

CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Monday, 15 July, 2013 at 6.00 p.m. in a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Panel Members Present

Councillor S. Coughlan (Chair)
Councillor J. Rochelle (Vice-Chair)
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul
Councillor G. Illmann-Walker
Councillor D. Shires

Portfolio holders present

Councillor C. Towe - Resources

Officers Present

Paul Gordon, Head of Business Change
Carol Williams, Head of Programme Delivery and Governance
Helen Dudson, Manager of Corporate Performance Management
Lloyd Haynes, Senior Finance Manager
Ross Hutchinson, Lead Accountant
Craig Goodall, Committee Business and Governance Manager

213/13 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

214/13 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

215/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

216/13 MINUTES

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June, 2013, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

217/13 CORPORATE PLAN

The Panel were presented with a draft copy of the Council's Corporate Plan 2013/14 to 2015/16 (annexed).

The Manager of Corporate Performance Management highlighted the draft Corporate Plan to Members, including:-

- The five themes contained in the Plan;
- The working smarter objectives;
- Links to the sustainable community strategy, health and wellbeing strategy and community and safety plan.

The following were the principal points from the ensuing question and answer session:-

- It was explained that the working smarter objectives were set to create greater efficiency in the way the Council operated. Working smarter was designed to empower staff to act and solve problems, within their remit, as soon as possible;
- Working smarter also sought to engage staff in the way the changes to working practices were developed. This had worked well with the development of increased partnership working regarding performance management;
- Members were keen to ensure that partners empowered staff to act, engage and share information without the need to refer issues to more senior staff. The Manager of Corporate Performance Management assured Members that this was taking place. A good example was of the partnership group working to tackle problems with sex workers. Here, a wide partnership approach, including members of the local community, was working towards tackling this longstanding problem;
- Under the “supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work” priority, Members felt that a focus on attracting high value jobs and careers to the Borough should be included;
- It was felt that the importance of good quality housing should be included under the “Improving health and wellbeing, including independence for older people priority”;
- A request was made for data that informed the statement that Walsall was in decline before the recent recession;
- Members requested the final paragraph of the “Support for delivery” priority be redrafted to make it more explicit who was responsible.

Resolved

That:

- (1) the importance of good quality housing should be included under the “Improving Health and Wellbeing”; including independence for older people” priority;**
- (2) under the “supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work” priority, Members felt that a focus on attracting high value jobs and careers to the Borough should be included;**
- (3) the final sentence of the “Support for Delivery” priority be redrafted to make it more explicit who was responsible;**
- (4) the Panel be provided with an explanation of why Walsall was considered to be in economic decline before the recent recession;**

and;

(5) the report be noted.

218/13 DRAFT REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN 2012/13 (PRE-AUDIT)

Members considered the draft revenue and capital outturn position for the year ended 31st March, 2013, subject to external audit for services within the remit of the Panel.

The Senior Finance Manager highlighted that there had been a revenue underspend of £1.032 million (net use of earmarked reserves/carry forward) and a capital underspend of £473,000 (net approved carry forward in 2013/14).

Following a question, it was explained that agile working was a term used to describe flexible working patterns such as hot desking and working from home. Members were informed that agile working was increasing productivity in the Benefits Team.

Agency staff had been employed in the Benefits and Customer Service Teams to create capacity for medium to long term improvements. Part of the additional spend in the Benefits Team had been created by bringing the Benefits call centre back in house.

External funding for working smarter had been received from the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership.

Further information was requested on the following matters:-

- Review of the single person discount scheme;
- Purchase of performance management software;
- Deprived area funding grant;
- ICT external income;
- Resources redundancy payments, including the number, service area and grades of staff involved, redundancy payment details and information on any confidentiality agreements entered.

Resolved

That:

(1) further information be provided to Members on the following matters:-

- (a) review of the single person discount scheme;**
- (b) purchase of performance management software;**
- (c) deprived area funding grant;**
- (d) ICT external income;**
- (e) resources redundancy payments, including the number, service area and grades of staff involved, redundancy payment details and information on any confidentiality agreements entered.**

and;

(2) the report be noted.

219/13 WORKING SMARTER PROGRAMME

The Panel were updated on the outcome of activities which formed part of the refreshed working smarter programme. The Head of Programme Delivery and Governance reported on the working smarter programme themes, sponsors and high level outcomes. She explained that the asterisks on the programme diagram represented areas that had an impact on health and wellbeing.

The Head of Business Change explained that the working smarter board took oversight of the programme.

The portfolio holder (Resources) commented that the Council needed to save around £100 million over the next five years and the working smarter programme was the Council's way of achieving this.

The Chair commented it is very important that the Panel took oversight of the programme. With this in mind, he suggested that the Panel considered each theme in turn at future meetings to consider how the working smarter objectives were being met. He suggested that this started at the next meeting with the "Supporting business to thrive and the supporting local people to work" theme and how this was working to achieve the "reduce the number of people dependent upon out of work benefits" outcome. This was agreed by the Panel.

Resolved

That:

- (1) the Panel consider progress against achieving the working smarter themes during 2013/14;**
- (2) the Panel consider progress against theme 1, "Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people to work" and the outcome to "reduce the number of people dependent upon out of work benefits" at their next meeting;**
and;
- (3) the report be noted.**

220/13 IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM WORKING GROUP

The Panel reviewed establishing the Working Group to consider the impact of welfare reforms.

The Chairman explained he wished to produce a public report on the impact of welfare reforms in the Borough. He explained that he would be requesting data from Citizens Advice and Housing Associations about how the changes had affected residents and demands on their services.

Regarding membership, Councillor Rochelle requested to be appointed to the Working Group and the Panel agreed to invite a representative from each of the remaining Scrutiny and Performance Panels.

Resolved

That:

- (1) Councillor J. Rochelle be appointed to the Working Group;**
and;
- (2) each Scrutiny and Performance Panel be invited to nominate one Member to participate in the Working Group.**

221/13 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Resolved

That:

- (1) the Forward Plan be noted;**
and;
- (2) the Work Programme 2013/14 be noted.**

222/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the time and date of the next meeting was 6.00 p.m. on 12 September, 2013.

The meeting closed at 6.44 p.m.

Signed:

Date: