

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 16 March 2011

Present: Councillor P Gilchrist (Chair)

Councillors A Brighouse D McCubbin
J Keeley J Stapleton
P Davies S Williams
P Kearney

Deputies: Councillors D Dodd (In place of A McArdle)
AER Jones (In place of B Kenny)

124 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

No such declarations were made.

125 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 31 January, 16 and 23 February 2011 be approved.

126 REACHING EXCELLENT LEVEL OF THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Interim Director of Corporate Services presented a report, which highlighted changes to equality legislation, and Government equality policy, which would affect the method of/timescale to reaching 'excellent' status of the Equality Framework for Local Government. He reported that the work was part of the Corporate Plan 2010/2011 (strategic objective 5, to create an excellent council) to encourage efficiencies as well as tackling Wirral's inequalities, and as part of the Council's legal obligations within the Equality Act 2010.

The Council's Corporate Equality and Cohesion Manager gave a detailed presentation upon the measures that were required. She outlined the requirements of the new Equality Framework and highlighted the general and specific duties contained within it. She set out the Fairness Agenda contained within the Government's Equality Strategy and referred in particular to the role of scrutiny to

demonstrate that the Council had met its general and specific duties and was able to demonstrate improvements and outcomes as a result of its equality objectives. She commented also that the Council's 'Equality Watch Scheme 2009 – 2012' was due to be refreshed, to take into consideration the Equality Act 2010 and, consultation would take place across the Council, with partner agencies and among members of the Council's equality watch scheme.

In response to questions from Members in relation to Equality Impact Assessments, she commented upon the requirement on the Council to analyse the impact on people of what it did and to publish the results. Such analysis could be in the form of formal Equality Impact Assessments but different methods of analysis had been undertaken by assessors, including the use of templates. In response to further comments upon training, she referred to the Elumnos online training module, which had recently been updated in the light of the changed requirements.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That Committee notes that the action plan for reaching 'excellent' status is being reviewed and refreshed to reflect the requirements of the new Equality Duty 2010, the Government's Equality Strategy 'Building A Fairer Britain' (December 2010), and the changes to the role of the Local Government Improvement and Development's Equalities Team.**
- (3) That Committee notes that the deadline for being assessed for 'excellent' status of the Equality Framework for Local Government will need to move from November 2011 to July 2012.**
- (4) That a copy of any templates used to record Equality Impact Assessments be provided direct to all Members of the Committee.**
- (5) That information in relation to Members' responsibilities be incorporated into the induction packs for all newly elected Members of the Council.**
- (6) That a further report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee in relation to the Equality Implications of the recent Council Budget, to include information as to what analysis was undertaken and how officers took equality duties into account.**

127 FINANCIAL MONITORING STATEMENT

The Director of Finance presented a summary of the position of the revenue accounts and General Fund balances as at 31 January and 28 February 2011. The Statement included the composition of the original 2010/2011 budget by Department including agreed savings and policy options; monitoring against the 2010/2011 budget including the financial implications of any changes agreed through Cabinet decisions; anticipated variances, changes not agreed by Cabinet, against the original budget and comments to provide an explanation of variances and areas identified as requiring further attention.

In response to comments from Members in relation to pressures within Adult Social Services, the Director reported that the Interim Director of Adult Social Services was

reviewing all options before declaring a potential overspend. All Directors continued to look at actions to address any pressures within their departmental budgets. In response to a comment from a Member as to the information contained within the monitoring statement, the Director indicated that a key criterion from the Committee was that the information presented within it should be contained in a single sheet.

Resolved – That the content of the Financial Monitoring Statement be noted.

128 FINAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT 2011-2013

The Director of Finance reported that the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2011/2013 was announced on 31 January 2011 for debate in Parliament on 9 February 2011. Although it contained some minor changes to the Provisional Settlement that was announced on 13 December 2010 and reported to Cabinet on 13 January 2011, in general terms it confirmed the Formula Grant provisionally allocated to local authorities which, for Wirral, was a reduction of £14m.

In response to questions from Members, the Director indicated that the reduction in Formula Grant for Wirral and other North West local authorities was unprecedented and that representations that had been made to the DCLG had had little impact. In response to further comments, the Director stressed the importance of an accurate census return, as the information would affect future grant allocation.

It was moved by Councillor P Davies and seconded by Councillor A Jones –

“That Committee disagrees with the decision of the Government to front-load savings in local government budgets into 2011/2012.

It is also disappointing that no significant changes have been made in the £51m which Wirral Council will lose in their total allocation of funding from central Government in 2011/2012.

Committee also believes that the methodology used for distributing grant by the Government was grossly unfair in that it concentrated cuts on the areas of highest deprivation.

Committee asks the Cabinet to begin lobbying Government early in the new financial year to ensure that the funding position of Wirral Council is improved in future years”.

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor P Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor J Keeley –

“That Committee recognises that substantial changes in grant level have occurred and that the two year settlement requires the achievement of further savings.

In these conditions, Members are anxious that the case for settlements that reflect social conditions is made, especially where Councils are and have undertaken the cost saving exercises expected by this and previous Governments.

Accordingly, this Committee considers it prudent for Cabinet to prepare a submission for the DCLG outlining how Wirral has made savings, utilised its reserves and has secured efficiencies without compulsory redundancies but highlights the difficulties facing this Borough”.

The amendment was put and carried (6:4)

The amendment, then becoming the substantive motion was put and carried.

Resolved (6:4) (Councillors P Davies, D Dodd, A Jones and J Stapleton voting against) –

- (1) That Committee recognises that substantial changes in grant level have occurred and that the two year settlement requires the achievement of further savings.**
- (2) In these conditions, Members are anxious that the case for settlements that reflect social conditions is made, especially where Councils are and have undertaken the cost saving exercises expected by this and previous Governments.**
- (3) Accordingly, this Committee considers it prudent for Cabinet to prepare a submission for the DCLG outlining how Wirral has made savings, utilised its reserves and has secured efficiencies without compulsory redundancies but highlights the difficulties facing this Borough.**

129 PRESENTATION - OPERATION BLACK VOTE

Mr Simon Woolley, founder and Director of Operation Black Vote (OBV) attended the meeting at the request of the Chair and gave a brief presentation on the aims of the organisation. At its core, OBV existed to ensure greater racial justice and equality throughout the UK, working specifically, but not exclusively within the democratic and civic framework to deliver its objectives. The organisation sought to inspire Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities to engage with public institutions in order to address persistent race inequalities faced in areas such as: education, health and employment.

The four main areas of OBVs work related to –

- political education, to raise awareness and understanding of democratic and civic society through citizenship projects;
- political participation, to improve engagement with civic society through local and national voter registration and other civic participation campaigns;
- increasing political representation of BME communities, through encouraging engagement, undertaking ground-breaking mentoring schemes; lobbying political parties and civic institutions on the benefits of representative bodies; and
- the promotion of equality and human rights, by increasing the awareness of a progressive equality and human rights agenda.

Mr Woolley hoped that OBV would be able to forge a partnership with Wirral Council and he outlined a number of schemes that could be explored to bring in marginalised groups to civic society. He was mindful of financial constraints faced by local authorities and suggested that in a time of austerity, a premium should be placed on equality measures. He referred to Councillor Shadowing Schemes, which had been a great success in Liverpool and elsewhere, which worked with local Councils seeking out individuals who had the potential to stand for elected office in service to the Local authority. He commented that UK Councils were running a deficit of minority ethnic councillors, with under 3% being from a BME background and authorities were urged

to take action to engage minority groups in decision making at all levels of governance.

Members thanked Mr Woolley for his presentation and referred to the work being undertaken in Wirral in relation to equality initiatives, in particular by the Wirral Multicultural Organisation. With the agreement of the Chair, the Leader of the Council addressed the Committee and thanked Mr Woolley for his attendance. He proposed that OBV meet with Council officers with a view to exploring some of the initiatives highlighted. In particular, he expressed a willingness to engage with the Councillor Shadowing Scheme.

On a motion by Councillor P Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor P Davies, it was –

Resolved – That Committee welcomes the opportunity to work closely with Operation Black Vote and looks forward to developing a constructive partnership.

130 **IMPACT OF A REDUCTION IN THE EARLY INTERVENTION GRANT**

The Interim Director of Children's Services reported upon the impact on the Children and Young People's budget in 2011/2012 arising from a reduction in grant funding through the Early Intervention Grant (EIG) of £4,874,000. The purpose of the grant was to help improve outcomes for children, young people and families by early intervention. It was un-ringfenced, consisted of a number of different areas and from 2011/2012, would be paid in a single sum with authorities free to allocate funds to their priority needs.

He reported that budgets had been reduced following Area Based Grant cuts of £2.6m announced last summer and of those reductions, £836,000 were in EIG areas. The remaining savings were £719,000, found in other education budgets, and £1,088,000 from reductions outside the department. In 2011/2012 EIG had reduced by a further £2,231,000 and £383,000 had been achieved through the Council's EVR/Severance Scheme. He commented that this included the closure of the Early Years Mobile Crèche; reduction in administrative and financial support for Surestart; and alternative delivery of the Family Information Service. Other decisions had been taken, including a renegotiated Connexions contract, all of which totalled £2,231,000 of the £2,231,000 required; and the Interim Director indicated that the shortfall had been included as growth within the Council's budget. Having regard to the adjustments, the Director indicated that the budgeted spend on EIG areas in 2011/2012 would be £17,873,000.

In response to comments from Members, the Interim Director reported upon the numbers of posts that had been deleted in Children's Centres. He agreed to provide detailed information in relation to those posts to Members direct, together with comparison figures for expenditure in 2010/2011.

It was moved by Councillor P Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor A Brighouse –

"That the report and the careful management of the reduction in grant funding be noted".

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor P Davies and seconded by Councillor A Jones –

“That the Committee is not convinced that the scale of reductions in grant can be made without impacting adversely on frontline services”.

The amendment was put and lost (4:6)

The motion was put and carried (6:4)

Resolved (6:4) (Councillors P Davies, D Dodd, A Jones and J Stapleton voting against) – That the report and the careful management of the reduction in grant funding be noted.

131 **SPECIFIC GRANTS**

The Director of Finance presented a report which compared the Specific Grants received in 2010/2011 with those now announced by the Government for 2011/2012. It identified the movement in the grants between the two years and the implications arising from those grants that had ceased or been reduced. He commented that Government financial support to local authorities in the form of grant assistance essentially comprised general grants and specific grants. The main general grant was the Formula Grant, announced in the Local Government Finance Settlement, which was available to support all Council services. Specific grants had reduced in number in recent years and were issued to support specific services or projects by a range of Government Departments. The main grants were the Dedicated Schools Grant and the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Grant.

The Director commented that the general assumption was that as the grant was provided for a service or project, then the ending of the grant would result in that service or project ceasing. Chief Officers had considered the implications of the grants ceasing/reducing as part of the preparation of the budget. The Director set out the latest position on reductions and ceased grants, the main areas being Social Care Reform/Stroke Strategy, Early Intervention, Housing Market Renewal (HMR) and Waste Infrastructure.

In response to a question from a Member as to which areas of Wirral would not now receive HMR funding, the Director indicated that the Interim Director of Corporate Services was confident that all statutory responsibilities would be met. The Cabinet had approved a bid of £600,000 to facilitate the continuation of services but the programme would be considerably reduced.

It was moved by Councillor P Davies and seconded by Councillor A Jones –

“That this Committee deplores the cuts in Wirral’s specific grants, amounting to a reduction of £10.1m. The cuts to these grants will impact on the quality of services to some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

Committee asks the Cabinet to produce a detailed report on the impact of the reductions in these grants and what action they intend to take to mitigate the effects”.

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor P Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor A Brighouse –

“That Committee requests that factual information on these issues be presented to future meetings of appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committees, with appropriate information on the distribution of grant spending”.

The amendment was put and carried (6:4)

The amendment, then becoming the substantive motion was put and carried.

Resolved (6:4) (Councillors P Davies, D Dodd, A Jones and J Stapleton voting against) – That Committee requests that factual information on these issues be presented to future meetings of appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committees, with appropriate information on the distribution of grant spending.

132 EMPLOYEE PAY COSTS

Further to minute 67 (18 November 2010), the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management presented a detailed analysis on the payment of allowances and enhancements to employees, in addition to basic salary. He commented that the pay and conditions for local authority employees were detailed in the Green Book: National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service for Local Government Services, which contained the key national and local provisions and included nationally and locally agreed allowance payments. In addition, a number of the Part 3 (local) arrangements had been agreed as part of the harmonisation of terms and conditions in August 2008.

He commented also upon measures introduced in 2010/2011 to reduce employee pay costs and indicated that the 2011/2012 budget assumed reductions of £300,000 in car mileage and £250,000 in non-contractual payments due to voluntary leavers. He reported that the review of employee pay costs was a project within the Strategic Change Programme and, in response to a question from a Member, he indicated that its main purpose was to identify where payments could be changed, altered or stopped. However, it was not intended to deny allowances to members of staff who were entitled to them.

Resolved –

- (1) That the range, detail and comparisons of allowances and enhancements which are paid over and above employee salaries and which are therefore within the scope of this review, be noted.**
- (2) That the review of employee pay costs being a project within the Strategic Change Programme, be noted.**

133 EVR/STAFFING RESOURCES UPDATE

Further to minute 119 (31 January 2011), the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management presented an update, by Department, of the numbers of staff leaving the employment of the authority as a result of Early Voluntary Retirement/Voluntary Severance (EVR/VS) between December 2010 and June 2011. The total at present was 1123 and he confirmed that all had been subject to detailed analysis, prior to being approved. In response to a question from a Member in relation to additions to the total reported, the Director confirmed that in the light of decisions taken by the Council in respect of service provision, after the December 2010 deadline, those members of staff who were directly and materially affected by the proposals had been given a second opportunity to apply for EVR/VS. Following this, an additional 36 members of staff in DASS and an additional 9 in CYP had been given approval to

leave. Elsewhere, there were redeployment opportunities and no one would be required to leave to meet the budget.

In response to a further question from a Member, the Director commented that behind the departure of staff under EVR/VS was a restructure of services presently being undertaken by Chief Officers for which an amount of £2m had been set aside. The restructure plans would be completed in the coming months.

The Chair referred to comments that had been made by Diane Kelly, Assistant Branch Secretary, Wirral UNISON, at the meeting of the Committee held on 16 February 2011 (minute 122 refers) in relation to stress suffered by managers and staff. He referred also to a ground breaking case for stress at work (Walker –v– Northumberland County Council, 1994) and sought assurance that the issue was being addressed. The Director reported that substantial training had been given to managers, to identify and combat stress in the workplace, which had been discussed with trade unions at regular corporate JCC meetings.

Resolved – That the detailed analysis be noted and a further update be presented to a future meeting of the Committee, once the overall total is known.

134 **MOBILE PHONE POLICY**

Further to minute 67 (18 November 2010), the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management presented the Council's current Mobile Phone Policy, which listed a series of guidelines that employees were expected to follow when they were issued with a mobile phone by the Finance Department (IT Services). The Policy had been updated in line with legislative changes and was also complemented by the Health and Safety Arrangements – Mobile Phones and Driving.

Resolved –

- (1) That the contents of the current Mobile Phone Policy be noted.**
- (2) That Committee notes that the Mobile Phone Policy will be subject to joint review between the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management and the Director of Finance and that the outcome of the review will be presented to the Employment and Appointments Committee.**

135 **EARLY VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT/VOLUNTARY SEVERANCE FUNDING**

The Director of Finance presented information, in tabular format, in relation to the costs and sources of funding of the Early Voluntary Retirement/Voluntary Severance (EVR/VS) Scheme. He provided details of the use of capitalisation, which was the relaxation of a normal accounting requirement, by the Secretary of State, which permitted specified items of expenditure that would normally be classified as revenue expenditure to be treated as capital expenditure. It provided financial flexibility for the management of one-off unexpected costs and the Director indicated that, in response to an application for a capitalisation direction for statutory redundancy payments, the DCLG had advised that Wirral could capitalise up to £3,420,000 in 2010/2011. A further £200m would be available for capitalisation in 2011/2012 but the DCLG had yet to announce the bidding process or timetable.

The Director reported that an alternate source of funding was the use of revenue and balances and he indicated that those officers that had left the Council before 31 March 2011 would realise a part year saving in the financial year 2010/2011 of £1.9m, which could be used to offset the cost of implementing the scheme. No pay award had been offered for 2010/2011, but an amount of £1.4m was included within the original Estimates for 2010/2011 in respect of a pay award from April 2010. That sum had been removed from departmental budgets and returned to the General Balance in order to partially meet the cost of the Scheme. He commented that the Efficiency Investment Budget was available to support initiatives approved by the Cabinet, which would lead to the delivery of future efficiencies and would be used to meet the full costs of any restructuring and retraining requirements that had been identified by each Chief Officer. The funding would be released on the confirmation of an appropriate business case by the Strategic Change Programme Board.

He reported that the minimum recommended level of General Fund balances for 2010/2011 was £6.5m and the latest position showed projected balances at 31 March 2011 of £14m, after the use of £2.6m. An additional £4.4m was projected to be used from balances in 2011/2012.

It was moved by Councillor P Davies and seconded by Councillor A Jones –

“(1) That Committee believes that the previous terms and conditions which applied to EVR/VS applications should be re-instated and the Cabinet be requested to undertake a full review of the way in which applications for EVR/VS were invited.

(2) That this Committee does not believe that it is appropriate to ask employees to take serious decisions about their future in a “last chance saloon” climate of fear, where pressure is applied to persuade people to go by telling them that any future settlements will be considerably reduced, and that a failure to reach the required number of EVRs or Voluntary Severance requests would lead to compulsory redundancies.

(3) That this Committee asks for the report of the Director of Finance to be referred to the Employment and Appointments Committee to re-instate immediately the previous terms and conditions which applied to EVR/VS applications for any future applicants, pending the review”.

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor J Keeley and seconded by Councillor D McCubbin –

“That the report be noted”.

The amendment was put and carried (6:4)

The amendment, then becoming the substantive motion was put and carried.

Resolved (6:4) (Councillors P Davies, D Dodd, A Jones and J Stapleton voting against) – That the report be noted.

136 2010/2011 THIRD QUARTER PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL REVIEW

The Interim Chief Executive presented a report, which set out the performance of the Council’s Corporate Plan towards delivering the vision of building a more equal and prosperous Wirral. It intended to provide Members with an overview of performance,

financial and risk monitoring for the third quarter 2010/2011 against the various strategic objectives.

He reported that performance of the 103 projects within the Corporate Plan showed that 87 (84%) were assessed as green and that all milestones that should have been met at this point had been met. It showed also that 13 projects (13%) were amber, 2 (2%) were red, with some non-critical milestones missed or in danger of non-critical slippage and 1 project (1%) had been completed. There were 64 performance indicators at the third quarter period and he provided a summary of the overall performance.

He reported that the format for reporting performance issues and financial information was currently under review and future reports would reflect any changes to the current format. Considerable work had been undertaken to ensure consistency of the information provided and a system would be put in place to ensure that reporting measures were adequate to manage performance.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

137 **REVENUES INCOME AND BENEFITS**

The Director of Finance provided information on the position regarding Council Tax, National Non Domestic Rate, general debt and cash income collection and the payment of benefits.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

138 **HOUSING BENEFITS REFORM AND THE BENEFITS BUDGET**

The Director of Finance reported that Housing Benefit spend was the largest individual budget within the Council Budget and Members were advised of any changes which impacted upon it. In addition, the budgets, including sums set aside in provisions and reserves, were kept under review to ensure sums no longer required were released.

He set out legislative changes to Housing Benefits (Local Housing Allowance) that would come into effect from April 2011 and outlined proposals to reform the welfare system by the creation of a new Universal Credit under the Welfare Reform Bill. He also provided information on the Lean Review of Benefits, presented the budget for 2011/2012; and submitted a review of the reserves and provisions.

It was moved by Councillor P Davies and seconded by Councillor A Jones –

“(1) That Committee condemns the fact that planned changes to Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance will significantly worsen conditions for benefit claimants, reducing the amount of property available to rent within the reduced allowances available, reducing the size of properties available for those with large families, with the potential for overcrowding and reducing to a single room the size of property allowed for single claimants between 25 and 35.

(2) That Committee recognises that the cap on Housing Benefit/Allowance will cause severe hardship and increase homelessness in high rental areas like London.

(3) That this Committee is concerned that the introduction of the Universal Credit could lead to severe practical difficulties arising from the transfer of responsibilities from local to central Government.

(4) That this Committee believes that the issue of Welfare Reform and changes to the benefits system announced recently, and its likely impact on Local Government staffing and finances requires detailed examination and should be the subject of a special study by this Overview and Scrutiny Committee”.

Part (4) above, of the motion by Councillor Davies, seconded by Councillor Jones, was agreed unanimously without a vote.

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor P Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor A Brighouse –

“That the Committee is keen to follow the development of a national policy for the benefit of tenants and welcomes the move to Universal Credit”.

The amendment was put and carried (6:4)

The amendment, then becoming the substantive motion, incorporating part (4) of the motion by Councillors Davies and Jones, was put and carried.

Resolved (Councillors P Davies, D Dodd, A Jones and J Stapleton voting against (1) below) –

(1) That the Committee is keen to follow the development of a national policy for the benefit of tenants and welcomes the move to Universal Credit. (6:4)

(2) That this Committee believes that the issue of Welfare Reform and changes to the benefits system announced recently, and its likely impact on Local Government staffing and finances requires detailed examination and should be the subject of a special study by this Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

139 TREASURY MANAGEMENT THIRD QUARTER 2010/2011 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Director of Finance presented a review of Treasury Management activities during the third quarter of 2010/2011 and confirmed compliance with treasury limits and prudential indicators. It had been prepared in accordance with the revised CIPFA Treasury Management Code and the revised Prudential Code and had been presented to the Cabinet on 3 February 2011 (minute 308 refers).

Resolved – That the Treasury Management Performance Monitoring Report be noted.

140 TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2011-2014

In accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management in Public Services, the Director of Finance presented the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2011-2014, which had been approved by the Cabinet on 21 February 2011 (minute 329 refers).

Resolved –

- (1) That the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy for 2011-2014 be noted.**
- (2) That the adoption of the Prudential Indicators be noted.**
- (3) That the Minimum Revenue Provision policy be noted.**
- (4) That the authorisation by the Cabinet of the following Council Officers, listed in Appendix D of the Strategy Statement, to approve payments from Council bank accounts for all Treasury Management activities, be noted –**

Director of Finance	Ian E. Coleman
Deputy Director of Finance	David L.H. Taylor-Smith
Head of ICT	Geoffrey W. Paterson
Head of Benefits, Revenue and Customer Services	Malcolm J. Flanagan
Head of Financial Services	Thomas W. Sault
Head of Support Services	Michael J. Fowler
Chief Accountant	Peter J. Molyneux
Chief Accountant	Jenny Spick.

141 PROCUREMENT - REVIEW OF CONTRACT EFFICIENCIES 2010/2011

The Director of Finance reported that at its meeting on 5 November 2009, the Cabinet (minute 186 refers) approved a projected procurement savings target of £682,000 for 2010/2011 for those areas of expenditure that involved corporate contracts. He reported upon progress towards achieving the savings target and other procurement initiatives that had a direct impact on service departments. He also outlined possible procurement efficiencies for 2011-2012 and commented that the Cabinet on 9 December 2010 (minute 252 refers) agreed to include procurement savings of £2m in the budget for 2011/2012.

Resolved –

- (1) That the procurement efficiencies delivered in 2010/2011 be noted.**
- (2) That the inclusion of procurement savings of £2m in the budget for 2011/2012 be noted**

142 OFFICE RATIONALISATION

Further to minute 110 (31 January 2011), the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management provided an update in relation to the office rationalisation programme which, with an increase in agile working would support the corporate priority to improve the use of the Council's land and assets and help facilitate improvements in service delivery. The project was expected to deliver substantial annual revenue savings by reducing the amount of space occupied and he commented that although the provision of administrative accommodation was not a statutory requirement, such accommodation did support the delivery of statutory functions.

He outlined the progress that had been made since the last meeting of the Committee, particularly in relation to measures to facilitate the vacation of Westminster House. He commented also upon the impact of the current Early Retirement/Voluntary Severance (EVR/VS) scheme on office occupancy and indicated that although there was a reduction in the amount of space required, not all of the staff who had left the authority occupied desk space. The additional impact of further staff leaving the authority in the period up to 30 June 2011 would be assessed and proposals would be brought forward for the vacation of further buildings.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That Committee recognises the next steps required in relation to the Office Rationalisation programme and expresses anxiety that, unless work is expedited as a matter of urgency, savings will not be achieved in a timely manner.**
- (3) That update reports be presented to future meetings of the Committee on a quarterly basis.**

143 FORWARD PLAN

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported that the Forward Plan for the period March to June 2011 had been published on the Council's intranet/website. Members had been invited to review the Plan prior to the meeting in order for the Committee to consider, having regard to the work programme (see minute 144 post), whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within it and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.

Resolved – That the Forward Plan be noted.

144 REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair provided an update on the current status of the Committee's Work Programme, which included scrutiny of the work of the Community and Customer Engagement, Corporate Resources and Finance and Best Value portfolio holders. He invited suggestions from Members for additions to the work programme, having regard to how scrutiny could be undertaken within relevant timescales and resources.

Resolved – That the following items be added to the work programme for the 2011/2012 municipal year –

- **Updates in relation to the Strategic Change Programme**
 - **Early Voluntary Retirement/Voluntary Severance (EVR/VS)
– Analysis and Restructuring**
 - **Customer Access Strategy**
 - **Office Accommodation**
 - **Benefits**
-