

Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 15 March 2017

Attendance

Members of the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz
Cllr Andrew Wynne (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Payal Bedi-Chadha
Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Louise Miles
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Ian Brookfield

Employees

Colin Parr	Head of Governance
Arif Sain	Equalities Manager
Julia Cleary	Systems and Scrutiny Manager
Claire Nye	Chief Accountant
Neil White	Scrutiny Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies**
There were no apologies given.
- 2 Declarations of interest (15 March 2017)**
There were no declarations of interest recorded.
- 3 Minutes of previous meeting**
That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 4 Matters arising**
There were no matters raised.

5 **Equality in Employment Monitoring Report**

Colin Parr, Head of Governance and Arif Sain, Head of Equalities and Diversity submitted two Equality in Employment Monitoring reports for 2015-16 and for October 2016-December 2016. Both reports provided an analysis of workforce data for their respective period for all staff excluding schools staff.

The Head of Governance advised that the reporting of equalities data throughout the council was now more robust and the reports showed the level of data that could be populated. This level of data was being considered by an internal working group on a regular basis so that patterns and trends could be ascertained at an early stage with corrective action taken where needed. It was further being considered by the Council's Equality Advisory Group at each of its meetings.

The panel agreed that it would like to see the future annual reports on the equality monitoring data at its meetings, with an analysis of the key issues extrapolated from the trends from the data and how the Council has dealt with these issues.

The panel raised a number of specific queries from the data in the reports. The Head of Equalities and Diversity advised that the Council's workforce equalities strategy was developed by looking at key issues such as those raised and working out the best approach whether reactive or proactive to best progress the issues. The Council was seeking to become an Excellent authority under the Local Government Association Equalities framework.

In response to a question, the Head of Governance stated (which has been confirmed post meeting by Human Resources) that all members of staff have the opportunity to have an exit interview.

The Panel queried the number of apprentices that the council employed and the council's policy on apprentices. It noted that there was currently a review group looking at this issue which would report its findings in the summer.

Resolved – that (A) the Annual Equality in Employment Monitoring Reports for future years be submitted to future meetings with an analysis of the key issues extrapolated from the trends within the data and how the Council had dealt with these issues, and

(B) the Panel be updated on the numbers of staff being dismissed on medical capacity and whether reasonable adjustments are explored where the employee involved has a disability.

6 **School Admission Appeals - Update on Service Level Agreements**

Julia Cleary, Scrutiny and Systems Manager updated the Panel on the concerns expressed by the Panel at its meeting on 16 November 2016 regarding the Council's School Admissions Appeals Clerking Service.

The Scrutiny and Systems Manager commented that in respect of the increase in fees for clerking services the Council incurred considerable costs in dealing with admission appeals on behalf of schools, particularly when hearings did not go ahead as planned and the fee income generated in 2016/17 had not been sufficient to cover the associated staffing and administrative costs.

The Scrutiny and Systems Manager advised that the 2017/18 fees had been set to generate a further £20,000 income based on anticipated fee volumes that should fully cover the costs of service provision. However, this would be monitored throughout the year.

In respect of the Panel's concern that this increase could discourage schools from buying into the service there was no evidence, at this stage, to suggest this as the council fees were very competitive compared to private legal firms.

Panel members considered which schools had received the most appeals and requested that they receive a briefing note on the percentage uptake of appeals for each of the schools that had received applications for appeals.

Concern was expressed as to whether the costs of appeals should be paid for by the Admissions Authority or the individual school by this would require a change in legislation.

Resolved that the Panel members receive a briefing note on the percentage uptake of appeals for each of the schools that had received applications for appeals.

7 **Budget Update and Review**

Claire Nye, Chief Accountant submitted information about the Council's finances that had been reported to either the Cabinet and/or Cabinet (Resources) Panel since the last update to the Panel.

The Chief Accountant drew the attention of the Panel to the nine reports focussing on the Council's finances that had been received by Cabinet and the three reports received by Cabinet (Resources) Panel, since the last update to the Panel on 16 November 2016.

The Chief Accountant advised that following the Government's announcement at the 2017 Spring Budget, a report was going to the next meeting of the Cabinet that would seek to adjust the Council's gross expenditure and income budgets to reflect an additional Adult Social Care funding in 2017/18 of £6.402 million.

The Panel agreed that the details of this funding changed be included within a future budget update to the Panel.

In response to a question, the Chief Accountant confirmed that when the Council received details of the other funding changes announced in the budget such as additional funding for work to reduce domestic violence, the effects of those for the Council would be reported to the Cabinet (Resources) Panel.

Resolved that details of the additional Government funding for Adult Social Care be included within a future budget update to the Panel.

- 8 **Outcome of the Local Government Association Finance Peer Review - update**
Claire Nye, Chief Accountant submitted a report detailing the progress that had been made on the action plan from the recommendations of the Local Government Association (LGA) Finance Peer Review final report of June 2016.

The Chief Accountant advised that the Peer Team's key recommendations to the Council were to:

- Review and refresh the strategic narrative for addressing the budget deficit so there is further clarity on aspirations, ethos and work streams.
- Revisit and review some of the assumptions and approaches in the financial strategy so that they better reflect and support the future ambitions of the Council.
- Review the Medium Term Financial Strategy risk on the Strategic Risk Register.
- Continue the work on developing the alignment, linkage and interdependency of the financial strategy and information with other plans and processes.
- Make the approach to capital programming more robust.
- Further consider the balance, emphasis and pace between the different components of the financial strategy going forward.

The Chief Accountant added that the action plan arising from these recommendations was approved by Cabinet on September 2016 and considered by the Panel at its meeting on 14 September 2016.

The Chief Accountant stated that work was continuing to progress the action plan. The LGA have been invited back in June 2017 to carry out a short review into progress since their report and to consider progress on the action plan. A further update would be provided to the Panel after that has taken place.

9 **Chair's Thanks**

The Chair thanked the members of the Panel and the Scrutiny Officer for all their hard work and contribution to the Panel during the Civic Year.

The Panel expressed its thanks to the Chair for the way she had chaired the Panel's meetings during the year.