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COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 19 November 2009

Present:

Councillor	C Meaden (Chair)		
Councillors	L Rowlands	AER Jones	
	D Elderton	S Quinn	
	G Ellis	P Gilchrist	
	A Pritchard		

Deputies:

Councillors	RL Abbey (In place of J George)		
	P Williams (In place of C Teggin)		

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

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were. No such declarations were made.

34 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2009, be approved.

35 COMMUNITY COHESION

Members referred to matters raised at the presentation, prior to the meeting, by the Council's Corporate Equality and Cohesion Manager, in relation to Community Cohesion. The presentation had highlighted the events which had led to the idea of community cohesion and which had resulted in the formation in 2006 of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. Community Cohesion was 'what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well and live well together'. For this to happen, people needed to have –

- a shared vision and sense of belonging;
- a focus on what new and existing communities had in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity and;
- strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

Cohesion was not about trying to make everyone the same but about giving people the skills to respect difference, to cope with change and welcome new residents. Alongside those skills there needed to be a shared sense of mutual respect for each other.

The presentation indicated that central government had committed to cohesion by the establishment of a set of national indicators to support PSA 21 'to build cohesive, empowered and active communities' and PSA 26 'to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from international terrorism'. Although many activities to support community cohesion were led by the Police, the support of local authorities and partners were vital in its success. The presentation indicated a proposed approach by the Council, the first part of which was to undertake a mapping exercise and to produce an action plan. Members indicated their support for the development of community cohesion in Wirral and referred also to the success of the Diversity Day held recently at Wallasey Town Hall.

Resolved – That an update report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

[The Chair indicated that she had approved consideration of the following additional item of business.]

36 **PRESENTATION - 2009/2010 QUARTER TWO PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL REVIEW**

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services commented that the Second Quarter Performance Report 2009/2010 was available for inspection in the Web Library and he gave a detailed presentation to highlight the key achievements and performance issues which had been identified in the monitoring period. He referred in particular to the on target spend of £19m on Woodchurch High School and to the fact that 64.4% of the performance indicators which were priorities for improvement were achieving or exceeding targets. He reported that although the recession continued to impact there had been a number of improvements, particularly in relation to creating and safeguarding jobs. He identified both what worked well and the key risks in relation to each of the Council's Strategic Objectives and provided also an overall performance summary relevant to the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny committee, together with information in relation to targets to reduce sickness absence.

He commented also upon information provided by the Director of Finance in relation to key financial headlines and reported also upon the revenue budget and capital programme 2009/2010.

In response to comments from Members, the Director provided information with regard to the recession recovery programme and he highlighted the work undertaken by Invest Wirral.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

37 **PRESENTATION - COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT/PARTNERSHIP EVALUATION**

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services gave a presentation in relation to an Evaluation of the four underpinning themes in Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which were included in the scrutiny work programme of the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Sustainability
- Tackling Inequality
- Protecting the Vulnerable
- Value for Money

The CAA placed a focus on self-assessment for the Council and the Partnership and he outlined what had been learned from the evaluation exercise, including the need to –

- ensure the capture of local knowledge;
- ensure that the voice of the community is represented in plans and in feedback to the public;
- improve communication of partnership successes;
- ensure a proactive approach to sharing learning on joint commissioning across the partnership;
- continue to improve performance management of shared partnership objectives and targets.

He proposed that the outcomes of CAA would be reported to Council Excellence on 1 February 2010, together with an action plan to address CAA area outcomes and findings of partnership evaluation. The delivery of the activity could be the subject of scrutiny by Council Excellence, with a particular focus on the underpinning themes agreed as part of the work programme. In response to comments from Members in relation to the availability of the full version of the Council's self assessment, the Director agreed to consider how best to disseminate information to Members in advance of it being made available publicly on the Audit Commission website. He agreed also to investigate the information contained within press releases copied to Members.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

38 FINANCIAL MONITORING STATEMENT

The Director of Finance presented a summary in tabular format of the current position of the revenue accounts and General Fund balances as at 30 September 2009, together with an update as at 31 October 2009. He indicated areas where there were reports of financial pressures, and commented in particular upon continuing pressures in Adult Social Services, Children and Young People, Finance, Regeneration and Technical Services. At this stage of the financial year, the decisions taken by the Cabinet and the overspends in Adult Social Services, Children and Young People, Regeneration and Technical Services, if realised would reduce the balance at 31 March 2010 by £2.7m (down to £2.5m) and the Directors were looking at actions to address the projected overspends. In response to a comment from a Member, the Director confirmed that balances would have to be restored to £6.5m for 2010/2011

Resolved –

(1) That the contents of the financial monitoring statement be noted.

- (2) That the Financial Monitoring Statement be circulated in future to all Members of the Council.**

39 PROJECTED BUDGET 2010-2011

The Director of Finance presented the projected budget for 2010-2011, which would be the final year of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 (CSR). The final settlement was issued on 21 January 2009 which confirmed the indicative figures for 2010/2011 and the Director commented that in his budget speech on 22 April 2009 the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that the main grant for 2010/2011 would not be reduced but that there would be reductions from 2011/2012.

The Director set out variations that had been identified for 2010/2011, together with other developments which were likely to impact on the financial position of the Authority. He indicated the projected balances were reduced from £6m to £5m and assumed that all projected overspendings in 2009/2010 other than in Cultural Services would be contained by Directors. The budget showed a shortfall of £13.6m in 2010/2011 and he commented that the gap between projected expenditure and anticipated resources would need to be bridged by a combination of savings and/or increased Council Tax, in order to set a balanced budget.

Resolved – That the projected budget for 2010/2011 be updated and reported regularly to the Cabinet and to this Committee.

40 BUDGET PROJECTIONS 2011-2014

The Director of Finance reported that with the release of further documents supporting the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget on 22 April 2009 it had been possible to revise the initial estimate of the projected budgets for the years from 2011 to 2014. Those projections indicated that efficiencies would be required in the order of £23.1m in 2011/2012, £20m in 2012/2013 and £21m in 2013/2014. He set out the assumptions which underpinned the projections and he indicated those elements of the Local Government Finance Settlement that the Government had agreed to being reviewed as part of the 2011 settlement.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That the budget projections be kept under review as the global recession develops.**
- (3) That further efficiencies be sought through the delivery of the strategic change programme, the extension of that programme and by specific service efficiencies.**

41 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Director of Finance presented a summary of a review of the issues contained within the Corporate Risk Register, which had been approved by the Cabinet on 3 September 2009 (minute 94 refers) and referred to this Committee for information by

the Audit and Risk Management Committee on 23 September 2009 (minute 37 refers).

The Corporate Risk Register was a key element of the Risk Management Strategy and contained those issues that had the greatest potential to prevent or frustrate the achievement of the Strategic Objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan. It had been developed over time and the aim of the review was to rationalise the risks in order to produce a more easily understandable and manageable Risk Register. He highlighted the main changes to the Register and confirmed that it was important to remember that the Register described critical potential threats and that the inclusion of a particular issue did not mean that the event or situation described was a current problem, rather that it would be significant if it was not managed effectively.

Resolved –

- (1) That the revised Corporate Risk Register be noted.**
- (2) That progress in managing corporate risks continue to be included in the quarterly Performance and Financial Monitoring Report.**

42 **GENERAL FINANCIAL MATTERS**

The Director of Finance provided information on the treasury management position, monitoring of the prudential indicators, the position regarding Council Tax, National Non Domestic Rate, general debt and cash income collection and the payment of benefits. He provided an update in relation to the current economic environment and commented that although consensus seemed to suggest that the recession was near to an end, it did not mean that there would be an immediate and swift return to growth.

In response to a question from a Member, the Director provided information in relation to the process to be followed in the event of a complaint in relation to a Housing Benefit assessment.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

43 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHRONICLE (LGC) AWARDS 2009**

The Director of Finance reported that the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards had been held for a number of years and were intended to celebrate the highest levels of achievement in the world of local government. Wirral had previously been successful in winning of the Procurement Initiative Award and the Investment Manager of the Year Award. He was pleased to report that two submissions had been shortlisted for an award in 2009 (Pension Fund of the Year and Best Exchequer Services) and that the awards ceremony for shortlisted entries was to take place on 25 November 2009 at Claridges Mayfair.

Resolved – That the best wishes of the Committee be accorded to Wirral's shortlisted entries.

44 **REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair presented an update to the agreed work programme, which had been designed around the four themes of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (Sustainability, Tackling Inequality, Vulnerable People and Value for Money).

Resolved –

- (1) That the thanks of the Committee be accorded to the officers for work undertaken in the development of the work programme.**
 - (2) That an update report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee upon progress in relation to the office accommodation element of the Strategic Asset Review.**
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