

BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 27 November 2019

Present: Councillor D Mitchell (Chair)

Councillors J Bird K Greaney
T Cox J Stapleton
M Collins J Walsh
G Davies KJ Williams
S Foulkes S Williams
A Gardner

Apologies Councillor G Watt

24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

One apology was received from Councillor Geoffrey Watt.

25 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 made.

26 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 17 September, 2019.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September, 2019, be approved.

27 2019/20 QUARTER 2 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE

The Chair introduced the report which provided the 2019/20 Quarter 2 (July – September 2019) performance report for Wirral Plan pledges under the Business theme. The Quarter 2 report was included as Appendix 1 to the report, and provided an overview of the progress in Quarter 2, including

available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

28 POTHoles AND STREET LIGHTING - UPDATE

Brian Smith, Senior Highway Maintenance Street Light Manager, introduced a report which provided an update on the measures being undertaken to reduce potholes in the carriageway and reduce the number of streetlights not working across the borough. The report also provided information regarding the methods being employed to bring about sustainable reduction improvements.

In response to Members' comments, both Brian Smith and Paul Graves, Street Lighting and Operations Manager, made the following comments:

- All the highways services contracts in respect of repairs to potholes were paid on a price schedule for work which was actually undertaken and on a banded scale so that the more work a contractor received the cost to the Council, per square metre reduced.
- There were multiple ways of supplying the infrastructure for the street lighting columns with the Council having its own underground cable network as well as the Scottish Power network. Faults could sometimes be rectified quickly but some could take longer and problems could sometimes be compounded, if a whole lighting column needed replacing leading to an extended delay in repairs.
- There were guaranteed standards of provision with Scottish Power, regulated by Ofgem, and dependent upon whether or not there was some form of exemption, compensation could be paid.
- In respect of the Penny Bridge roundabout there was a major cable fault and a full infrastructure redesign was currently taking place with installation due to take place, hopefully over the next few months.
- In respect of communications for works being undertaken around the borough, this had been identified as a problem and was currently being addressed, with postings on the website and new simplified standard letters for residents.
- With regard to street light faults, straightforward repairs were carried out as soon as possible, if a full replacement was required and it was part of the LED replacement scheme then there could be a delay.
- A small contract was in place to replace a number of lamp columns which had been damaged by traffic accidents or which were found to be dangerous and structurally unsound and needed to be cut down.

David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, also responded to some comments and referred to proposed general signage which could be put out where the fault was due to underground cabling to alert motorists to the cause. A programme totalling £500,000, over the next two years was also in

place for replacement bollards and reflective signage on traffic islands. Including an external contractor, there were now three teams fixing 600/700 electrical faults each month.

The Chair referred to some particular issues affecting the southern end of the borough and looked forward to these being addressed in the near future and also suggested the need for Scottish Power to be invited back to the Committee.

Members also thanked the officers for their report to the Committee and responses to questions.

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

Resolved –

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the actions taken to reduce pothole repairs and street lighting outages be supported.

29 **UPDATE ON LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DEVELOPMENTS**

Rose Boylan, Policy and Strategy Manager, introduced a report and gave a presentation which set out a brief overview of the latest developments at the Liverpool City Region (LCR). This included the development of a Local Industrial Strategy; LCR Town Centre Fund; LCR Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the first LCR Environmental Summit in November.

In response to comments from Members, Rose Boylan acknowledged that the wording in the draft Local Industrial Strategy was ‘wordy’ and that it would be turned into much more user friendly language when communicated to residents and the general public. The strategy’s aim, whilst acknowledging the distinctive communities and neighbourhoods, was to build strong communities and working as a collective City Region have a single approach to benefit all. Work was being undertaken to help with the revitalisation of town centres regardless of whatever funding streams might be available in the future.

Councillor Jean Stapleton gave an update on the work of the Liverpool City Region Scrutiny Committee and a very informative workshop on the Liverpool Enterprise Partnership which she had attended the previous week.

The Chair commented that Eastham appeared to be missed off some of the literature which came out of the LCR and the need for this to be rectified.

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

Resolved – That the report be noted.

30 **UNIVERSAL CREDIT - UPDATE REPORT**

The Chair introduced a report which provided an update following the report brought to Committee in September 2018 (minute 17 refers) on the Early Impact of Universal Credit and corresponding workshops. In accordance with Committee Members' request it focused on the ongoing roll-out of Universal Credit, the ending of 'Universal Support' programme and introduction of 'Help to Claim' together with the experience of and any associated impacts upon the operational service delivery teams.

The Assistant Chief Executive apologised on behalf of Lisa Jamieson, Head of Customer Services, who, at very short notice, was unable to be present to answer questions on the report and informed the Committee that written answers would be provided for the Committee.

Members raised questions on the report, which included:

- How many claimants were being directed to the national 'Money Advice Service' by the Authority as expected by the Department of Work and Pensions?
- The report referred to claimants being able to make telephone claims for Universal Credit but a Member understood that claimants were in fact discouraged from making claims over the telephone.

A Member also voiced concerns at the human cost involved with the legislation on Universal Credit and expressed the view that it was fundamentally flawed.

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

Resolved – That the update report be noted.

31 **WIRRAL GROWTH COMPANY - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

David Armstrong, the Assistant Chief Executive, introduced a report which set out proposals for the Committee to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of the Wirral Growth Company Partnership Plan and associated Business Cases. This work was time sensitive with a scheduled Cabinet decision early in 2020. The approach set out in the report would enable the Committee to review the proposals and submit any comments to Cabinet to inform the decision.

The Chair referred to the possible time constraints in getting the Committee's feedback report to Cabinet, and requested the Committee's agreement for the report to be approved by the Chair and party spokespersons, if required.

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

Resolved – That a workshop be convened to review the Wirral Growth Company Partnership Plan and associated Business Cases and, if necessary, the feedback report to Cabinet be approved by the Chair and party spokespersons.

32 UPDATE ON INTERIMS AND CONSULTANTS

Nikki Boardman, Director of Change and Organisational Design, introduced a report which provided an update on the Council's use of interims and consultants. The level of spend on executive interim / consultants in 2017/18 was £1.8m, this had reduced for 2018-19 to £1.2m. However, the expected level of spend for the full year 2019-20 was likely to be the same as 2018-19 at approximately £1.2m.

Responding to comments from Members, Nikki Boardman, commented that within legal services there had been a restructure put in place, as there were a number of interims currently covering vacant positions.

Vicki Shaw, Head of Legal Services, concurred that there were a number of solicitor post vacancies within Legal Services and subject to senior management sign off these were due to be advertised very shortly. The number of trainee solicitor posts was also being increased in order to train future lawyers to meet anticipated recruitment gaps in the most economic and effective way.

A Member suggested the need for regular reports on this matter and that the next report needed to focus on and provide more detail as to the number of interims working within the Business Management area

Responding to further comments, Tony Williams, the Head of HR, stated that there were currently 14 interims on day rates. With regard to end dates, interims could only be appointed for a three month period at a time, and a business case needed to be put forward for each extension to this and approved at director level. Directors were being encouraged to end any interim arrangements as soon as possible so that if the position was linked to recruitment this was undertaken as soon as possible.

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

Resolved – That the report be noted and a further report be brought back to the Committee with the details requested.

33 **FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 2 2019/20**

Sarah Cox, Principal Accountant, introduced the report of the Director of Finance and Investment which set out the Council's revenue and capital monitoring position for 2019/20 quarter 2. An adverse revenue position of £429,000 was currently forecast, which was a £238,000 increase from Quarter 1 forecast position of £198,000). This was largely due to income targets not being fully met and increased costs from the Coroners Service. Some pressures were forecast to be mitigated by employee vacancy savings.

Responding to comments from Members, Sarah Cox commented that there were ways of checking income targets with Service Level Agreements to ensure that they were achievable.

With regard to mitigation plans for the forecast budget deficit, David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, commented that a series of measures were in place to scrutinise spending even more closely.

The Chair reminded Members that in relation to the budget, plans were in place for all four scrutiny committees to be invited to two scrutiny budget workshops in January, 2020.

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

Resolved – That the report be noted.

34 **HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC REPRESENTATION PANEL MINUTES**

The Committee was requested to note the minutes of the Highways and Traffic Representation Panel meeting held on 21 October, 2019, regarding objections received against a proposal to introduce a scheme of proposed accessibility improvements on Lowood Road and Circular Road, Birkenhead. The Panel had recommended that the proposed scheme should not be introduced.

Councillor Steve Williams, Chair of the Panel, addressed the Committee and expressed agreement with a comment which had been made at the Panel by a Ward Councillor for Councillors to have more training and seek professional advice before putting such proposals forward.

Councillor Jean Stapleton commented that both she and former Councillor Phil Davies, had asked the Highways section to look at this matter at the request of residents and follow the normal consultation procedures, and that was what had happened in this case. Officers had given impartial advice and a decision had been reached in a fair and democratic manner.

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

Resolved – That the minutes be noted.

35 **BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report from the Scrutiny Officer which explained the process of developing and managing a scrutiny work programme for the current municipal year. The report also updated the Committee on the current status of scrutiny reviews and workshops on a variety of topics.

Resolved – That the report be noted.