

# TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 2nd September, 2013

**Present:-** Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Shenton – in the Chair

Councillors Bannister, D Becket, Mrs Burgess, Hambleton,  
Mrs Hambleton, Jones and Taylor.J

Portfolio Holder, Cllr Mike Stubbs

Officers John Sellgren, Chief Executive  
Kelvin Turner, Executive Director Resources and Support  
Services  
Jeanette Hilton, Head of Customer and ICT Services  
Phil Jones, Head of Communications  
Simon Sowerby, Business Improvement Manager  
Martin Stevens, Democratic Services Officer

## 1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Howells, who was away on holiday. It was noted that the Leader had informed the Chair that he would be unable to attend the meeting.

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

## 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2013 were confirmed as a correct record.

## 4. UK MAIL - CORPORATE POSTAL SERVICES REVIEW

The Chair stated that UK Mail had been requested as an item for the work plan at the last meeting. The Head of Customer and ICT Services stated that in February, Cabinet had approved the appointment of UK Mail, subject to the satisfactory outcome of a pilot exercise of six months duration. There had been a few issues at the start of the pilot but most of these issues had been resolved within the pilot period or were being addressed through changes and updates in working methods by the provider and the authority. UK Mail completed the sorting but the final delivery was completed by Royal Mail. The Business Improvement Manager stated that Royal Mail did not enter a bid for the contract, due to the projected volume not being large enough.

A Member commented on the data incorporated in the report stipulating that an average could be misleading and that it was the spread of data which was important. There had been some cases when mail had taken too long to arrive, this was of a particular concern for time critical post. Some Members were in agreement that there had been cases when time sensitive post had taken too long to arrive. The Head of Customer and ICT Services stated that the final part of the delivery was completed

by Royal Mail, which meant that the delay was not always caused by UK Mail. The Council had worked with UK Mail when they were aware of delivery being delayed. When the Council had looked into the delayed delivery the hold up had often been the fault of Royal Mail rather than UK Mail.

Members asked what the procedure would be if UK mail were not accepted as the contractor after the pilot had been completed. In response, the Business Improvement Manager stated that they could go to the second provider – Secured Mail. The other alternative would be to go back out to the market place through an open tender process or through the GPS (Government Procurement Service) framework. There were however departments within the Council which had seen an improvement in service since the switch to UK Mail, with the feedback being generally good across the Council and a reduction in problems as the pilot had proceeded. The Executive Director for Resources and Support Services stated that before UK Mail were awarded the contract, the Council had quite a number of issues with Royal Mail.

A Member asked if there was an opportunity to join up with the other public sector partners that worked at the Council, such as the Police and Social Services. In response the Head of Customer Services and ICT stated that the Council went into the Procurement process as a partnership with other local Councils but this still did not attract Royal Mail. She confirmed that the contract with UK Mail was for two years after the initial pilot. The Business Improvement Manager stated that when the contract ended there was an intention to have a formal collaboration with other authorities to obtain the best deal.

The Chair stated that the Scrutiny Committee could look at the Council's mail arrangements when the contract came up again for renewal.

## **5. KEELE GOLF COURSE**

The Executive Director of Resources and Support Services stated that the overall net cost of Keele Golf course had gone down but income was only slightly up. Season ticket sales were on the increase. The figures within the report showed a net operating cost of £17,237 from the period of May to July, plus £6,430 one off costs. Had the Council not maintained continuity of the course operations, significant holding costs would have been incurred in securing the site. These had been estimated at approximately £10,000 a month, the cost to the Council would have therefore been approximately £30,000. The Council were currently engaged in a tendering process to find a contractor for the long-term management and maintenance of the course. Tenders had been returned on the 19 August and were currently being evaluated. The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee would be considering the tendering process at its meeting on 24 September 2013, with a final report being presented to Cabinet on 16 October. A Member stated that they hoped when the contract had been awarded that the Council would not have to subsidise the course any further.

Members asked about the risks associated with a contractor not being able to make a profit from the course. The Business Improvement Manager stated that it was 5 - 25 year lease and there was always the risk of a contractor going to the wall. As part of the evaluation process the Council was trying to understand the business model to reduce this risk.

-

A Member asked if there would be flexibility within the contract to allow the contractor to use the buildings and facilities for other purposes to improve their profits. The Business Improvement Manager stated that one of the tender questions was about added value and there would be a degree of flexibility as to how the course could be operated.

## 6. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT TO END OF QUARTER ONE (JUNE) 2013

The Executive Director for Resources and Support Services stated the budget for the General Fund for 2012/13 had been originally set in February 2012 and amounted to a net total of £15,383,940. The eventual outturn for the year was a positive variance against the figure of £3,024. Whilst there had been some adverse variances against some budget heads, these had been offset by positive variances against others. The revenue budget position at the end of the first quarter was at a break-even position for the general fund budget. He was pleased to report that since the agenda had been despatched a 14<sup>th</sup> dividend from the administrators of the bank that had collapsed had been received of just over £420,000 and the indications were that the Council would receive the full amount. A Member stated that the Council was fortunate that the Bank was a British subsidiary of an Icelandic Bank. They asked whether retrieving such a high percentage of the money was down to the efficiency of the administrators or the pressure from the Local Government Association. In response the Executive Director for Resources and Support Services stated that there had been an equal contribution from both organisations. The administrators had done an excellent job of selling off the Mortgage Group.

The Chief Executive reported that the Performance Management Report was being presented in a new format. Some of the changes in format were as a consequence of recommendations resulting from the Member Working Group. He acknowledged the hard work of the working group. The new version recognised that the Council worked with partners and was focused around the well-being of the community. The intention was to further develop the format of performance reports ensuring suitability and clear communication of progress with outcomes for the Council and partner agencies. One area that still needed to be completed was the identification of some Police targets. He was hopeful that the Police Commissioner could attend a future Cabinet meeting and that a Police Plan could be developed for the Borough area.

A Member, in reference to outcome 1.2.3, "Reduction in incidents of violence with injury," stated that the title was misleading as the number referred to the total incidents rather than the total reduction. He was pleased that the Police had given some performance statistics for the report and was hopeful that this would continue in the long-term.

In reference to outcome 1.3.5, "the level of air quality," a Member stated that Kidsgrove was of a particular concern. There was a discussion about the level of detail regarding air pollution contained within the report. Consideration was given to having extra information within an accompanying guidance note.

Members agreed that with some of the outcomes there would be a benefit in Members knowing which other organisations were responsible for achieving the outcome. The Chief Executive agreed that a guidance note containing this information would be useful, but if this information was contained within the report it could become overly crowded.

In reference to indicator 1.5.1, "Town Centre Vacancy Rate," Members were in agreement that businesses needed to be encouraged into the Town. It was important for Planning Officers to be aware of the difficulties facing business and the changing face of Town Centres across the country. The Town Centre Vacancy Rate was recommended as an outcome for the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor and evaluate.

A Member in reference to outcome 2.1.4, "The Level of NEETS," asked if the data would be available in quarter 2. The Chief Executive assured Members that this should be the case, subject to the data being provided by the relevant partner agency. Members also requested that an alternative to the acronym NEETS be used in future reports.

In reference to outcome 2.2.6, "Number of hours worked by volunteers in council co-ordinated activities (museum)," Members requested that voluntary activity contributing to operational services across the Borough be recorded.

A Member referring to outcome 2.3.5 questioned the definition of a "minor adaptation" and in reference to outcome 2.4.6, the definition of a "Business Birth." The Chief Executive agreed that the language for business birth needed to be changed and the definition of a minor adaptation could be included in the proposed guidance note.

In reference to outcome 3.1.1, a Member asked how many parks in the Borough did not have Green Flag Status. The Chief Executive in response stated that this was information which could be contained for the proposed guidance note.

With reference to outcome 3.2.2, "Number of people visiting museums" and outcome 3.2.3, "Number of people attending local theatres" a Member suggested that the plural, 's' should be removed. There was a further discussion about who the museum and theatre were trying to attract.

Members were keen to ensure that the cardiac rehabilitation programme was working well at Jubilee 2. In response the Scrutiny Officer stated that this was an area within the remit of the Council's Health Scrutiny Committee, which had been considered by them in the past and would be again addressed in the future.

The Scrutiny Officer, in reference to outcome, 4.2.4, "Items raised by Members on the Scrutiny Work Programme," reported that the new work programmes would mean that this data could now be recorded and would be available for the next report.

On outcome, 4.3.3, 'Average number of days per employee lost to sickness,' the Chief Executive stated that long-term sickness numbers had caused the drop in performance. He was however pleased to report that two Officers from Democratic Services had now returned from long-term sick leave.

On outcome 4.4, 'Percentage of requests resolved at first point of contact,' it was pointed out that the target should read, "Good is High."

**RESOLVED:**

A) That the Committee recommends that the Police Commissioner be informed of the use of Police data in the Council's Performance Management Reports and request

whether there has been any target setting for indicators by the Police Commissioner or an intention to do so in the future.

B) That the Committee recommends that Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitor and evaluate the Town Centre Vacancy Rate.

C) That an alternative to the acronym 'NEET' and 'Business Birth' be used in future reports.

D) That voluntary activity contributing to operational services across the Borough be recorded.

E) That a guidance note be proposed containing information such as the other partner organisations involved in achieving progress of outcomes, general background information and definitions of key phrases contained within the Performance Management Report.

F) That the minor corrections to the report as detailed in the minutes be implemented.

## **7. BUDGET CONSULTATION 2013 AND THE BUDGET REVIEW GROUP**

The Portfolio Holder presented a report on the Budget Review Group. He summarised the items discussed at their last two meetings. With respect to the funding/grants review the main purpose was to discover the most efficient way to awarding funds to community groups and to make the best of the funds. He reported that he was always looking at the Capital Budget to make the best use of the money available.

The Head of Communications presented a report on the Budget Consultation. A budget consultation had been carried out in 2012 and so the consultation aimed at shaping spending priorities for the 2014/15 financial year could build on the work carried out in 2012. The Portfolio Holder stated that he was looking forward to the Budget Scrutiny Café planned in the future.

## **8. WORK PLAN**

The Chair stated that a new item had been added to the work programme, "Portfolio Holder (s) Question Time." The Scrutiny Officer stated that this was an opportunity for the Committee to question the Portfolio Holders on their priorities and work objectives for the next six months and to address any issues or concerns that they may be facing within their portfolio. It was also an opportunity for the Portfolio Holder to request Scrutiny support in any of the areas they were currently working on and to give a statement to the Committee. The item therefore helped to fulfil Scrutiny's role in holding the Executive to account but was also working with the Executive in a critical friend framework and in the development of future policy. The Chair stated that it would be helpful for the Portfolio Holder to receive questions from Members in advance.

## **9. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business within the meaning of Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

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