

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 24th January, 2013

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Hambleton, Cllr Mrs Heames, Cllr Jones, Cllr Mrs Peers and Cllr Stringer.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Committee was provided with a written update regarding the recruitment of the Town Centre Manager, as referred to in the minutes of the meeting on 19 November 2012. This consisted of a response by the Executive Director, Regeneration and Development to questions that had been asked about the recruitment process and the legal position of the Town Centre Manager role, and also the job advertisement, job description and person specification.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2012 be agreed as a correct record.

4. COUNCIL PLAN 2013-14 TO 2015-16

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Head of Business Improvement and Partnerships regarding the Council Plan 2013-14 to 2015-16.

The Council Plan document was not in a form to be considered by scrutiny, but the presentation informed the Committee of the work that had taken place so far on what had formerly been the Corporate Plan. The Council Plan would be considered by Cabinet in March. The changes that the implementation of the Council Plan would make would be seen in the first quarter of 2013/14 when the plan would be fully in place.

A review of the Performance Management Framework had been undertaken and a number of different groups had been involved in developing an outcome-focussed Council Plan, which would focus around priorities and not portfolios. The first phase of the development process included Cabinet members, Executive Management team, Wider Management Team and a working group from the Committee had considered the Council Plan too. Seventeen outcomes had been developed which were linked to the four corporate priorities, and the outcomes were more about long term improvements for the Borough rather than initial results. There was a new vision for the Council 'to create a borough that is prosperous, clean, healthy and safe', and a new corporate priority of 'becoming a Co-operative Council delivering

high quality, community driven services' had been added to the Council Plan (this replaced 'transforming our Council to achieve excellence').

The second phase would be to determine how to measure the identified outcomes. Nine workshops had been held in August and September 2012 which included stakeholders from across the Council. This allowed views to be shared on the information which was currently collected or how stakeholders could contribute in the future. One to one meetings had also been held with Officers and partners where relevant. Making the plan live would be the next step and it would be given consideration by Members through Cabinet and the scrutiny process. The plan would be used in service planning, with reporting templates to be developed and quarterly reporting on the outcomes (rather than by portfolios).

Members noted the seventeen outcomes linked to the Council priorities, and questioned how these were measurable. There would be more detailed measures under each outcome on performance management reports and there would be satisfaction and involvement measures around performance measures. The Committee would have the opportunity to challenge how outcomes were measured when they received the performance management report.

A definition was requested for the further efficiencies as referred to in the presentation. This was the ongoing process to find savings and better ways of working. Partnership working was also considered, and how this would look going forward. It would be dependent upon the area of work, but it may include organisations from the business community, other public sector agencies or third sector bodies. There were ongoing conversations, and areas of work were already focussed.

RESOLVED: That the information be received.

5. **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT TO END OF QUARTER THREE (DECEMBER) 2012**

The Committee received the Performance Management Report to the End of Quarter Three (December) 2012. The information had been organised into priorities, which would be developed further. It was a testament to Officers that the report had made the meeting due to the timing and pressures to bring the information together. Thanks were recorded to Officers, as the Committee had previously advised against receiving retrospective figures, which had been addressed. The figures reflected that a number of areas were a work in progress, with an improvement expected to be shown by the end of the year.

The Committee received an update from the Leader of the Council regarding the street and environment figures for quarter two. This was requested at the 19 November meeting and of the first tranche figures considered at the that meeting, in the case of litter, resources needed to be targeted towards retail and commercial areas, high obstruction housing, highways and recreation areas. In the case of detritus, resources needed to be targeted towards high obstruction housing, industry and warehousing and highways. Resources would be targeted to tackle problem areas for the next performance management report. It was noted that the figures for litter had improved for the quarter three report; they were still over target, but there was a reduction from the figures for the previous quarter.

The question was raised why the overall status of the four priority areas was a moderate indicator, when for some priority areas the majority of indicators were

positive. It was expected that an average of the figures was translated into an indicator and to get an overall positive one, there would need to be unanimous positive indicators for that priority. It was noted by Members that there was not a target for the violence with injury indicator (1.2 in the report), and questioned if this should be zero. The figures for this were not received as regularly as Officers would like, however to have a zero target may be unrealistic as these incidents did take place.

Members referred to point 1.8 in the report (the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting) and questioned how much recycled waste was rejected for being mixed up in the wrong containers. Due to the kerb side sorting system there was a nil rejection rate and a high standard of refuse was collected. There was inevitably an element of the wrong items being placed in the wrong bags, but on the whole the system worked well and there were no negative reports from the processing plants. It was questioned whether the poor weather of the previous Friday had an adverse affect on point 1.9 of the report (measure missed bin collections on all our routes). There had been a decision to suspend bin collections due to the weather on the afternoon of Friday 18 January, and the suspended collections would not be classed as being missed.

An increase in the average number of days lost per employee through sickness was noted by Members. It was important to give context to the figures, due to the size of the organisation there were two or three people off on long term sickness and these were being managed accordingly by Human Resources. It was important for individuals to return to work from long term sickness when they were fit to and the Council should be mindful and sensitive to their needs. Through the Human Resources Officers, long term sickness was managed well. It was necessary for short term sickness to be managed more closely to address employees having occasional days off; although short term absence was not considered to be a concern. It was questioned whether there were comparative figures for employee absence with neighbouring local authorities. The Borough Council was performing well and would probably be in the top quarter for absence figures in both Staffordshire and nationally. The target for absence for 2013/14 would be set as part of the Council Plan approval process and would be considered by Cabinet in March. The target remained quite demanding; it was comparatively low and had been decreased in the last three years.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Budget Management provided the Committee with an update for point 4.3 of the report (the percentage projected variance against the full year Council budget), the figures of which had been unavailable when the agenda was published. At the end of quarter three there was a positive variance of £7,000. From an expected spend of £5,235,000 there had been an actual spend of £5,228,000. Thanks were extended from the Leader on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Budget Management to the Council's finance team, as when considering the current economic climate, the positive variance was impressive.

The Leader had information relating to all moderate indicators in the report and this would be distributed to the Committee. The Chair would be attending February Cabinet to provide feedback on the budget setting process, but would also make comment on the Performance Management report as required.

RESOLVED: (a) That the information be received.

(b) That information regarding the moderate indicators in the report be distributed to the Committee.

6. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2013/14

The Committee received the Revenue and Capital Budgets 2013/14 report, which had been received by Cabinet on 16 January 2013. This was similar to the reports previously received by the Committee. Thanks were extended to the Executive Director, Resources and Support Services and to the finance team for the easy read of the report.

There was to be a minor amendment to point 6.4 for the final report. Point 6.4 currently stated that it was proposed to make no changes to the amounts held as a minimum balance. The reserves and balances had been reviewed and to reduce risk it was to be recommended to hold £1.3 million in the minimum balance. There was also one change to the savings and funding strategies being considered, which was reference S23 where a minor restructure in the Housing Team would create a £35,000 saving.

Members questioned if the £50,000 figure for the provision of waste bins to residents was standard. The figure was accurate as some bins break or split, were stolen, were over twenty years old and required replacement or there was natural wastage. There were 100,000 wheelie bins in the Borough with a cost of £20 to replace each one; £50,000 was a year on year figure for the provision of bins. It was further questioned whether residents were charged for replacement bins. If the replacement was needed through no fault of the resident (e.g. theft, natural wastage) they would not be charged. In the case of theft, they would need to inform the Police. If a sufficient explanation could not be provided for the need for a new bin, then a charge could be levied.

The achievements for 2012/13 contained within the report were questioned by Members, who considered the achievements were from 2011/2012 and nearing completion by the beginning of the current year. Elements of the achievements took place in the current year, with a number of areas commencing in 2011/12 and being completed in 2012/13. It had been noted previously that budget reports considered savings and figures, but did not specify the actions the Council were taking in relation to the budget. By providing a summary it gave context to the figures.

Members commended the drop in software pricing and noted the savings derived from franking machine maintenance no longer being required. A report would be received by Cabinet in February regarding the reorganisation of the corporate mail system which would create savings of £40,000 for the Borough Council, with approximately £6,000 of these coming from the removal of the requirement for a franking machine at the Civic Offices, as contained in the proposed contract.

Members asked whether there was confidence that the Council was not pricing itself out of the market with regard to room hire fees. The Leader considered that the figures were prudent and was comfortable that they were realistic to achieve or even exceed. Partners co-located within the Civic Offices were using the reception rooms which also attracted a fee.

RESOLVED: That the information be received.

6 (a) FEEDBACK FROM THE BUDGET SCRUTINY CAFÉ

Consideration was given to the Budget Scrutiny Café which took place on 17 January 2013. There was bad weather on 17 January and clashes with Parish Council

meetings were only identified the week before the cafe. It had been impractical to reschedule the event when it had already been carefully planned. Around ten councillors attended, which was less than anticipated. Officers still considered it to have been a worthwhile exercise which could be a stepping stone to build on, not only for budget scrutiny, but for other areas too. It was also good to see Officers who did not regularly attend scrutiny committee meetings. There had been an attempt to encapsulate the range of questions asked, in order that it might highlight an area to the Committee which required further scrutiny.

From the Cabinet perspective, the Leader advised it had been an interesting evening, with Cabinet members having the chance to hold worthwhile discussions with opposition Councillors. The Cabinet would be happy to take part in future cafés as it was a format that could clearly be built on. The Cabinet had tried to be transparent and the Leader thanked the Chair and the Committee for hosting the event. The Chair was pleased that members of all political parties attended.

The cost of holding the café was questioned and it was considered that the date was already scheduled for a Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, so some of the Officers who attended would have already been in attendance if it had remained as a committee meeting.

Members considered the summary of questions asked, in particular the staffing efficiencies and how these would be monitored and managed. It was confirmed that only the themes of the questions asked had been captured and if Members had been satisfied with the answers provided their questions had not been pursued further; which had been the case for the monitoring and managing of staffing efficiencies. There were two questions that required further answer and the responses were distributed at the beginning of the meeting, with the Members who had asked the questions to receive a copy too. However, it was advised that Heads of Service would be managing staffing efficiencies for their own areas. They would report to the Executive Management Team who in turn would report to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Budget Management. Any efficiencies would then come to Transformation and Resources for scrutiny. Conversations had taken place with Stafford Borough Council regarding waste and the potential to harmonise collection systems and conversations had also taken place with Stoke-on-Trent City Council regarding the disposal of waste. These were the only significant shared service conversations that had taken place. The Council were open to discuss the potential for working together with other local authorities. No response had been received regarding working together, but nothing was being ruled out.

RESOLVED: That the information be received.

7. **SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES 2013/14**

The Committee received a report that had been approved by Cabinet on 16 January 2013 regarding the Scale of Fees and Charges which were to be applied from 1 April 2013. The scale of fees and charges were reviewed annually and there was a charging policy which Heads of Service were encouraged to follow. A benchmarking exercise across district councils had been undertaken to ascertain charges compared with other councils. There would be consideration at the February Cabinet as to whether charges should be introduced for pre-planning advice.

Members noted there was to be a 2% increase in fees and charges at Jubilee 2 and questioned whether this would make the facilities inaccessible for some people. Many of the leisure charges were proposed to be frozen and the proposed £2 per

month fee increase for Jubilee 2 was not considered to be a disincentive. Membership fees would still be good value for money, competitive in comparison to local alternatives and it would still be an encouragement for people to lead a healthy and active lifestyle. When Jubilee 2 first opened the prices were purposefully set low against the market rate and it was also noted that the costs to run the facility had increased. There was a projected income surplus in 2012/13 and Members questioned whether the surplus would be recycled back into the community. It was built into the Jubilee 2 business plan that the operating costs should be in a break even position in three years. Until a break even position was achieved the Council would provide a subsidy, meaning any surplus income was helpful. The Leader concurred that advice had been sought from the Executive Director, Operational Services and the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services and the Leader had been assured the increase was not a disincentive. Costs were required to be met and it was necessary to be realistic as the Council subsidy could not continue indefinitely. The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure was informed of membership figures and usage numbers which would be monitored closely. The figures for leisure usage for the separate centres were captured in the Performance Management Report and Members could see the figures for each one. Members noted it was always in the business plan to review the prices and considered that the fees were the right price to encourage members of the public to use the facilities. It was necessary for income levels to increase year on year to meet costs and to close the gap to running costs breaking even.

There was to be an increase in the price for a cemetery interment for individuals over 16 years old and for the cremation of individuals over 16 years old. Bereavement services had been invested in heavily over recent years with the new cemetery at Keele and improvements at the crematorium. It was now necessary to build up a fund for the replacement of key equipment when it was required. New cremators had been installed around two years previously at a cost of just under £1 million and although would not need replacing for a minimum of ten years, a fund for their ultimate replacement was required.

It was noted by Members that there was a significant increase in the refundable deposits for circuses and fairs and asked whether this was due to the abuse of sites in the past. It was an incentive to discourage the users of the sites from leaving a mess, but it was also pointed out that the Borough charged less than other local authorities. The cost of M.O.T.s at the depot had been reduced to seek to grow custom in this area, and it was expected that an increase in the number of M.O.T.s would be seen.

RESOLVED: That the information be received.

8. DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

It was resolved that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of an appendix to the Scales of Fees and Charges 2013/14 report, because it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

9. SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES 2013/14

There was discussion of an appendix to the Scale of Fees and Charges 2013/14 report.

10. WORK PLAN

The work plan for the Committee was discussed. All items were on course and their progress as detailed on the work plan was agreed.

The Constitution Working Party was to meet on 28 January 2013 to discuss and agree a questionnaire which was to be distributed to Members regarding the saying of prayers at meetings. It was expected that the responses would be received and could be discussed at the next meeting of the Committee on 7 March 2013.

It was also noted that the Local Government Association work regarding the modernisation of the Post Office Network had still not been published. The Executive Director, Resources and Support Services had been chasing the publication date for the report, which was expected to be the end of February or early March. The Committee had agreed to await the publication of this work to avoid duplicating work.

RESOLVED: That the information be received.

11. **URGENT BUSINESS**

Members requested further discussion of the information that had been distributed regarding the Town Centre Manager.

Members questioned the recruitment process and how the successful applicant had been selected. A response had been requested from the Executive Director, Regeneration and Development to questions that had been asked relating to the recruitment for the Town Centre Manager. The response supplied had been distributed and any further questions would need to be addressed to the Town Centre Partnership. The Town Centre Partnership was a Community Interest Company and the Town Centre Manager's employer. The Chair clarified that Newcastle Borough Council Officers had not been involved in the recruitment process and the Community Interest Company was a separate body. There were no further questions from Members.

COUNCILLOR MRS ELIZABETH SHENTON

Chair