

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 14 February 2013

Present: Councillor J Hale (Chair)

Councillors P Doughty S Whittingham
S Hodrien J Williamson
C Muspratt P Gilchrist
R Gregson

Deputies: Councillors S Mountney

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

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with the item 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 the item to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor Hale declared a personal interest by virtue of him being a member of a sports club

2 CONSULTATION FINDINGS : WHAT REALLY MATTERS STAGE 2

Further to minutes 29 (6 November 2012), 40 (5 December 2012) and 44 (16 January 2013), the Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive upon the outcome of the What Really Matters Stage 2 Consultation, which had been considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 7 February 2013 (minute 184 refers).

The comprehensive programme of consultation and engagement had been undertaken to inform the development of the Council's Corporate and Financial Plan for 2013-2016 and further to inform the decision making process surrounding significant budget savings. The Cabinet had noted the consultation process and implementation described within the report, and thanked Wirral residents, staff and other stakeholders for their input. Cabinet had also noted the detailed consultation findings in relation to each budget option as contained within Appendices 1, 2 and 3.

The report detailed the consultation findings and provided information in relation to targeted engagement and the methodology for the geographic and demographic analysis that had been undertaken. Key messages were that the Council should

protect the vulnerable, retain responsibility for quality and look to raise income and eliminate waste. The Chief Executive had responded personally to all direct communication from members of staff and a team was in place to ensure Equality Impact Assessments, continued engagement and consultation and to show due regard to concerns raised.

Individual views expressed by Members in relation to the general analysis of consultation responses were that, in some instances, the comments did not represent a neutral interpretation; for example, 51% being shown as either strong support for an option or, conversely, being a slight majority against. However, Members noted that the comments were subjective.

The Chair indicated that the use of the word “strongly” was not a clear indication of strong support to the proposals and that the Council should not be exaggerating and misleading the figures.

Mr McCallum indicated that the option summaries were included to provide Members with a snapshot of the proposals. These would not be used by Cabinet to form the basis of their decision making.

The Chair, supported by the Committee suggested that future questionnaire questions be circulated to each Committee to allow Members to comment and give their feedback prior to publication. Mr McCallum agreed to feed this back to the Policy Department.

The Committee was requested to give consideration to the consultation feedback in relation to the following specific items, which fell within its remit and the Chair proposed that individual views expressed by Members could form the basis of feedback to Budget Cabinet –

1. Reducing Council Management

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

2. Workforce Conditions of Service

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

3. Procurement

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

4. Treasury Management

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

5. Rationalisation of Civic Services

In response to Members , Mr McCallum indicated that information regarding the options were shared with the public and further details on the options was given to this Committee in November 2012.

The Chair indicated that in relation to the reduction of mayoral visit, this was a very popular function which generated a lot of money raised for charity and that he felt should not be looked at as part of the budget savings.

Individual Members commented that although the function was indeed welcomed by the public and it raised a lot of money for charity, some public perceptions differ and in the current climate may not be classed as an essential service to retain.

Surjit Tour, Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management indicated that this option was not looking to reduce mayoral visits, but the additional costs, i.e. overtime and extra mayoral car.

Mr Tour indicated that originally the Council had two chauffeurs and two car to transport the mayor and deputy to functions, this had now reduced to one chauffeur so the service would now have to look at the budget provision and manage visits within this. Security was an important issue in relation to undertaking mayoral visits; this would have to be given careful consideration.

The Committee noted this option.

6. Moving to Four Yearly Elections

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

7. Reducing the Cost of Democracy

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

8. Information Technology Service

In response to Members, Mr McCallum explained that this option covers both employees and Members and the option detailed the proposal to replace the current I.T Strategy.

In relation I.T equipment, Members indicated that at present their equipment was not fit for purpose. Councillor Whittingham indicated that in relation to Members using their own equipment, this had been discussed at the Members Equipment Steering Group and there were security issues to be considered.

Mr Tour indicated that in relation to security we have to comply with the requirement of the Government Connect.

Members indicated that they had recently been given a demonstration of a tablet with a key board which was not suitable. Councillor Whittingham reiterated that no Member would be receiving an I Pad; however WiFi would be made available in the Town Hall.

The Committee noted this option.

9. Public Relations and Marketing

The Chair commented that in view of the significant benefits of tourism to Wirral for e.g. the Hoylake Open Day and the need to build on the momentum, the Cabinet should consider carefully the impact of removing subsidies for tourism events.

The Committee noted this option.

10. Area Forum

The Chair indicated that the Democracy Working Group were working on this.

The Committee noted this option.

11. Better Use of Buildings

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

12. Transforming Business Support

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

13. Restructure of Law, HR and Asset Management

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

14. Revenues and Benefits

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

15. Increasing Court Costs

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

16. Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

17. Council Tax Pensioner Discount

The Committee indicated that they had no further comments and noted this option

18. Council Tax Discretionary Rate Relief

The Chair indicated that he was unclear as to the proposals the Cabinet would be considering in relation to this and that this may result in businesses closing.

Resolved – That the Cabinet be requested to have due regard to the views expressed in relation to those budget options within the remit of the Council Excellence O&S Committee.

