

# COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 1 October 2012

Present:

Councillor	J Hale (Chair)	
Councillors	A Cox	C Muspratt
	S Williams	S Whittingham
	P Doughty	J Williamson
	S Hodrien	P Gilchrist
	C Jones	

## 21 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members of the Committee were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary and non pecuniary interests, in connection with any item(s) on the agenda and state the nature of the interest.

Members were also reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they are 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.

## 22 MINUTES

In relation Minute 9, Paragraph 2 – Welfare and Debt Advice Services, it was commented that the minute should read “Councillor J Williamson also declared a personal Interest in the item by virtue of her being a Bankruptcy Examiner” and not Councillor S Williams as previously stated.

In relation to Minute 6 – Financial Monitoring Statement, Councillor Whittingham indicated that he was a volunteer at the Wirral Transport Museum and not the British Transport Museum as stated.

**Resolved – That subject to the above amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2012, be approved as a correct record.**

## 23 WIRRAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which set out Wirral's Improvement Plan and identified the mechanisms for its successful management and delivery. The Plan as detailed in appendix 1 to the report set out the key targets and objectives for improvement as well as the anticipated success criteria and delivery timetable.

The report detailed how delivery of the Improvement Plan would be managed through a governance model which illustrated clear lines of responsibility in relation to programme management and assurance. There was an outline of the resource requirements to set up and initiate the programme supported by a delivery model which demonstrated how the initial resource plan would be expanded upon. The report included reporting arrangements and a summary of how risk would be managed.

The plan was endorsed by the Improvement Board at its last meeting on 20 July 2012 and approved by Cabinet on 6th September 2012, resolving that delivery should commence as a matter of urgency.

Fiona Johnston, Director of Policy, Performance and Public Health indicated that the Committee was responsible for ensuring the plan was implemented and suggested that Members indicated what types of reports they required and timescales to be set. Members suggested that special meetings or a standard item be introduced on the agenda to discuss the improvement plan.

In response to Members comments in relation to sanctions for Members in relation to the revised Code of Conduct of Corporate Governance, Surjit Tour Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management indicated that work was currently being done to update the Code of Practice and Member/Officer behaviour policy. Mr Tour indicated that the Code was already in place and the processes there; these would be added to, to define the culture of the organisation.

In relation to Member training, Members suggested that as mandatory training could not be enforced; training documents could be circulated to those Members unable to attend training events. It was further suggested that online training could be a possible option.

#### **Resolved –**

**That the Improvement Plan, the proposed governance model and initial resource requirements to enable the commencement of delivery as a matter of urgency be approved.**

## **24 ICT STRATEGY**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance informing of the progress made on implementing the ICT Strategy as presented to Cabinet on 13 October 2011. The strategy focused on the key areas that linked it to other significant strategies, both internal and external. These included the influences exerted by the office rationalisation programme, and agile working initiatives; improvement of services to Members, reduction of the use in paper in the Committee processes, plus the Government's ICT Strategy. The report outlined the potential benefits that may be derived from these strategies.

The ICT Strategy promoted the Council's corporate priorities in that ICT underpinned service delivery in most areas and was an enabler in the realisation of benefits associated with most corporate initiatives. Implementation of the Strategy would assist in cost savings as ICT supported the changes its business processes and

working practices to take best advantage of the available technology. The Council did not have a statutory duty to deliver ICT services.

Geoff Patterson, Head of IT Services indicated that there was a lot of duplication in relation to document management within the Council, there was scope to rationalise these systems, this would not save money for the Council but would reduce the amount of IT support needed.

In relation to recovery data centres, Mr Patterson indicated that the Council currently had two data centres which serve as a back up to each centre; through office rationalisation plans were being introduced to relocate the centres across the Borough to separate the two centres.

Members asked about the current testing on-going with the pilot scheme in relation to mobile working and asked if work could be done with the firewall to enable network access from own devices. In response, Mr Patterson indicated that this could be done by adding an extra layer to the network this wouldn't connect personal devices but would enable access via mobile phones. At present Members and staff are able to access their emails from home computers or laptops via the use of a council key fob. Due regard was need to be given to the security of information.

In relation to the business case it was explained that this contained the details of outcomes, associated costs, and benefits, return of investment and improvements and savings. The business case justifies why IT is being implemented.

Mr Patterson answered questions from Members in relation to budget projections, use of data systems and Microsoft Office and virtualised hardware.

It was suggested and agreed that a Working Party to include Councillors Williams, Gilchrist and Whittingham and Mr Patterson be set up to look at the IT infrastructure and best practice and agree a terms of reference ensuring that the working party did not infringe on the work of Members Equipment Steering Group.

#### **Resolved – That**

- (1) the report updating on the IT Strategy be noted; and**
- (2) the Head of IT be requested to set up a Working Party to include Councillors Williams, Gilchrist and Whittingham to look at the IT infrastructure and best practice and agree a terms of reference to ensuring that the working party did not infringe on the work of Members Equipment Steering Group.**

## **25 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS AND LOCAL OMBUDSMAN CONTACTS**

The Committee considered the report of the Interim Director of Finance providing a quarterly analysis of requests received under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('FOIA') and matters being dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman, as recommended by Cabinet at its meeting on 12 April 2012 (Minute No. 404 refers).

Additional qualitative information was offered on service performance in response to contacts, highlighting any exceptions.

In reference to the extreme number of Freedom of Information requests that the Council received, Geoff Paterson, Head of IT Services indicated that with the implications of the KLOE 6 that authors have produce shorter reports and appendices, work would be undertaken to improve structure of the website to try and reduce the number of requests received.

Surjit Tour, Interim Director of Law, HR and Asset Management indicated that work would also be undertaken to improve the content of the Mod.gov library and ensure that where possible all information is in the public domain.

In response to Members, Mr Tour indicated that a quarterly report on the requests not processed could be provided if requested by the Committee,

**Resolved –**

**That the report updating on the Freedom of Information requests be noted.**

## 26 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the Interim Director of Finance, which presented a review of Treasury Management policies, practices and activities during the first quarter of 2012-13 and confirmed compliance with treasury limits and prudential indicators. The report had been prepared in accordance with the revised CIPFA Treasury Management Code and the revised Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

**Resolved –**

**That the Treasury Management Performance Monitoring Report be noted.**

## 27 **REVENUES, INCOME AND BENEFITS - MONITORING 2012/13**

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

In response to Members in relation to recoveries from the Adult Social Services and Legal Departments, Malcolm Flanagan, Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services indicated that that a lot work had been undertaken to recover as reasonably as possible; action is taken when required and help and advice is offered in relation to debt management.

Members raised the issues of building control fees and car parking charges, and indicated that in relation to car parking the Council needed to be more competitive. In response, it was commented that Liverpool City Council had reduced their car parking charges to increase revenue.

**Resolved – That**

- (1) the report be noted;**
- (2) the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services be requested to forward information to Members on the proportion of fees uncollected in relation to golf course fees; and**
- (3) the Deputy Director of Technical Services be requested to investigate the points raised by Members in relation car park fees and report back to them in writing.**

**28 REVENUE MONITORING 2012/13 MONTH 4 (JULY 2012)**

The Committee considered the report of the Interim Director of Finance setting out the revenue position for 2012/13 as at Month 4 (July 2012). It identified the latest financial projections and prioritised the risks for ongoing management actions, to ensure the year-end position would result in spend remaining within the budget allocated.

The report indicated that Cabinet on 6 September 2012 instituted a spending freeze in the light of the projected overspend.

**Resolved-**

**That the report on the revenue monitoring 2012/13 for month 4 (July 2012 be noted.**

**29 OFFICE RATIONALISATION UPDATE**

Prior to consideration of the item Councillor C Muspratt declared a Personal Interest by virtue of her being Secretary of the Mayer Trust. The Committee considered the report of the Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management updating on recent activity in respect of the Office Rationalisation Programme. The report indicated that Rationalisation of the Council's administrative accommodation would support the corporate priority of improving the efficiency and value for money of Council services and would result in financial savings to the Council. Office rationalisation was not a statutory duty.

**Resolved -**

**The report updating on Office Rationalisation be noted.**

**30 FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period September to December 2012 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 Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider, having regard to the work

programme, whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.

Resolved – That the Forward Plan be noted.

### 31 **REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair referred to the Committee's Work Programme and sought the views of Members as to whether any matters should be recommended for inclusion in the Work Programme of the Committee for the 2012/2013 municipal year.

In relation to the work programme, the Chair referred to the special meetings that may be needed to discuss budget provisions he indicated that he would like to meet with the two Spokespersons to discuss this information and set an appropriate timetable for discussion.

**Resolved – That**

- (1) the Work Programme be noted;**
  - (2) a meeting to discuss budget implication meetings be arranged and attended by the Chair and Spokespersons.**
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