

**Minutes of the Corporate Performance Management, Efficiency and Effectiveness Scrutiny Committee**

**Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2014 at 5 p.m.**  
**In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley**

**Present:**

Councillor D Blood (Chair)  
Councillor B Cotterill (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors C Baugh, D Caunt, A Finch, P Harley, S Henley, L Jones, I Marrey, M Mottram and D Russell.

**Officers:**

G Thomas (Assistant Director – Policy and Improvement) – Lead Officer to the Committee, M Wooldridge (Principal Policy and Performance Management Officer), P Tart (Director), J Szczechowski (Head of Accountancy) and A Tromans (Information Systems Section Manager) – all Directorate of Corporate Resources, C Ballinger (Divisional Lead – Social Work) and J Prashar (Divisional Lead – Looked After Children) – both Directorate of Children's Services, J Jennings (Head of Communications and Public Affairs) – Chief Executive's Directorate and R Sanders (Assistant Principal Officer, Democratic Services)

16      **Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Wood.

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17      **Declaration of Interest**

A declaration of non- pecuniary interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, was declared by Councillor A Finch in agenda item no 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy) in view of his son's employment with the Council in the Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services. Councillor Finch indicated that he would declare a pecuniary interest and leave the meeting room should any matter directly relating to his son's employment arise.

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18      **Appointment of substitute Member**

It was reported that Councillor Jones was serving in place of Councillor Wood for this meeting of the Committee only.

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**Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2014, be approved as a correct record and signed.

**Medium Term Financial Strategy**

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive, Treasurer and Director of Corporate Resources consulting the Committee on the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period to 2017/18, with emphasis on the proposals relating to this Committee's terms of reference, as set out in paragraph 24 of the report and relating to the Corporate Resources and Chief Executive's directorates.

In response to a question regarding the proposed savings from the budget of the Directorate of Corporate Resources on Information, Communication and Technology, the Director of Corporate Resources indicated that the majority of the sum would be met from the reduction of 16 full time equivalent posts, some of which were vacancies, and from improved procurement activity. Whilst the Director emphasised that savings in the sum proposed would not be easy, the Information Systems Section Manager indicated the leaner management structure arising from restructuring proposals currently being implemented would assist.

In response to a question regarding the proposed saving of £100,000 in 2017/18 from the grant allocated to the Dudley and West Midlands Zoological Society, the Director of Corporate Resources indicated that the proposal was linked to the ability of the Society to obtain alternative funding for its improvement works, e.g., Heritage Lottery Funds. It was questioned further whether it might be preferable to make the reduction over three years. The Director confirmed that further to discussions held with the Society, the reduction in one lump sum had been considered the most appropriate expedient and had been agreed through the Cabinet process.

In relation to the savings of £500,000 proposed from consolidated property function, the Director of Corporate Resources confirmed that this was in addition to the original £423,000 savings already proposed for Office Accommodation savings (of which £223,000 had been brought forward to 2014/15).

In relation to the Office Accommodation savings and the disposal of twelve sites, the Director of Corporate Resources confirmed that the Council had received market value for each sale and that receipts had been allocated to the refurbishment of the remaining key office sites on the central campus. Where there was a profit, these would be divided equally between the Council and the Limited Liability Partnership.

Clarification regarding the funding implications of the Single Tier Pension Scheme, as referred to in paragraphs 16 and 17 of the report, was requested. The Head of Accountancy confirmed that the estimated cost of changes in National insurance was £2m, and this pressure was from 2016/17. It was anticipated that clarification of funding would be provided in the Autumn statement which would allow forecasts to be updated for inclusion within the March budget report.

Resolved

That the Cabinet's proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2017/18, as set out in the report submitted, be received.

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21 Review of Corporate services Utilisation

Further to a request made to the meeting of the Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2014, for an assessment to be made of whether all opportunities to centralise similar responsibilities for a number of functions across Directorates had been taken, or if there were services where distinct service issues warranted separate structures, an interim report on the matter by the Lead Officer was submitted.

The report outlined the current position in respect of centralised services in the areas of Communications, Graphics, Printing, Catering and ICT Services and had been drafted following discussion with service leads on current practice. It noted that drafting had been conducted as corporate restructuring had commenced and that restructuring provided further scope for centralisation of services and closer coordination across the Council.

The Lead Officer confirmed that Internal Audit was carrying out an assessment of which services which were using outside providers. The current position and issues that needed to be addressed as areas of improvement regarding the specific areas of communications, graphics and printing were referred to in paragraphs 32 to 35 of the report and it was indicated that a report on those matters would be submitted to the February meeting of the Committee.

In the discussion, the Lead officer confirmed that catering at the Crystal Leisure Centre was now being supplied by the Directorate of the Urban Environment.

Resolved

That the report be noted and acknowledged as part of a two-part review.

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22. Corporate Quarterly Performance Management Report

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the second Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report for 2014/15 relating to performance for the period 2<sup>nd</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2014.

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In discussing PIs 659 and 434, the latest available figures and the circumstances of the downward trends in each case were explained respectively by the Divisional Leads (Social Work) and (Looked After Children).

In relation to PI 659, referrals had continued to rise significantly, partly because of high profile safeguarding and child protection cases, and this mirrored national trends. The recent change replacing Initial Assessments with Single Assessments meant that the data was not directly comparable with last year. Whilst the number of assessments undertaken were still fewer than last year, it was reported that performance had increased once those completed towards the end of the reporting period had been inputted. The much greater rise in referrals not needing to progress to assessment by Children's Social Care had also contributed to a lower conversion rate. It was indicated that work was being undertaken to ensure effective services were provided in respect of the significant rises in contacts and referrals.

In relation to PI 434, the reasons for the length of time in securing adoptions were explained by the Divisional Lead (Looked After Children), these being the need to ensure as far as ever possible that a child was placed safely with the most suitable family. This needed to take into account that the adoptive parent would parent the child into the future. The Divisional Lead also indicated that, in certain cases, adoptions took longer to secure in view of the particular circumstances of the children, the numbers of siblings, and the aim to keep siblings together if possible. The Divisional Lead stated that Dudley was not alone in not meeting national targets. Differing views were expressed by Members, some considering that the time taken to resolve an adoption was too long and not in the interests of the child and others accepting that adoption was not a process that could be progressed quickly and that it was more important that the adoption was the most appropriate.

Concern was expressed regarding the data provided in the report in respect of PI 659 being severely out of date by the time it was submitted to the Committee, in response to which the data collection methodology was explained. The Assistant Director (Policy and Improvement) accepted that the data needed to be more current to be meaningful.

In relation to PIs 680 and 731, a Member asked which agency had benefitted financially, should there have been a difference between between the target and the performance. The Lead Officer stated that a written reply would be sent.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the Quarterly Performance Management Report in respect of performance for the period from 2<sup>nd</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2014 be noted, together with the comments made at this meeting.
- (2) That a report be submitted to the next meeting indicating how it is proposed that more current data will be supplied and incorporated into performance documentation.

The meeting ended at 7.10 p.m.

CHAIR