

Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 4 April 2019

Attendance

Members of the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz
Cllr Payal Bedi-Chadha
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Ian Brookfield
Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Jane Stevenson (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Alison Shannon	Chief Accountant
Lisa Taylor	Head of Service Improvement
Claire Nye	Director of Finance
Gail Rider	Head of ICT

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following:

Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman

2 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations recorded.

3 **Minutes of previous meeting**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2018 were approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

6 **Universal Credit Update**

Scrutiny Officer advised that in response to a request for further information on the Law Student Representation Project about support given to residents a briefing paper on the scheme was shared with members.

Scrutiny Officer briefed the panel on outcome of discussion with Helen Winfield, Head of Community Support, and Darren Baggs, Assistant Director, Wolverhampton Homes, in response to concerns about mitigating the effect of reduced income for tenants in receipt of Universal Credit.

7 Customer Services Journey

Members of the panel met on 28 January 2019 for a presentation by Head of Customer Services to respond to the concerns raised by Councillors about the performance of the service and the next steps in the process to deliver improved customer services to the public. The minutes of the meeting are on agenda for discussion.

5 Treasury Management

Alison Shannon, Chief Accountant, presented the Treasury Management Strategy and Activity Monitoring Q3 2018-19 for information and comment. The Chief Accountant advised the panel that there has been no change in the risk appetite approach adopted by the Council.

The Chief Accountant outlined the key parts of the report and commented that there are no immediate concerns about the Council's investment but that there is a general apprehension about future investment trends due increased level of economic uncertainty due to Brexit.

The panel queried the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision statement (Appendix 4) and the implications of the change in method of calculation detailed in national guidance which states that the new maximum period of useful economic life should be reduced from 99 years to 50 years. The Director of Finance advised the panel of the implications for the Council.

The panel discussed the training needs for Councillors on the topic of treasury management and whether it should be offered to all Councillors.

The panel noted that specific training was being arranged by Member Development to recognise the responsibility on the panel to scrutinise the treasury management strategy document. The panel were advised that general finance training is included as part of the induction training being developed for Councillors.

The panel suggested that consideration should be given to offering ongoing specific training on treasury management to members of the panel to help meet their responsibilities. The panel receive quarterly treasury monitoring reports and have a responsibility to reassure itself that information presented has been properly scrutinised.

The Chair circulated a questionnaire prepared by Cipfa which provides a baseline measure to assess knowledge levels and to identify training and information needs. Claire Nye, Director of Finance, added that feedback from the panel on the budget information and finance training would be helpful in planning the content of future sessions. The panel were invited to share any specific information or concerns that they have which could be helpful in developing the content. The panel discussed if finance training should be mandatory for all Councillors.

The panel discussed the consideration given to the possible outcome of the Brexit negotiations. The panel discussed the volatility in the financial markets and requested that this issue is referred to a future meeting for further consideration. In particular, the impact of different Brexit scenarios on future interest rates changes.

The Director of Finance confirmed that there are ongoing discussions with the Council's financial advisers.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report.
2. The panel comments on specific financial training and support to be considered and reported back to a future meeting of the panel.

6 **Strategic Asset Management Strategy - Draft Minutes - 23.1.19**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2019 were approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

7 **Customer Services Journey - Draft Minutes - 28.1.19**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2018 were approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

8 **Customer Services Journey - Update**

Lisa Taylor, Head of Customer Services, gave an update on a presentation on the performance of the customer services given to the panel on 28 January 2019.

The Head of Customer Services outlined the changes in performance of the service, comparing the period March 2018 to March 2019. The Head of Customer Services commented on the reasons for the increase in demand and the impact of changes to garden waste collection service.

The Head of Customer Services commented on the new approach taken to respond to high demand activities and the benefits arising from changes such as the reorganisation of customer services, and regular performance reports given to affected services. The Head of Customer Services commented on the work done to build positive working relationships with service areas as part of a new approach to respond to high demand activities.

The Head of Customer Services commented on the range of current and future work being done improve current performance. The panel queried the plans to reassign customer services officers by primary skills sets. The Head of Customer Services advised the panel of plans to introduce a resolution team to deal with more complex calls in order to provide an improved service and reduce caller waiting times.

The panel queried the data on the call abandonment rate and whether there was a system similar to that used by private sector companies to advise a caller where they are in the waiting lists of people to be answered. The Head of Customer Services advised the panel that on average calls are typically abandoned after a 10-minute wait. The Head of Customer Services advised the panel that the current technology does not offer the option for a person to either be told how many people are already waiting in the queue to be answered or the option of them being called back when

they reach their number in the waiting list. The Head of Service is reviewing different customer service telephone systems in operation to see how the current system could be improved. The panel discussed the different type of calls received by the Council and different ideas for reducing the current waiting times.

The Head of Customer Services commented on the challenges facing the Council and the different levels of resourcing available compared to that available in the private sector reflecting their aim of wanting to improve their competitive edge and offer customers a better service.

The panel discussed the decision to cancel the call back system due to the problems caused.

The Head of Customer Services advised the panel that turnover rates have been low among customer services officers. A range of work is being done to improve working conditions and support customer services officers, by reviewing skill mix and identifying knowledge gaps. The Head of Customer Services advised the panel that in response to a peak in demand extra temporary staff can be recruited at short notice.

The panel discussed the important role that customer service officers have in representing the face of the Council in their contacts with the public and there is need to consider the level of funding needed to deliver a service that panel members want to see.

The panel discussed the level of staffing and the work done to provide extra resources to respond to expected spikes in customer demand and identify periods of peak activity.

The panel welcomed the report and the progress made.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

9

Exclusion of press and public

[To pass the following resolution: 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 items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information on the grounds shown below.]

Decision:

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 items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Resolved: The Panel approved the resolution.

10

Digital Print Progress Report

Gail Rider, Head of ICT, presented a report on progress made on the following actions below agreed by the panel at the meeting 28 November 2018.

- The competitiveness of the in-house printing service provision, versus external print providers
- A review of print jobs being procured by council staff outside of the internal service provision
- The current position of the refurbishment of the DPS kitchen area

The panel discussed the report and supported the recommendations for future action.

Resolved:

The panel welcome the proposals and agreed to receive a further report from the Head of ICT on progress to meeting in October 2019.