

## **TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Monday, 3rd September, 2012

**Present:-** Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Shenton – in the Chair  
Councillors Clarke, Hambleton, Mrs Hambleton, Stringer and Waring

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received by Councillors Mrs Burgess, Councillor Fear, Councillor Mrs Heames, Councillor Howells, Councillor Lawton and Councillor Mrs Peers.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2012 were agreed as a correct record.

### **4. KIDSGROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE PARTNERSHIPS**

The Committee considered a briefing note regarding Kidsgrove Customer Service Centre Partnerships and the Police move into the Kidsgrove Customer Service Centre. This was in response to questions raised previously. The Council's Head of Customer and ICT Services was unable to attend the meeting; any questions raised by the Committee would receive a written response.

Members were concerned that the Police would not guarantee a period of time at Kidsgrove Town Hall, that there was no long term commitment to Kidsgrove and that if the Police suffered another tranche of cuts then they may move from Kidsgrove Town Hall. Members assumed that there was a breakout clause contained in the lease, but could not get confirmation of this from the Police. Members wanted to know how long the Police were committed to Kidsgrove for.

There was concern from Members that the accommodation was tight at the town hall. The accommodation was compared with Longton Town Hall, which had a big room with lots of partners. Members were concerned that there was no space to conduct integrated work with partners at Kidsgrove and that the Council would not be working any closer with partners than they were now. Members considered that the services being provided at the One Stop Shop were superficial. For example, the CAB had office space at the Town Hall but the service it offered was to make appointments for the public to see advisors in Newcastle. Members were of the opinion that the One Stop Shop needed to offer more substantive services.

Members questioned the unmanned exhibition for the consultation on the Site Allocations and Policies Local Plan and advised that it consisted of a pile of papers on a table. The Leader would take the comments regarding the unmanned exhibitions back to the appropriate officers.

Members felt that staff at the One Stop Shop required local knowledge and would benefit from training giving them a basic knowledge of Kidsgrove.

Members questioned when the agreement was to be signed for the Police to take up space within the Town Hall. The Leader would question the Local Policing Team Commander when meeting with him the next week.

**RESOLVED:** (a) That the information be received.

(b) That clarification be sought of how long the Police were committed to Kidsgrove for and whether there is a breakout clause contained in the lease.

(c) That the Head of Customer and ICT Service be advised that staff at the One Stop Shop would benefit from training giving them a basic knowledge of Kidsgrove.

(d) That the time frame for the Police moving into Kidsgrove Town Hall be ascertained.

**5. BUDGET PREPARATION, SCRUTINY AND APPROVAL PROCESS 2013/14**

The Committee received a report outlining the process by where the 2013/14 budget would be prepared, scrutinised and approved.

The budget setting process would take up the largest part of the workload for the Committee up to February 2013. Budget setting took place over a period of over twelve months and was an all year round process. The process got more challenging as time progressed and it was noted that the country was still firmly in a recession.

The report set out the role of the Committee and other Councillors and stakeholders. There would be a lot of participation from Directors, Heads of Service etc. A consultation exercise would be conducted and would be brought back to the Committee.

A 'scrutiny café' was being introduced as a new element to the budget setting process. This would be open to all elected Members and Cabinet members would be available, giving all Members an opportunity to ask questions. The whole budget setting process was being opened up to create transparency.

The Chair advised that the timetable was not produced by officers, it was driven by backbenchers. It was questioned what the plans were for public consultation. The Leader of the Council confirmed that there would be a public consultation whereby the public could explain how they thought budget options could be best implemented, and that the public could directly question the Cabinet. Parish and town councils would be visited and there was liaison with LAPs. The Communications department were looking at how best to deliver this and it could include use of the website, the Reporter, static displays and Bluetooth messaging. The Chair emphasised the importance of continuing to present the budget in plain English.

Cabinet offered their thanks to the Officers in the Finance department for their work on the budget setting process.

**RESOLVED:** (a) That the information be received.

(b) That Cabinet be informed the committee endorse the process set out in the report and agreed the scrutiny work programme timetable.

**6. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT PERIOD 2012/13 FIRST QUARTER**

The Committee received the Financial and Performance Management Report for the first quarter of 2012/13. The next report would be in the new outcomes based format.

Members noted that it was good to see a lot of targets being met. It was noted that Planning was not achieving its target but there were many reasons for this and the Planning Committee would keep a watching brief on the situation.

Members noted that the number of people accessing leisure and recreational facilities and the number of people visiting the museum were also not achieving their target. With regard to leisure facilities, Members considered that there needed to be a drive to attract schools into using leisure facilities again and there was concern that the schools would not return. An officer was to attend Kidsgrove Town Council in October to discuss this. The Committee considered that they could look at this issue in the New Year.

Members noted that expenditure totals for J2 had gone over budget. This was because there was not enough allowance in the budget for a cleaning contract; however the additional income J2 had achieved had covered the cost. Members questioned whether the cleaning contract accounted for all of the approximately £34,000 overspend. It would be a significant figure; if not all of the figure, then it would be a majority of it.

**RESOLVED:** That the information be received.

**7. FLEXIBLE WORKING FOR BOROUGH COUNCIL EMPLOYEES**

The Committee received an update report regarding the current position of flexible working/homeworking at the Council. Flexible working mainly applied to office based staff. It was enhanced in 2009 and there were now standard, enhanced and compressed flexible working schemes. There were different flexible working arrangements for field based staff which enabled resource to be kept where needed. For example, Streetscene employees work longer hours in the summer and shorter hours in the winter.

Homeworking had been introduced on a voluntary basis and was being kept under review by The Way We Work Sub-Programme Board. Homeworking was continuing to be promoted on a voluntary basis; making homeworking compulsory would constitute a change in contractual terms. With regard to the cost of homeworking, from the original budget of £40,000 there was £10,000 remaining. The benefits of homeworking were that it increased efficiency and supported management of attendance, in particular, when used as part of rehabilitation packages for employees returning to work following long term sickness absence.

Questions had been raised by Members regarding the £63,000 cost of implementing homeworking that had been offset by partners moving into the Civic Offices. It had been suggested that there was a saving in carbon emissions from employees

working from home. However, Members considered that partners would still be emitting carbon, and therefore the Council would not benefit from the £63,000 worth of savings. Members were in favour of homeworking/flexible working etc, but felt that the £63,000 figure had not been explained adequately. It was confirmed that the figure of £63,000 was an estimate that had been based upon 40% of staff working from home one day per week. Approximately £30,000 had actually been spent and therefore the Council was not spending as much of the money coming in from partners. The next step was to focus on recycling equipment employees had at home that they were not using, and to make it available to employees wanting to work from home. Officers noted that a lot of employees used their own equipment when working from home.

Employees regularly working from home could claim a supplement for electricity etc and the figure of £3.00 per week complied with HM Revenues and Customs as anything beyond this sum would become a taxable benefit. Members questioned whether this supplement was being claimed by employees working from home. Employees needed to work from home at least 60% of the working week before they could claim the allowance, most employees worked from home on an occasional basis and only one employee worked from home enough to be able to claim the allowance.

Members questioned how it was determined that employees could work from home. There were a whole range of points that managers needed to consider and an element of trust was required; there had only been one performance issue so far. Furthermore, there were no security issues with regard to the transportation of secure information, as employees did not need to physically take information home, as were able to access the Council's information systems remotely in a secure way.

Members stated their support of flexible working but considered that the Council should not go down the route of contractual homeworking. Other local authorities had given serious consideration to homeworking when they had moved into new buildings. It was considered that homeworking would be good for business continuity in the event of a major incident and it was also noted that homeworking would be beneficial for people with disabilities who may not be able to attend work in the Civic Offices. It was agreed by the Committee that regular updates were to be received regarding flexible working, and the next update would be expected in six months time.

**RESOLVED:** (a) That the information be received.

(b) That an update be provided to the Committee regarding flexible working in six months time.

## **8. PROCUREMENT OF THE REPORTER**

The Committee received a report regarding the outcome of a procurement process for the distribution and printing of the Council's newspaper the Reporter. The report was due to be considered by Cabinet on 19 September 2012.

In May 2009, Cabinet received a report which outlined the results of the procurement process for the print and distribution of the Reporter. Contracts were awarded to two separate companies, one to provide print services and the other to provide distribution services. These contracts were for an initial two-year period with the option for negotiations with the contract providers for two separate 12-month

extensions. These options were exercised with both providers. Therefore, the same print and distribution companies had been involved with the Council for the last four years. With distribution providers in particular, bookings needed to be secured significantly in advance of the dates required. To ensure that the Council could secure appropriate bookings both for 2013/14 and also for the following financial year, it was considered appropriate to carry out the procurement process twelve months in advance.

Some elements of the procurement process had been less than satisfactory, particularly with the print side where there had only been one respoondee. The decision had been made to press ahead with the distribution element of the procurement, with a separate process for the print procurement.

Members questioned if there would be an impact on staff at the present time. It was confirmed that only four issues of the Reporter a year had been produced for the last two years and there would be no impact on staff. Members also questioned why there was an edition of the Reporter in May and another in July. This was to cover the elections in May and to avoid the August holidays and promote the leisure activities available during the summer holidays.

A number of options to widen the tender for print were being considered. It was questioned how a tender was written. Quotes would be asked for different numbers of pages and then it would be determined what could be afforded from the available budget. Members questioned whether a smaller paper, rather than a broadsheet, would help to reduce costs. Several factors could affect cost and a smaller paper may not necessarily be cheaper.

Members questioned whether the number of advertisements had increased or decreased. Last year had been quite successful in terms of advertisements from partners and advertisers. However, it was noted that there was no longer advertising expertise in the Communications department, and as time went on this might have an effect. The economic climate should also be considered. It was noted that four publications a year adhered to the Recommended Code of Practice on Local Authority Publicity that was revised by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in 2011.

It was questioned by Members whether the Council might consider online delivery of the Reporter and reduce copies in the process, although it was not suggested to move away from the current format completely. There was a suggestion that they could be printed and left in one stop shops or doctor's surgeries. Newspapers in general were selling less copies and online delivery was something that could be looked at in the future. The Council was being followed on Twitter and it was necessary to explore different methods of communicating information.

Members noted that when the Reporter was first introduced it did win awards. However, the Reporter was still in the same format it was in when it was first produced and it was questioned whether it could be revamped.

**RESOLVED:** (a) That the information be received.

(b) That Cabinet and Officers be informed of the Committee recommendations regarding updating the format/design of The Reporter and to make The Reporter available in other media forms.

9. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee concurred that the items on the work plan were all on course.

**RESOLVED:** That the information be received.

10. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business considered.

**COUNCILLOR MRS ELIZABETH SHENTON**  
**Chair**