

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 28 October 2010

Present: Councillor P Gilchrist (Chair)

Councillors A Brighouse B Kenny
J Keeley A McArdle
P Davies D McCubbin
P Kearney J Stapleton

Deputies: Councillors J Hale (In place of S Williams)

In attendance: Councillors J Green S Holbrook

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

Members were asked to consider whether they had a personal or prejudicial interest in connection with any item on the agenda and, if so, to declare it and to state the nature of such interest.

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 to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

No such declarations were made.

63 STRATEGIC CHANGE PROGRAMME

Further to minute 43 (21/9/10) the Director of Technical Services provided an update on the Strategic Change Programme. The report outlined progress made to date including the establishment of the Strategic Change Programme Office (SCPO) under the Director of Technical Services and also of a Strategic Change Programme Board (SCPB).

A corporate project management system (ProjectVision, Cora Systems) had been procured and configured against the delivery arrangements established by SCPB. Training on the use of the system had begun and was due to conclude on 16 November 2010, for key project managers. Additional training for members and Chief Officers would take place as required.

The Director described the "decision gate" approach to programme delivery which had been developed. This approach established a number of decision gates projects had to pass through during the project life cycle. If a project failed to satisfy specific criteria, SCPB would not approve progression to the next stage. An assurance

framework had been agreed and would be delivered by the Director of Finance, providing independent assurance of the programme to SCPB.

The Strategic Change Programme Board had provisionally agreed three delivery channels in which the projects would be categorised:

- Strategic Change Projects – These projects will be managed using the delivery arrangements and assurance framework agreed by SCPB. The progress of these projects will be monitored by SCPB.
- Business as Usual Projects – those projects which will be primarily managed through normal governance processes i.e. Cabinet decides, Executive Team implements, scrutiny monitors. However, some projects will be significant in terms of the efficiencies to be delivered or the risk to the organisation that SCPB will require some oversight.
- DASS Programme - These projects have clear dependencies and linkages to each other and should be managed as a single programme.

The existing programme agreed by Cabinet on 14 January 2010, had been reviewed to establish if projects were still relevant to the Council's objectives, had the ability to be delivered or could be enhanced or stretched to provide additional outcomes. Any new or emerging ideas had also been assessed by SCPB for inclusion.

All projects were awaiting SCPB approval. In some cases this approval was the continuance of an existing project, whilst in other cases it would be approval to start project delivery. There had been a further proposal to group these projects by themes, which might assist in the future development of the programme. These themes were draft at this stage and would be more fully developed following the consultation exercise and refresh of the Council's Corporate Plan. The processes established in restating the change programme and monitoring its delivery allowed for the expansion of the programme, enabling emerging ideas to be developed into new projects under the "project conception" stage. These ideas were received from several quarters including the staff suggestion scheme, response from staff to the Leader's emails, the recent MBA projects and members of the public. This process would also be applied to ideas and recommendations resulting from the recent consultation exercise.

Councillor P Davies expressed concern that the savings target had now gone up to £33m for the next year, although the Strategic Change Programme would not be identifying any savings until November.

The Director responded that it would be foolhardy to try and put figures on savings when all the work had not yet been completed but that he would be happy to provide these figures when they were available.

With the permission of the Chair, the Deputy Leader of the Council addressed the Committee and spoke of the need to make efficiencies across departmental boundaries as these had not been pursued in the past. The previous process had stalled because it was too overcomplicated but there was now more information available and greater transparency to the process.

With the permission of the Chair, the Leader of the Council addressed the Committee and expressed his thanks to the Director for all his work on the Change Programme

in making it deliverable. A strategy was now in place which would deliver savings and the Director of Finance was signing off every project.

The Director stated that the new processes for the Change Programme which were now in place followed tried and tested industry management techniques which were far more robust than previous methods of managing change. A lot of savings would be made through reduced staffing costs and arrangements were in place to make sure these weren't double counted with the current EVR offer.

The Chair referred to the Cabinet resolution of 22 July, 2010 which had given delegated authority to the Chief Executive to take all decisions relating to the Strategic Change Programme in consultation with the Programme Board and of the need for the Committee to be kept 'in the loop'.

The Leader of the Council responded that he would be happy to explore a reporting model to keep Council and the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committees informed of decisions taken.

It was moved by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Hale,

"(1) That the officers be thanked for their updated report.

(2) That Committee recognises the adoption and development of robust and rigorous processes now being put forward.

(3) That Committee recognises and welcomes the reported involvement of staff in the process.

(4) That Committee does not accept the categorisation of the Strategic Change Programme as suggested in the Director's report and Committee expects reports back on progress and involvement at key stages in the process."

The Committee voted upon each part of the motion in turn as follows:

The first part was put and carried (10:0).

The second part was put and carried (5:4) (Councillors P Davies, Kenny, McArdle and Stapleton voting against)

The third part was put and carried (6:4) (Councillors P Davies, Kenny, McArdle and Stapleton voting against)

The fourth part was put and carried (10:0).

It was moved as an addition to the motion by Councillor P Davies and seconded by Councillor Stapleton –

"That proper discussions take place with the Trades Unions around the Strategic Change Programme."

This motion was put and carried (10:0).

It was further moved by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Hale that –

“This Committee appreciates the opportunity to look at those issues in the Change Programme, which fall within its remit, at future meetings.”

As an amendment to this further motion it was moved by Councillor P Davies, seconded by Councillor Kenny, that –

“This Committee believes that all projects under the Strategic Change Programme should go through the Council’s normal governance processes. To that end, the Council’s Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee is keen to support the change programme by scrutinising all projects referred to in this report and asks the Director to produce a progress report to the next meeting of this Committee.”

The amendment was put and lost (4:6)

The further motion was put and carried (6:4) (Councillors P Davies, Kenny, McArdle and Stapleton voting against)

Resolved –

(1) That the officers be thanked for their updated report.

(2) (5:4) (Councillors P Davies, Kenny, McArdle and Stapleton voting against) That Committee recognises the adoption and development of robust and rigorous processes now being put forward.

(3) (6:4) (Councillors P Davies, Kenny, McArdle and Stapleton voting against) That Committee recognises and welcomes the reported involvement of staff in the process.

(4) That Committee does not accept the categorisation of the Strategic Change Programme as suggested in the Director’s report and Committee expects reports back on progress and involvement at key stages in the process.

(5) That proper discussions take place with the Trades Unions around the Strategic Change Programme.

(6) (6:4) (Councillors P Davies, Kenny, McArdle and Stapleton voting against) That Committee appreciates the opportunity to look at those issues in the Change Programme, which fall within its remit, at future meetings.

64 CONSULTATION TASK FORCES

Further to minute 58 (21/9/10) the Committee considered a report from the Interim Chief Executive which set out the extensive work undertaken to deliver the Council’s consultation process ‘Wirral’s Future: Be a part of it’. The report documented the different stages of the project, the overall methodology used, and the next steps in the process, highlighting the underpinning commitment to make the process inclusive and accessible to the widest possible audience.

With the permission of the Chair, the Leader of the Council addressed the Committee and expressed his thanks to the project team involved for all their work in helping to deliver the consultation over such a short period of time. He also thanked the

outreach team of over 30 staff who over a seven week period had spoken to over 10,000 people at 140 events and with partner organisations had helped distribute over 40,000 questionnaires, of which over 5,000 had been returned. Additionally he thanked the team responsible for capturing all the data coming back and the importance attached to making sure all those who had contributed had feedback on their ideas.

He emphasised that the whole process was open and transparent, with all the information which was considered by the Task Forces being available to the public on the Council's website.

Responding to comments from the Chair, the Interim Chief Executive stated that after the consultation had closed Task Forces would meet for a fourth time to consider the survey results and review their initial proposals with their recommendations then forming the basis of a report to Cabinet on 25 November.

The Head of Tourism and Marketing, who was leading the core project team, also responded to comments from the Committee including on the length of the questionnaire which had had to strike a balance between being too simplistic and achieving an informed response on the questions posed. Geographical locations could be identified for those responses on the internet and there was also a facility to strip out multiple responses. Every single comment received would be published on the website along with the percentage returns for each question and a detailed evaluation of the responses. All Members would be informed of the dates of the fourth Task Force meetings to be held during the second week in November and invited to attend.

It was moved by Councillor P Davies and seconded by Councillor McArdle that –

“This Committee believes that:

- No account in drawing up the options was taken of the knowledge, experience and skills built up over time and held by councillors elected to represent the public.
- The entire programme has been determined by the Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council without input from Cabinet or Scrutiny.
- The consultation process was therefore put in place without any regard for the checks and balances contained within the Council's Constitution and that, in so doing, the Council and individuals have been put at future risk.
- Proper account was not taken of the professional survey skills required to construct a neutral questionnaire and provide a statistically valid sample which would be representative of the whole of Wirral and the result is an unbalanced and deeply flawed consultation exercise.
- Questions have been fudged so the public cannot be sure whether services from the Council will actually stop, in favour of unfunded voluntary or private sector activity, or simply be replaced by commissioned or outsourced services.
- The lack of any financial information or costings of the options being put forward, and the lack of any options allowing people to choose clearly between internally and externally provided services, renders them meaningless in budget terms.

- This therefore appears not to be a budgetary exercise at all but a way of pushing forward Tory Party ideological propaganda that massive outsourcing of services to create a smaller state is always better, regardless of the cost in financial or human terms.
- The validity of the whole exercise is now rightly being questioned by the people of Wirral.

This Committee also notes that, with little action taken, the budget shortfall has risen again to £33m and is likely to rise still further when the local government settlement is announced.

This Committee therefore recommends to Cabinet that:

- (1) The results of this flawed consultation are treated with extreme caution and not used as a true basis for any budget decisions.
- (2) Any future consultation of this nature using questionnaires is carried out in a neutral and statistically valid way, without political interference, using those professionally skilled in surveying public opinion.
- (3) The full consultation processes are approved through Cabinet and are subject to scrutiny in the normal way.
- (4) Task Forces outside the Council's Constitutional framework are not used but instead independent representatives are co-opted for the purpose onto the relevant Scrutiny Committee to work in conjunction with elected members to provide advice to Cabinet.
- (5) A guide to good practice in consultation is produced, with the appropriate external advice, in order to avoid future problems.
- (6) The Cabinet should take responsibility for decision making and act with all speed to reduce the budget deficit."

The motion was put and lost (4:6).

It was then moved by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Keeley and –

Resolved (10:0) –

- (1) That this Committee recognises the dedication of all the staff who have met with and encouraged the public to participate in the consultation, in a large number of locations.**
- (2) That this Committee understands that the Task Forces have undertaken detailed work and thanks them for their input.**
- (3) That this Committee welcomes assurances that recommendations from the Task Forces and future meetings are to be open to the public and advertised and their contributions are to be assessed by Members.**

(4) That this Committee recognises that the information received from the consultation will be fully reported to Members, accessible to the public and used to contribute to the outcome of the budget process.
