, and links to previous Government policy initiatives. Cllr Reynolds commented on the potential of volunteering to bring a range of benefits to the Council. For example, evidence suggesting the positive impact on employees volunteering, team building and overall business performance.

Sam Axtell, Consultation and Community Involvement Officer, updated the panel on progress of the scheme. Currently 14 people have taken part in the programme since the launch in April 2015. Consultation and Community Involvement Officer commented that concern was expressed by managers about the impact of the scheme and their willingness to release staff for up to two days a year, particularly for in small teams. In response to such concerns discussions have been had with managers and reassurance given that spaces could not be backfilled. Furthermore, a decision about releasing staff will be subject to approval of the manager and due consideration will need to be given to the needs of the service. There was an expectation that managers would be willing to sign up to the scheme.

The panel queried if there was an ideal target for the number of volunteers to be recruited in the first year and the work done to promote the scheme. Consultation and Community Involvement Officer referred to the report and range of work done to promote the scheme, for example, drop in sessions, meetings with teams. In addition, there have been discussions with employees to provide an opportunity to develop ideas and respond to interest in getting involved

Consultation and Community Involvement Officer welcomed ideas from the panel about what more could be done to promote the scheme and encourage more employees to become volunteers. Consultation and Community Involvement Officer explained that managers are being encouraged to discuss the opportunity for employees to get involved as part of the annual appraisal. Guidance and e-learning in relation to the annual appraisal process has been published for managers. In addition, a tab is to be added to the intranet system to provide a link to details about employee volunteering. The scheme has been promoted on the Council intranet, road shows and newsletters. A range of related work is being done to encourage employees to think of volunteering as part of their on-going learning and development.

The panel commented on the impact of releasing employees on the Council and considered this needs to be handled carefully. The panel welcomed the assurance that the schemes would not affect the delivery of frontline services.

The panel queried the benefit to voluntary sector groups of a scheme that would involve releasing council employees for only two days annually and also the response from the sector. The panel queried if consideration had been given to increasing the number of days, while accepting the need to ensure continued delivery of frontline Council services. The panel welcomed that a decision about releasing employees would be the line manager.

Consultation and Community Involvement Officer responded that there have been discussions with representatives of the voluntary sector about the scheme. The feedback from the sector has been positive about the scheme. Discussions had identified the gaps and skills – such as book keeping which a team could provide in a rolling programme of support to an organisation. Consultation and Community Involvement Officer gave an example of a team supporting Compton in the Park event. The support of volunteers received positive feedback from the charity. Discussions are on-going with colleagues to build links with voluntary sector organisations.

The panel expressed disappointment about the small number involved in the scheme, when considering the size of the Council workforce. The panel queried the reasons for the low response and what work had been done to investigate this issue further.

Consultation and Community Involvement Officer acknowledged that increasing the number of volunteers was a challenge as the idea does not appeal to everyone. Consultation and Community Involvement Officer commented on the benefits of volunteering and also that it will take time to build up numbers. The panel accepted the challenge to increasing numbers of volunteering at a time when services are working with reducing resources and therefore a need to set realistic recruitment targets. Consultation and Community Involvement Officer highlighted the benefits to employees joining the scheme. The panel discussed the wider benefits of volunteering to the Council and the City as a whole.

The panel discussed the possibility of using the staff awards scheme to recognise volunteers, as part of the long service award ceremony.

Resolved:

The review group to receive a progress report on the employee volunteering scheme to the panel meeting on 20.4.16.

The meeting closed at 18:41