

**CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT,
EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 20th November, 2013 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Blood (Chair)
Councillor A Ahmed (Vice Chair)
Councillors Boleyn, Caunt, Marrey, Mottram, Russell, Sykes, K Turner and Wright.

Officers

Assistant Director, Policy and Improvement (Lead Officer to the Committee),
Principal Policy and Performance Management Officer (Chief Executive's
Directorate) and the Democratic Services Manager (Directorate of Corporate
Resources)

Also in attendance

For Minute No. 17 - Director of Corporate Resources and the Head of
Accountancy (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

For Minute No. 18 - Representatives of the Transforming Organisation, Real
Change (TORCh) Project Group, namely the Children's Services Finance
Manager, Head of Communications and Public Affairs, Head of Strategic Asset
Planning, Divisional Lead - Integrated Youth Support and the Design and
Development Manager supported by the Admin Apprentice (Communications
and Public Affairs)

14 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No Member declared an interest in any matter to be considered at this meeting.

15 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5th
September, 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed.

16 **PUBLIC FORUM**

No matters were raised under this agenda item.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Resources and the Treasurer on the Revenue Budget Strategy for 2014/15 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy, with emphasis on proposals relating to the Committee's terms of reference.

In response to a query as to whether the Committee could raise wider issues identified in the budget, the Director of Corporate Resources indicated that one of the key principles of the revised scrutiny arrangements had been to align Scrutiny Committee terms of reference with the functions of the Council's Directorates. Whilst there was no intention to restrict debate, the terms of reference of this Committee primarily related to the Chief Executive's Directorate and the Directorate of Corporate Resources. This would be considered in the annual review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements.

Following an overview of the report, Members raised specific issues on the budget proposals as follows:

- The potential implications of future proposals concerning business rates, in particular the effect on the Council's budget deficit if business rates were not increased. The Committee noted ongoing discussions in the national context, however, it was acknowledged that any increase in business rates might not be sufficient to meet the anticipated deficit.
- Issues concerning the recurring overspend in relation to Looked After Children and proposals to address the potential impact in future years arising from levels of demand. The Committee noted that the Children's Services Directorate were developing plans to deal with the existing budget position and address the implications for future years. A view had been expressed that the level of expenditure reflected the true costs rather than overspending.
- Reference was made to issues associated with the zero based budget approach commenced by the Council in 2012.
- A written reply would be given in response to a question concerning the amount written off in bad debts by businesses since the start of the financial year and the action being taken to keep these debts to a minimum.
- A written reply would be given in response to a question concerning interest shown by any 'not for profit' organisations in New Bradley Hall and the anticipated funds that would be received for this asset.
- In connection with Children's Centres, a question was asked concerning the number and location of the Centres affected by the savings of £2.3m over two years. It was noted that these points were covered in the public consultation document, which had recently been published.

- Reference was made to the proposed restructuring of the Chief Executive's and Corporate Resources Directorates and the possibility of any suggested proposals being reported to this Scrutiny Committee. The Director of Corporate Resources indicated that the restructuring of the two Directorates should be viewed in the context of a wider corporate restructuring process to be undertaken in the forthcoming year.
- The Director of Corporate Resources and the Head of Accountancy responded to questions concerning the effect of the new pension scheme and the ongoing issues of Single Status and Equal Pay. Provision had been made in the budget for these items and it was acknowledged that Single Status/Equal Pay was a lengthy process involving a range of complex and ongoing issues.
- In relation to other identified staff savings in the Chief Executive's Directorate, the Lead Officer indicated that these would primarily be identified from policy, research and support functions.
- The Director of Corporate Resources responded to queries concerning the removal of risk management funding and proposals concerning conveyancing fees. It was considered that these items would have minimal implications in the overall budgetary context.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the issues identified above, the Revenue Budget Strategy proposals for 2014/15 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy be received and noted, taking account of the considerations set out in paragraph 41 of the report now submitted.

18

APPRENTICESHIP AND WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME FOR DUDLEY COUNCIL

The Committee considered a progress report from the Transforming Organisation, Real Change (TORCh) Project Group in respect of a review of the Apprenticeship and Work Experience Programme for Dudley MBC. The Committee viewed a video including information on the views and experiences of Apprentices working within various Council Directorates.

The Committee received a presentation from the Group on the proposed future vision and objectives; the national and local context; the advantages of adopting an excellent apprenticeship and work experience programme; the review methodology; issues connected with the existing internal arrangements; planned improvements, risks and constraints and the proposed next steps. It was noted that the Group had reported their progress to Corporate Board on 22nd October, 2013.

The Committee welcomed the report and congratulated the Group on the work undertaken to date. Reference was made to the need to challenge potentially negative perceptions of Apprenticeship programmes that had emerged in recent years.

The Group was considering improvements to internal processes to identify the number and location of the Apprentices employed by the Council and to track progress and outcomes. Although there was evidence of significant good practice across the Council, Directorates operated their own local processes. Members expressed the view that this should be co-ordinated on a corporate basis.

The Committee commented positively on the development of a prospectus to give information for parents and young people and the need to set internal targets for review. It was suggested that monitoring information be integrated into future quarterly performance management reporting arrangements to this Committee.

The Committee supported the re-introduction of a 'celebration of achievement' event for young people to ensure that participants felt valued, appreciated and supported by the Council. The Group also acknowledged the need for improvements to the induction process.

Reference was also made to ensuring that the Council, as a major employer, was setting standards, changing perceptions and receiving recognition in terms of the excellence of its Apprenticeship and Work Experience Programmes. In addition, the Council should continue to explore opportunities to work with partnerships and external organisations and consider sponsorship opportunities.

Comments were made on the ongoing work with schools, connections made with other employers and careers advice linked with the duties of the Council to track 16-18 year olds, improve their employability and signpost or offer other opportunities wherever possible.

The Committee noted the existing protocols within the Council to give priority to Looked after Children in terms of support and opportunities for Apprenticeship and Work Experience Placements.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That, subject to the comments outlined above, the project work and proposals recommended by the TORCh Project Group, as set out in the report and presentation to the Committee, be endorsed.
- (2) That monitoring information be integrated into the future quarterly performance management reports.
- (3) That a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the second Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report for 2013/14, relating to performance for the period 1st July to 30th September, 2013.

Following an overview of the content of the report by the Lead Officer, Members asked questions to which responses were given. Particular points raised were as follows:-

- Progress in relation to Stourbridge Credit Union presence in Stourbridge, including the establishment of a base in the library, investment in online resources and the marketing of services on a borough-wide basis.
- Further to Minute No. 11 of the meeting held on 5th September, 2013, reference was made to the financial situation concerning the Member's Dining Room/Coffee Lounge facility in the Council House. It was noted that the budget provided for a zero figure in relation to income against expenditure, however, it was suggested that the projected in-year deficit could now be in the region of £45,000. A written response would be provided as to which other budget heading was subsidising losses in relation to this function.
- In relation to Objective 5 (Ref: 6.6a), a query was raised on the progress of the actions listed under the section on making the best use of housing stock to provide and maintain 'affordable' housing for customers with housing need. The Lead Officer undertook to circulate information to Members on the outcomes of this activity and noted the points concerning the policy on fixed term tenancies.
- Reference was made to the regeneration activity in conjunction with New Heritage Regeneration and the Private Sector Partnership, the relationship to Stourbridge and Halesowen Area Action Plans and the need for further engagement to encourage and generate further job creation opportunities.
- The Committee expressed congratulations to all concerned relating to recent developments at the Red House Glass Cone.
- Reference was made to the Tourism Strategy Action Plan and the possibility of developing a Tourist Information Centre. The Lead Officer noted the comments made and reported on the existing provisions available at the Dudley Council Plus Offices.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the Quarterly Performance Management Report, in respect of performance for the period 1st July to 30th September, 2013, be noted together with the comments made at this meeting and that the officers indicated undertake the actions referred to above.

20 NEXT MEETING

Democratic Services would confirm the date of the next meeting in due course.

The meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.

CHAIR