

BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 5 March 2019

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	P Hackett (Chair)	
	Councillors	J Stapleton T Cox J McManus J Robinson	C Spriggs T Usher KJ Williams S Williams
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	B Berry (In place of K Hodson) A Gardner (In place of D Elderton) M Jordan (In place of C Blakeley) C Carubia (In place of D Mitchell)	
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	J Bird	M Sullivan

44 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Chris Blakeley, David Elderton, Kathy Hodson and Dave Mitchell, all of whom had deputies standing in for them and from Councillors Mike Sullivan and Jo Bird.

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

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare 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 received.

46 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 22 January, 2019.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January, 2019, be approved.

FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 3 2018/19

Jenny Spick, Senior Manager, Financial Planning and Policy, introduced the report of the Director of Finance and Investment which set out the Council's revenue and capital monitoring position for 2018/19 quarter 3.

The quarter 3 revenue report showed a £0.5m overspend for Business. The quarter 3 capital report showed an expenditure to date off £10.2 million on a revised programme of £17.6 million.

Jenny Spick gave a presentation to the Committee which included further details on the forecast overspend as follows:

- Finance and Resources: IT services overspends netted down by underspends within Treasury management and Change Management.
- Highways and Transport: Combination of higher than expected Winter Maintenance costs and reduced car park income.
- Jobs and Growth: Overspend in this area due to legal costs relating to Wirral Waters One.
- Law and Order: Overspend due to enhancement payments, overtime payments and shortfall in income targets.

Responding to comments from Members, Jenny Spick stated that spend on the Windows 10 rollout was £2.3m as at the end of February, though she did not have all the details on how long it was due to take. With regard to the Highways overspend, this was due to the anticipated high cost of winter maintenance with initial forecasts being for a harsh winter which had not arisen and the associated increased costs in salt and transport. There had also been reduced levels of income from car parking charges in the autumn. She could not forecast what would happen in March and whether or not forecasts would come back on track.

Members expressed concern that neither the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport nor the Interim Director Highways and Streetscene were present at the Committee to answer questions.

Responding to further comments Jenny Spick stated that extra staffing costs for community safety would be because some work had dropped off, such as for academy schools which no longer used this service. With regard to street lighting and the column upgrades she did not have an end date as to when this work would be completed. With regard to the reference to sustainable transport links at Duke Street, she would need to find this information out from the Interim Director Highways and Streetscene and provide a written answer.

Members also expressed concern at the length of time for street light repairs to be undertaken and the Chair also reiterated the need for the Cabinet Member to be present at this meeting to respond to comments.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

48 2018/19 QUARTER 3 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE

In view of Tony Williams, Head of Human Resources, being delayed at another meeting, the Chair agreed to take this item on the agenda next, before the Absence Management item.

Alan Evans, Assistant Director: Regeneration and Inward Investment introduced a report which provided the 2018/19 Quarter 3 (October - December 2019) performance report for Wirral Plan pledges under the Business theme. The Quarter 3 report was included as Appendix 1 to the report, and provided a description of the progress in Quarter 3, including available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

Responding to comments from Members, Alan Evans, stated that with regard to the road network deteriorating over the last 12 months and whether this was any more than usual and also if the additional funds for works on addressing the deterioration would mean the roads would be in a better condition than otherwise, he would need to ask Mark Smith, Interim Director Highways and Streetscene to respond to this in writing. With regard to Imagine Wirral and the Borough of Culture and creative and business development, Alan Evans commented that one of the key economic development projects was to turn the Treasury Building into a creative and digital business space and work on this had progressed and a lease agreement was due to be signed with the business which would occupy the building.

A Member referred to the good news with regard to the reduction in the indicator for those seriously injured or killed in road traffic accidents but expressed concern that no Cabinet Member or officer from highways was present to update the Committee.

In respect of the indicator on the skills gap and the reduction to 11%, Alan Evans responded to Members' comments and informed the Committee of the work undertaken with the Wirral Chamber of Commerce and with education bodies. Although Wirral was a net exporter of labour to Liverpool and the wider city region, the aim was to retain as many local knowledge based jobs as possible. He acknowledged that the Employer Skills Survey was a national survey and of the need to supplement this with the Chamber's own sector based surveys.

The Chair referred to the importance of 'skilling' up the local workforce particularly with potential large redevelopment schemes coming up as a result of the Muse / Wirral Growth Company projects.

Alan Evans responding to further comments referred to the GVA (Gross Value Added) which, although in Wirral was one of the lowest, had over the last five years shown some of the highest rises. He agreed the need to provide support to grow businesses and with regard to New Ferry and the £1.3m to be invested, this would comprise land assembly and a mixed use development of residential and businesses.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

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ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

Tony Williams, Head of Human Resources, introduced a report on absence management which updated the Committee on sickness absence levels in the Council and how this was being managed and monitored.

In response to several comments, Tony Williams stated that with regard to absence, these were now recorded on the selfserve system from day one, with reduced paper processes. From this month there would be an automatic alert by email to managers for staff who had hit an absence trigger. The system would also 'flag' up if a manager had not undertaken a 'return to work' interview. He acknowledged that the public sector average figure of 8.5 days lost per full time employee per annum was ambitious, when the current figure for Wirral Council was 10.97 and had hovered around 11 days for some years. The Council was working harder than ever, with the wellbeing strategy and policy improvements to bring the figures down. The policy and triggers would be looked at again in the forthcoming municipal year.

Tony Williams also acknowledged the difficulties in understanding if there was a correlation between absence levels and organisational change. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development research referred to in his report stated that management style was one of the top three causes of stress for organisations in the public sector. He stated that a piece of work was due to be undertaken with the Council's occupational health provider to gain a better understanding of the different categories of the causes of stress in the Council.

Members expressed concern that these average levels of absence were far higher than those in the private sector. With regard to the trigger targets there was some concern expressed that some employees might take advantage of this by having 10 or so days off within a 12 month period, thereby just staying below the trigger level.

Tony Williams responded that managers could still identify patterns of absence even without an employee hitting a trigger. He also referred to the Employee Assistance Programme which, allied to occupational health, was there to deal with a whole range of issues independently of the Council,

including access to six sessions of counselling per annum. With regard to a company doctor there were arrangements with occupational health for a doctor, but not one employed directly by the council, as it was easier and more cost effective to manage a commissioned service.

On a motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was –

Resolved – That Committee notes the current position in relation to employee absence within the Council and the work being undertaken to address this and that with agreement from the Chair and Party Spokespersons, Tony Williams bring an update to the Committee every six months.

50 UPDATE ON LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DEVELOPMENTS

Rose Boylan, Policy and Strategy Manager, introduced a report and gave a presentation setting out a brief overview of latest developments at the Liverpool City Region (LCR). A wide range of activity continued, and the report highlighted a small extract of achievements and priorities, which included:

- introducing half price bus travel for all apprentices under the age of 25;
- investing £8.3m in the first phase of a 372 mile walking and cycling network;
- progressing the introduction of new publicly owned trains onto the Mersey Rail network by 2021;
- providing £6m for a Mayoral Town Centre Fund to support local high streets across the City Region;
- forming the Mersey Tidal Power Commission to oversee the potential creation of sustainable energy solution that harness the power of the River Mersey;
- establishing a City Region-wide task force to tackle poor air quality;
- proposal to invest in digital infrastructure to ensure that all parts of the City Region benefit from fastest broadband speeds in the UK;
- proposed use of new Mayoral powers with respect to the bus network to ensure that bus services in the City Region worked for the benefit of bus users and the wider economy;
- investment of £200,000 to support the annual Borough of Culture programme.

Responding to comments from Members, Rose Boylan stated that she would be able to provide further details in writing regarding the proposed City Region investment in cycling and walking routes for the Wirral. The air quality task force would be looking at the issue across the region and the link to health inequalities in certain pockets of the region. 2019 was the year of the Environment for the region which had just been launched and she would be able to provide website links on a series of events scheduled for the year.

A Member welcomed the introduction of the £1 fast tag fee for City Region residents but suggested that the aim should be to make this free as it was for residents of Halton and Widnes crossing the Mersey Gateway toll bridge. Another Member expressed concern at the imbalance between Metro Mayor areas with some receiving more funding than others.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

51 **BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered a report from the Chair which explained the process of developing and managing a scrutiny work programme for the current municipal year. The report updated the Committee on the current status of items on the work programme.

An update was also provided on the Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee which had convened its first two scrutiny workshops in December, 2018.

Resolved – That the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2018/19, be noted.