

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 7th March, 2013

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

1. APOLOGIES

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January, 2012 be agreed as a correct record subject to Councillor Stringer being noted as present.

4. FLEXIBLE WORKING FOR BOROUGH COUNCIL EMPLOYEES

Consideration was given to a report updating Members on the current position in regard to flexible/homeworking by officers.

The number of officers working from home had increased over time, with at present, 182 officers being able to access remotely. It was stated that the number of log-ins did increase during inclement weather.

On 14 March, there would be a 'work from home' day for all of those on the scheme. This was to test out the system for business continuity should the need arise. The test would also include a period whereby the system would switch to Kidsgrove.

Resolved:- That the information be received.

5. UNIVERSAL CREDIT/WELFARE REFORM

Members received a presentation from the Council's Head of Revenue and Benefits, David Baker on Universal Credit/Welfare Reform. A copy of the presentation was handed to Members at the meeting.

A discussion followed with questions being raised by Members:

Members were advised that the anticipated collection rate for 2013/14, with the updated system would be 98%.

The officers in the Revenues and Benefits Section were facing a huge task with the changes. They had agreed to work extra hours where possible.

A request was made that the information, contained within the presentation be made available to all sixty Members of the Council.

Once the implementation of the changes was underway, Mr Baker would report back to this Committee with any issues that may require scrutiny.

Members were advised that there was a national guide on the Reform which could be localised and given to Members for reference.

- Resolved:-**
- (a) That the information be received.
 - (b) That all Members receive information on this issue.
 - (c) That an information sheet be produced for Members.
 - (d) That a report on the implementation of the changes be brought to a future meeting.

6. CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP

The Chair gave a verbal report to Members on the current position regarding the Constitution Working Group.

One of the elements that the Working Party has been tasked with is to consider the saying of prayers at Full Council. A questionnaire was issued to all elected Members and responses were collected on the evening of the Full Council meeting on 27 February 2013 with a few received later that week.

Eighteen responses were received, giving a return rate of 30%. A simple breakdown for each question is as follows:-

What did those responding consider to be the start of each Full Council meeting?

- After prayers have been said and the announcement of the first agenda item – 7 (38%)
- The entrance of the Mayoral party and prayers being said signified the start of the meeting – 11 (62%)

When asked about whether a reasonable approach would be a district session for prayer 15 minutes prior to each Full Council meeting, the responses were similarly split:

- Yes – 9 (50%)
- No – 7 (39%)
- Not answered or no opinion – 2 (11%)

Regarding the effect of a decision being taken about prayers, which the respondent was not happy with extracted a varying response:

- No effect – 11 (62%)
- Withdrawing prayers at 7pm would have a negative effect – 3 (16%)
- Keeping prayers at 7pm would have a negative effect – 2 (11%)
- Not answered – 2 (11%)

Finally, suggestions for other elements for the Working Party to consider included:

Finally, suggestions for other elements for the Working Party to consider included:

- Any minutes silences to be held after the apologies.
- Prayers should not be confined to Christian themes.
- Established Case Law.
- Human Rights
- Secular Principals of Government
- Working Group established to look at prayer content.

The Constitution Working Party's next meeting is on Monday 11 March and feedback from the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be considered.

In addition, the Constitution would require further updating to include areas such as the Staffing Committee, Cabinet Panels etc.

The issue of appointing substitute Members for Committees during periods of long absences would also be considered. This could not be done for Regulatory Committees however.

Resolved:- That the information be received and the comments noted.

7. **WORK PLAN**

Members considered the Work Plan for this Committee. There should be an update on the Post Office network for the May meeting. In addition, the Council plan went to the meeting of the Cabinet last night therefore at the next meeting of this Committee there should be more detail.

Resolved:- That the information be received.

COUNCILLOR MRS ELIZABETH SHENTON
Chair