

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Monday 25 February 2013 at 7.30pm at Campus West, Welwyn Garden City.

PRESENT: Councillors G.Michaelides (Chairman)

D.Bell, M.Birleson, M.Levitt, S.Markiewicz, J.Nicholls,  
N.Pace, A.Prest, S.Roberts, C.Watson

OFFICIALS Director (Governance) (B.Baldock)

PRESENT: Head of Resources (K.Ng)  
Client Support Services Manager (F.Cantel)  
Management Accountant (G.May)  
Management Accountant – Projects (V.Osborne)  
Senior Performance & Strategy Officer (C.Jauncey)  
Committee Manager (S.Hulks)

ALSO Darren Kampta

PRESENT: Cathy Hipkin

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30. MINUTES:

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2013 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

31. PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT – QUARTER 3:

Members received a report which informed them of the Performance Indicator data for the services that fell within the remit of this Committee.

The report highlighted areas in which targets had been met and those where they had not. Improvements had been achieved with staff sickness with short-term sickness reducing by 33%.

Members asked how well the figures for PI 202 compared with the national average. They were informed that the comparison data would be available at the end of the year and it was agreed that this would be reported to the Committee at the June or July meeting.

The Committee commented that the graph indicated that, where short-term sickness has reduced, long-term sickness had increased by the same amount. Officers agreed that this was the case. However, short-term sickness had been considered an issue and it was this that had been tackled with the new sickness reporting and management scheme. The figures for long-term sickness could be skewed just by the addition

of small number of chronically sick or terminally ill employees.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

32. STERIA CONTRACT PERFORMANCE:

The Committee received a report which provided information and an analysis of the performance of Steria against contractual key performance indicators and service level targets for benefits, council tax, business rates, ICT, contact centre, reception and switchboard.

It was noted that the target for the collection of business rates had been missed but this was due to a large payment being received but not posted to the account.

Members asked how the penalty system worked, particularly taking into consideration the changes to the welfare and benefits system. Officers advised that the targets would be adjusted to take into account the changes. When asked, he replied that the changed targets would be reflected in the reports for the June/July meeting.

Members asked how the new targets were set, who was involved in the process and what criteria was used for the setting.

Officers replied that the decision was made by officers from the Council and in agreement with Steria based on their knowledge and experience and taking into account the changes that were known to be happening.

Members asked whether the finance department were informed of the decisions as there could be an impact on the budget. They were reassured that regular meetings were held and finance were informed.

A Member asked for further information on the incentives mentioned in the report and it was agreed that officers would provide this.

Steria, when asked, stated that they had not been able to set up Welwyn Hatfield Council as a centre of excellence as they had not been successful in bringing in another authority. However, South Bucks council had recently signed up for IT services.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

33. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING AT 31 DECEMBER 2012 (PERIOD 9):

Members received a report which informed them of the revenue, capital

and HRA budget monitoring position as at the end of December 2012 (Month 9) for the financial year 2012/2013.

Items of note were:

- (1) Efficiency savings were at 85% of the total by Month 9
- (2) 51% of the growth programme funding had been spent (this would not reach 100% as there was a reduction in the amount being spent on Street Wardens and garage income was greater than expected)
- (3) HRA surplus would be £2.16m by year end

Members asked the following questions:

Q Could an explanation be given regarding the increased income of £18k from Douglas Tilbe House?

A *There had been negotiations over utility charges which had resulted in a bill being issued covering costs for the last couple of years.*

Q Should the cost for the asbestos survey not have been anticipated?

A *Asbestos surveys are not part of a planned maintenance programme and this cost was due to a property being vacated at which time the survey was undertaken.*

Q Could an explanation be given regarding the cost to the HRA as shown in paragraph 10.1?

A *When the Trust had been set up several Service Level Agreements had been put in place. A review of these had shown that some costs were chargeable to the Trust directly and others were an HRA cost.*

Q Was it felt that the reduction in the Campus West income might had a negative impact on the decision to invest in the facility?

A *Income from lettings and conference facilities were down which was only to be expected in the current economic climate. The investment that was planned for Campus West was for an additional cinema and a soft play area, both of which were popular and would result in an increase of income.*

Q Could information be provided on how the figures for pension shortfall had been reached?

- A *The provision for the pension contributions was based on 17% of pensionable pay plus a lump sum as set out in the Actuarial report. This amount was pro-rated across the service areas.*
- Q There was a figure in the report for litigation job evaluation increase. Was this a pay rise?
- A *Yes, but the additional information given identified the reason for the cost.*
- Q Why was there a saving allocated to Procurement.
- A *This reflected a period between when the Procurement Admin Officer had gone on maternity leave and a temporary replacement had been appointed.*
- Q Why had there been an increase in photocopying costs?
- A *Managers had realised that photocopying was a cheaper option than to print due to the cost of consumables. Elsewhere in the report it would be seen that printing costs had reduced.*
- Q Why had there been a further saving on Street Wardens when this was a particular growth item identified by Members and which they felt strongly was required?
- A *The delay in recruitment had been explained to Members previously. This additional saving was due to one of the Street Wardens resigning and the post being vacant temporarily.*
- Q What was the explanation of the cost for the PCSO?
- A *It had been agreed to reduce the council's contribution to the cost of PCSOs, but notice of the intention had been submitted late. A charge had to be paid for this.*
- Q Was it thought likely that there would be further reduction in the income from Building Control?
- A *It was thought that the revised budget would be met.*
- Q Why was there a wide variance between budget and forecast on page 48 of the report?
- A *This was due to a timing issue – payment would be made to recipients, then income received from government and efforts made to claim back any overpayments.*
- Q Where year to date figures were considerably lower than what would be expected at month 9, was there an expectation that the

forecasted outturn would be achieved?

A *It was thought that the outturns would be as forecast.*

Q At what stage were decisions made to write off amounts due that were in excess of 365 days?

A *An element of the amount owed over 365 days was for amounts owed which were being collected through small monthly payments. When debts became overdue over a reasonable period of time, the legal department would be informed and, where necessary, legal action taken to recover them. There was a robust process in place for chasing debts and debt collection was the primary role of some officers.*

Q Where in the accounts was the money from the Portas Project?

A *This money and some additional funds from the Arts Council was being held in a suspense account in revenue pending completion of several projects that were being undertaken.*

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

34. COMMITTEE OVERVIEW WORK PROGRAMME:

As this was the last meeting of the Committee for this municipal year, the work programme had been completed. A new programme would be produced by the Members appointed to the Committee next year.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

35. COMMITTEE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME:

Members of this Committee had made a request to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee for two Scrutiny reviews to take place.

The Chairman read out the minutes from the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting at which the request had been discussed.

The minutes are as below:-

Members noted that the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 14 November 2012 had recommended the establishment of a Review Group to consider the implementation of the new charging system in Hunters Bridge car park. The Committee had

also recommended that a Review Group should be formed to look into issues previously raised about Building Control. Members further noted that at their meeting on 10 January 2013 the Committee had also recommended that a scrutiny of the transfer of car parking to Cplus be carried out.

With regard to the recommendations in relation to car parking, Members were of the view that in the first instance officers should consider what performance information on the car park contract conducted by Cplus on behalf of the Council could be monitored and produce performance indicators as appropriate. In conjunction with consideration of the officers' report, Cplus be invited to attend a meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to give a presentation on their customer satisfaction surveys and any other monitoring measures which they employed.

With regard to Building Control, Members were informed that the context of the discussion had been of the service as a potential generator of income and a question of whether the service was adequately resourced or should more staff be appointed with a view to increasing fee income. It was pointed out that although the Council could now set their own fee levels they were only permitted to recover their costs. In terms of complaints, few if any were received and the service invariably scored high in customer satisfaction surveys.

#### RESOLVED

1. That officers produce performance indicators for the Council's car parks and together with the information collected by Cplus these be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.
2. That no action be taken at the present time with regard to the recommended scrutiny review of the Building Control Service.
3. That the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee be informed accordingly.

As this was the final meeting of the Committee for the municipal year, the Chairman thanked all of the Members for their input.

Meeting ended 8.35pm  
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