

CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday, 28 November, 2013 at 6.00 p.m. in a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Members in attendance

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

Portfolio holders in attendance Councillor M. Bird - Leader
Councillor C. Towe - Resources

Officers Present

Rory Borealis - Executive Director (Resources)
Jamie Morris - Executive Director (Neighbourhoods)
Keith Stone - Assistant Director (Neighbourhoods)
Susan Wright - Electoral Services Manager
Glenys Ensor - Principal Committee Business and Governance Manager
Ross Hutchinson - Lead Accountant
Craig Goodall - Committee Business and Governance Manager

242/13 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence for the duration of the meeting.

243/13 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

244/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

245/13 MINUTES

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting which took place on 22 October, 2013, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

246/13 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2014/15 FOR RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

The Panel considered the portfolio plan for future service delivery along with the approach being taken to delivering service improvement and cost efficiency for the resources portfolio.

The Portfolio Holder (Resources) introduced the portfolio plan and the draft revenue and capital programme for his portfolio.

The Panel discussed the draft budget and asked a number of questions. Below is a summary of the topics discussed:-

Draft capital programme

Social Care IT systems review and enhancement

Following a question, the Leader explained that investment was required to replace the existing Social Care IT system with a different software package that had increased compatibility with the systems used by other Local Authorities.

Replenish smarter workplaces capital pot

The Executive Director (Resources) explained that this money would be used to complete the upgrade of the Human Resources IT system.

Revenue budget

Reduce participation in Recruitability Scheme

A Member expressed concern about the reduction of spending in this area. The Portfolio Holder (Resources) clarified that he was supportive of the scheme and had been mindful to retain some placements but a reduction was necessary to assist in making savings.

My money, my home, my job

A Member asked how many staff redundancies could be expected following the customer focussed redesign in this area? The Executive Director (Resources) explained that primarily management and support roles would be reduced with front line resources maintained.

Efficiencies through stopping use of ATAR, the electronic time recording system

A Member expressed concern regarding the proposal to cease use of the current electronic time recording system used by staff because the loss of the system could result in a loss of management control and be open to abuse.

The Portfolio Holder (Resources) explained that the system was not suitable for the range of roles across the Council. With this in mind, he felt that managers should be given discretion to manage their teams and choose their own methods of monitoring working hours. ATAR was not fit for purpose and required substantial behind the scenes management by administrators across the organisation.

The Executive Director (Resources) re-assured the Panel that time keeping of staff would still take place through systems that met the needs of respective teams. He explained that ATAR required a lot of hidden administration across the organisation.

The Leader explained that he was not comfortable with the proposal and felt that an electronic time recording system should be maintained, even if this required updating the existing system.

Print and Design

Members on the Panel considered the proposed closure of the in-house print and design unit and reflected that the service had been seeking improvements for a number of years.

Resolved

That the Resources portfolio plan and draft revenue and capital budget for 2014/15 be noted.

247/13 FINANCIAL PLAN 2014/15 TO 2018/19: DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR CONSULTATION

The Panel considered all portfolio plans for future service delivery, along with the draft revenue and capital budgets for 2014/15.

The Portfolio Holder (Resources) explained that the Council was on a five year journey where it was required to save between £104 million to £120 million. By the time this journey was complete, Walsall Council would have reduced its annual spending by £200 million.

Whilst respecting the current financial situation, the Chair expressed concern as he felt it was unsustainable to keep cutting budgets and felt that Local Government was bearing the brunt of the Government's cost savings.

The Leader reported that he shared the same concerns and he fed back this view to Government on a regular basis.

The Panel discussed the draft budget. They noted the recommendations made by the Health and Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panels and asked a number of questions. Below is a summary of the topics discussed:-

Children's Services - review of targeted youth support, targeted careers information advice and guidance services

The Panel was re-assured that consultation would take place on this proposal.

Children's Services - expiry of spurgeons contractable family support

The contract had now expired, some saving had been achieved.

Children's Services - corporate parenting; internal residential; review of night time provision in homes

Members requested further information on this proposed saving.

Regeneration and Transport - asset management - service re-design and re-structure

This saving would be achieved through staff savings.

In closing the item, the Panel debated the impact of the savings so far on front line services. Members noted that whilst the impact was minimal in some areas, other services had been reduced.

Resolved

That:-

- (1) the recommendations of the Health and Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panels be noted;**
- (2) further information be provided to Members regarding the review of night time provision in homes under the Children's Services portfolio;**
and;
- (3) the financial plan 2014/15 - 2018/19 be noted.**

248/14 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2013/14

The Panel considered the recommendations on changes to polling districts and polling places.

The Electoral Services Manager explained the purpose of the recent review to Members, along with proposed amendments to the current arrangements. She highlighted three submissions that had been received from Members of the public and Councillors on the proposals.

Following a question, the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that only one polling station was changing. She explained the process that was undertaken to publicise the changes to voters. Members suggested that a sign should be erected on polling day on the site of the previous polling station to re-direct voters should they visit the old location by mistake.

The Panel discussed the benefits and disadvantages of using schools as polling stations. Members noted that whilst some schools did not welcome the disruption, others were happy to welcome residents onto their facilities.

Resolved

That the proposed changes to polling districts and polling places be submitted to Council for approval.

249/13 DELIVERY OF THE WORKING SMARTER PROGRAMME: THEME 3 - CREATING SAFE, SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

The Panel considered the activity taking place with delivery of Theme 3 of the working smarter programme. The theme title was "Creating safe, sustainable and inclusive communities".

The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) introduced activity taking place under this theme. The theme focussed on five key areas with detailed work taking place within each heading. Members were provided with an overview of each area and asked questions.

Waste management

The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) reported that a working smarter review was currently being undertaken in this area. He highlighted that activity so far had focussed on analysing customer service calls received concerning uncollected bins. Further work was to be undertaken to understand this demand in more detail as initial analysis suggested that missed bins were less of a problem than first anticipated.

Members felt that generally, this service was performing well and this was reflected in the figures for missed bins. One Member suggested that collection times could be reviewed to avoid congested areas at peak times. Whilst this might impact on waste collections, it could improve traffic flow.

Look after the roads

Members reported significant complaints from residents regarding pot holes across the Borough. Members felt that current arrangements took too long to deliver repairs.

It was reported that following a working smarter review, improved data matching was taking place to record the time it took for a pothole to be repaired following its initial reporting to the Council.

Provide nice parks and spaces

Members debated issues regarding anti-social behaviour in parks. In some areas anti-social behaviour was perceived to be increasing but in others, it was viewed in decline due to increased activities and engagement with local residents.

Public safety and protection

Members felt that the proposed integrated approach for enforcement between services and partners was excellent.

One Member expressed the view that police performance needed to be improved as despite positive performance figures being reported, some residents have apathy towards the police as they have a perception that engaging with them would not be worthwhile.

Getting local people more involved

Members commented that public attendance and participation at Area Panel meetings was generally poor.

The Panel discussed the current participatory budgeting pilot for verge parking schemes. The Chair commented that he felt the way the scheme was operated with Councillors making the final decision did not encourage people to participate. Furthermore, he questioned the value of investing in verge parking when many areas have more prevalent problems.

The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) explained that verge parking had been identified as a pilot project and in future years, participatory budgeting would include other services such as grounds maintenance and street cleansing.

A Member commented that a lot of the work reported under this theme was traditional change management seeking more efficient performance with fewer errors rather than a whole “systems thinking” working smarter approach. The Executive Director (Resources) acknowledged this and explained that different methodologies were being used in different contexts. More radical systems thinking was being undertaken under this theme but as it was a very resource intensive process, such radical thinking could not take place across the piece. Therefore, areas for radical review had to be prioritised where the greatest benefit would be felt. Other areas were using more conventional models in order to drive efficiency and produce savings in the interim before more radical reviews could take place in the future. The Chair acknowledged the improvements that had been gained with the radical review of benefits and the creation of the money, home, job service. Other Members were also pleased with the results and wished to see the thinking rolled out into other service areas.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

250/13 WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14 AND FORWARD PLAN

Resolved

That working smarter Theme 3 “Improving safeguarding learning and the life chances for children and young people” be considered at 2nd January, 2014 meeting of the panel with a focus on the following areas:-

(a) Early help strategy and early help services;

and;

(b) School improvement strategy and access and improvements.

251/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 6.00 p.m. on 2nd January, 2014.

The meeting closed at 7.21 p.m.

Chair:.....

Date:.....