

CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday, 11th February, 2014 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 D. Shires
Councillor R. Worrall

Portfolio holders in attendance Councillor C. Towe (Resources)

Officers in attendance Rory Borealis – Executive Director (Resources)
Simon Neilson – Executive Director (Regeneration)
Paul Gordon - Head of Business Change
Mike Tichford – Assistant Director (Regeneration)
Lynn Hall – Head of Benefits
Ross Hutchinson – Lead Accountant
Craig Goodall - Committee Business and Governance Manager

260/14 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor M. Longhi.

261/14 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

262/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

263/14 MINUTES

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting which took place on 2 January, 2014, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

264/14 DELIVERY OF THE WORKING SMARTER PROGRAMME - THEME 5 – SUPPORT FOR DELIVERING

The Panel considered progress with Theme 5 of the Working Smarter Programme: 'Support for Delivery'.

The Executive Director (Resources) explained to Members that the purpose of theme 5 was to provide the necessary skills, support and infrastructure to deliver the other 4 themes. He explained that, in order to provide a more coherent picture, the priorities within the theme had recently been consolidated from 7 to 4.

The Panel considered progress with implementing the 4 priorities.

'Smarter Workplaces' and 'The Way We Work'

The Executive Director (Regeneration) described how the 'Smarter Workplaces' project had refurbished the Civic Centre so that more staff could be based within the building, resulting in a reduction of the Council's property portfolio. This would save ongoing revenue costs and provide an opportunity for capital receipts. The aim was to provide 6.5 desks for every 10 members of staff. This would require staff to work in new ways to be successful. The Corporate Asset Management Plan (CAMP) provided the overarching strategy for this piece of work.

'The Way We Work' project was designed to assist staff to adapt to new ways of working. There were some cultural barriers to overcome to implement 'fully flexible working' but the priority was delivering working practices that improved services to customers and increased efficiency.

The meeting discussed carbon reduction plans and the 30% reduction target in the CAMP. Progress had been made with reducing the Council's carbon outputs with more efficient energy use at the Civic Centre. Further plans for solar panels and partnership working would add to this. Members felt that staff working from home would not add significantly to carbon reduction as energy use would simply be transferred from the office to the home.

Members reflected that whilst office centralisation had created financial savings, it also potentially reduced access to services in localities. A Member gave an example of a Social Care worker travelling from Aldridge to Willenhall to start work only to return to Aldridge to visit her first case.

Support Services fitness for purpose

The Executive Director (Resources) reported that a strategic overview of Support Services was being undertaken. All Support Services were being reviewed to establish whether or not they were fit for purpose.

He further explained that Support Services had been reduced by about 40% over the last 5 years and it was anticipated that approximately a further 40% saving was required. The ambition was to increase quality and reduce cost. Support Services that provided assistance to front line services would be prioritised.

Corporate Governance

The Executive Director (Resources) explained that a Corporate Governance review was underway following the identification of issues by external auditors. He highlighted the issues identified by the external auditors and explained that work was ongoing to ensure that staff understood the importance of ethical behaviour.

Following a question by a Member it was explained that each Directorate held a Hospitality Register. Staff were required to record hospitality accepted and offered in the registers which were periodically reviewed. A Member suggested that consideration should be given to make the registers publicly available.

Walsall Change Approach

The Executive Director (Resources) highlighted that the organisation was increasing its internal capacity and expertise in order to be able to drive through change.

Staff Empowerment

The Head of Business Change explained that, as part of the drive to ensure fitness for purpose and reduce costs, staff were being empowered to redesign services.

The Chair noted that it was important that those staff at risk of losing their jobs were adequately supported. He expressed concerns about the capacity in Human Resources to deliver this support and encouraged the Portfolio Holder to ensure that a full support package was in place.

Resolved:-

That:

1. the Executive Director (Regeneration) investigate the issue raised regarding a mobile member of staff travelling unnecessarily to a work location before beginning mobile based work;
2. the Executive Director (Resources) investigate the possibility of making the Staff Hospitality and Interests Register publically available;
3. the Portfolio Holder (Resources) and Executive Director (Resources) consider the adequacy of support provided by Human Resources to at risk staff;
and;
4. the report be noted.

265/14 Walsall Crisis Support Scheme

The Panel considered progress with the implementation of the Walsall Crisis Support Scheme (WCSS); what demand had been like during April to December 2013; what lessons had been learnt and future plans for the scheme.

The Head of Benefits explained the new holistic approach being taken to support customers. This approach had reduced the financial resources required whilst increasing job satisfaction for staff. She explained that there were potential funding issues to resolve in 2015/16 as a currently separate grant, to finance the WCSS, would become part of the overall government settlement. Investigations by finance so far had been unable to identify any funding elements in the overall government settlement so there were

concerns regarding the long term viability of the scheme. Current thinking was focused on rolling forward under spends in this area for use in future years.

Members were concerned about the loss of funding for the scheme and the impact this could have on residents. This concern was exacerbated by the potential impact that could be caused by the introduction of Universal Credit.

A Member expressed further concern about how the Council's holistic, lower spending model, could see government funds for 2014/15 withheld. He suggested that an appropriate method of spending the money be found rather than risk losing cash that could be used to help local people. The Executive Director (Resources) acknowledged this issue and explained that discussions were taking place to ensure that Walsall was not unfairly penalised for undertaking a lower spending approach.

Following a question, officers explained that the low number of enquiries to the WCSS, when compared to the previous scheme, could be because many customers were able to resolve their problems with Job Centre Plus and therefore avoid going into crisis.

The meeting discussed the use of food banks across the borough.

Resolved:-

That Members receive further information on investigations to identify funding for crisis support in the 2015/16 government settlement along with an analysis of the settlement compared to 2014/15 figures.

266/14 QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION 2013/14

The Panel considered the predicted revenue and capital outturn position for 2013/14 based on performance for quarter 3 (April to December 2013) the services within the remit of the Panel.

The Executive Director (Resources) reported that the forecast overspend of the Resources Directorate was £335,000. He added that forecast savings from contract negotiations of £1.452 m were unlikely to be achieved.

Following a question, the difference between different types of reserves was explained to Members. The Panel was reassured that general reserves were not being eroded. The only use of general reserves in the resources budget was funding towards unforeseeable employment matters.

The 'Health Through Warmth' capital budget was showing a significant under spend due to delays in expenditure.

Resolved:-

That the report be noted.

267/14 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered their latest Work Programme and Cabinets Forward Plan of key decisions (TABLED).

Resolved:-

That:

- 1. the following items be considered at the 25th March 2014 meeting of the Panel:-
 - a) School Improvement Framework;
 - b) Final report of the Welfare Reform Working Group;
 and
- 2. the Forward Plan be noted.

268/14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 25th March, 2014

The meeting closed at 7.04 p.m.

Chair:.....

Date:.....