

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Tuesday, 25th November, 2014 at 4.30 p.m.
at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

Present:

Councillor Tyler (Chair);
Councillor A Finch (Vice-Chair);
Councillors N Barlow, P Bradley, D Caunt, I Cooper, C Hale, M Hanif, L Jones,
M Mottram and G Simms.

Officers:

R Sims, Assistant Director ,Housing Strategy and Private Sector (Lead Officer to the Board),A Pope-Smith, Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services,J Millar, Director of Urban Environment, P Tart, Director of Corporate Resources, P Sharratt, Interim Director of Children's Services, K Jackson, Interim Director of Public Health, I Newman,Treasurer, M Bowsher , Assistant Director (Quality and Commissioning) and J Jablonski (Assistant Principal Officer - Democratic Services - Directorate of Corporate Resources).

23 **Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor R James.

24 **Appointment of Substitute Member**

It was reported that Councillor D Caunt had been appointed as a substitute for Councillor R James for this meeting of the Board.

25 **Declaration of Interests**

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

26 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th October, 2014, be approved as a correct record and signed.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

A joint report of the Chief Executive and Treasurer was submitted on the preliminary Medium Term Financial Strategy approved by Cabinet on 29th October, 2014 as a basis for consultation.

The Treasurer in his introduction to the report commented on matters raised at the five meetings of scrutiny committees held prior to this meeting. One particular comment made, arising from comments made at committees, was the need for further explanatory text in the report and this would be included in future reports.

Following the comments of the Treasurer questions were asked -

On the monies received by the Council arising from the refinancing of Birmingham Airport and on the amount of funding received under the Staying Put Fund.

It was reported that the Council received £3.9million in December, 2013 in respect of the first matter and the Interim Director of Children's Services would respond to Councillor Simms direct on the second matter.

Members then proceeded to consider the content of Appendices B and C to the report – Proposed Savings in respect of the Council's Directorates and Proposed use of Public Health Grant 2015/16 – respectively.

In respect of proposed savings for Adult, Community and Housing the following issues were raised

- How committed the Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) were to contributing to the Council's finances. A large element of this related to the Better Care Fund. It was reported that because the Government had changed the criteria recently the £6.870 million was still subject to negotiation. However the actual amount should be able to be confirmed shortly and would have to be formally signed off by both the Council and the CCG. Arrangements could be made to report the outcome to Members.
- Mental Health Services – whether the savings shown were achievable. Assurances were given based on work done by the review team identifying reduced costs.
- Unicorn Day Centre – how the savings shown were reached. An assurance was given that the saving shown could be met through various measures that were being considered.

Issues raised in respect of Children's Services were as follows –

- How additional surplus traded service income would be generated. Examples were given of traded services which it was considered could lead to further income given the good brand name of the Service. It was considered that the target could be met.
- Restructure the Integrated Youth Support Service-implications. It was reported that there were four elements to this service and that restructuring and targeting of services would be involved. In response to a question asked the Interim Director of Children's Services would arrange for all Members of the Committee to receive details of the current overall budget for the Service.

In response to a further question as to how many youth centres will have closed by the end of 2017/18 and in particular whether the Sedgley Youth Centre would still be open it was considered that this detail could not be given. It was however considered that some youth centres were likely to close.

- Home to school and college transport – concerns were raised at the overall costs involved and the need to act. In response various measures were mentioned together with the joint working with the Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services on commissioning of provision. Work done by that directorate in respect of consultation and in terms of costs and quality of provision were also mentioned.

Arising from further comments made that substantial savings and a better service could be achieved by changing the way the service was provided for example by joint usage with West Midlands Special Needs Transport it was agreed that the outcomes of the consultations held be reported to the next meeting of the committee.

- Children's Centres and health visitor service. It was reported that the contribution from Public Health Grant to support children's centres would be £70,000 in year and a further £470,000 in 2015/16. The Health Visitor Service would become the commissioning responsibility of the local authority in 2015 and this would afford further opportunities for integration and efficiency in the delivery of services to children and young people.
- Dudley Performing Arts (DPA) – in response to comments made it was reported that DPA was not sustainable in its present form and was operated separately from the traded services previously referred to. One possible future option for DPA was for it to operate under a trust arrangement.

Issues raised in respect of Urban Environment were as follows –

- Reduction in the road reconstruction and resurfacing programme – concerns raised at the reduction and impact of this. It was confirmed Dudley had received the largest share of recent government funding for road maintenance across the four Black Country Councils and it was hoped that Dudley's robust Highways Asset Management Plan would help attract additional government funding in the future. The Director of the Urban Environment also referred to the careful balance between preventative programmed repairs and reactive repairs citing also new micro asphalt and recycled material road surfacing treatments now being used borough wide.
- Reduction in gully drain emptying. In response to comments made the Director of the Urban Environment undertook to arrange for Councillor Caunt to be notified of the detail in relation to this proposed saving.
- Redesign of Pest Control Service – query as to whether this involved an increase in fees or reduction of staff. In response it was reported that the options were either outsourcing the service due to peaks and troughs in service demand or a review of the current charging regime.
- Increase bereavement charges – arising from this item comments were made about the capacity of Stourbridge crematorium. The Director of the Urban Environment indicated that the feasibility and cost benefit of providing extra seating at Stourbridge crematorium had been revisited and that he would arrange for Councillor Caunt to be contacted directly on the outcome.
- Switch off selected street lighting from midnight. It was noted that trials had taken place already with dimming and trimming of lights including within the Castle and Priory ward area with no adverse comments received. Further trials would now be undertaken following consultation. Currently there were no proposals to switch off traffic lights at night.

Issues raised in respect of Corporate Resources were as follows –

- Human Resources and Organisational Development – concerns over proposed savings and their impact. In relation to the staffing aspects the Director of Corporate Resources would arrange for details to be sent to Councillor Caunt.

Operationally, whilst directorates would be expected to do more HR type work themselves this did not extend to taking on specialised HR activity.

Arising from comments made about the relationship between recharging and savings, the Treasurer explained the arrangement involved.

In relation to the Chief Executive's directorate no issues were raised.

Issues raised in respect of the proposed use of Public Health Grant –

- In response to a query as to the anticipated underspend for the current financial year, the Interim Director of Public Health undertook to arrange for Councillor Caunt to be informed of this.
- In response to a query as to the earmarked reserves for Public Health it was noted that these were estimated to be £1.7million at the start of 2015/16 and £1.1million at the end of that year.
- New projects – diabetic eye screening – arising from comments made as to the usefulness of this project it was reported that the project was intended to further raise awareness given the 75% take up of the service from the 100% of persons contacted and the need to do targeted work.

In response to a query as to whether the number of opticians undertaking screening could be increased it was reported that the contract with opticians was with NHS England and that the question of their availability needed to be raised with that body.

The results of the work undertaken would be reported to the relevant scrutiny committee.

- In response to a query as to how the budget would cover arrangements for dealing with an ebola outbreak in the borough, it was reported that the Lead Respondent would be Public Health England with whom there was a co-operation agreement. NHS England would cover the costs of work/activity at the local level

The Interim Director of Public Health would respond to Councillor Barlow direct as to whether a similar co-operation agreement covered the City Hospital, Birmingham.

Arising from comments made, a general query was raised as to whether any further work had been done since 2012 on zero based budgeting.

In response the Treasurer reported that whilst that term was not used a number of areas had been subject to challenge over several years.

It was also being proposed that Budget Challenge Teams would be set up to challenge aspects of the budget given the £30 million savings that needed to be achieved by 2017/18.

It was commented upon that this should include service delivery so that the right money was spent in the right places.

The need to address such issues was recognised including the delivery of services in different ways given the need to achieve the savings required.

In response to a further query as to how much capital monies were used to cover pension costs/redundancies the Treasurer undertook to respond direct to Councillor Caunt on this matter.

At the conclusion of all comments made, the Chair thanked Members and Officers for their contributions made.

Resolved

That the Cabinet's proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2017/18, as set out in the report submitted, as commented upon by the Scrutiny Committees and as considered by this Board, as indicated above, be noted and that the Officers identified be requested to respond direct to the Members indicated on the issues shown.

The meeting ended at 6.10 pm

CHAIR