

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 5 December 2012

Present:

Councillor J Hale (Chair)

Councillors P Doughty J Williamson
S Hodrien P Gilchrist
C Muspratt

Deputies:

Councillors W Clements
J Walsh
C Povall
D McCubbin

51 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.

Councillors McCubbin and Clements declared personal interests by virtue of them being friends of libraries.

Councillor Doughty declared a personal interest by virtue of his employment

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

52 BUDGET OPTIONS

The Committee received a presentation from Lucy Barrow, Community Engagement Manager, Chief Executive's Department, on the process of the consultation and the progress made on Stage 2 of the consultation to date. Lucy Barrow reported that over 70 budget options had now been published and the savings identified were 25 per cent more than what was needed, giving Members and the public a real choice as to where they should be made. She also went on to outline the role of Overview and Scrutiny members in the process.

At the suggestion of the Chair the Committee then considered the 13 budget options relevant to its own remit in turn.

1. Full Management Restructure

The Chair suggested that the Committee note the report and await further information in due course.

2. Staff Terms and Conditions

Members asked if a HR analysis could be provided as to the level of impact on staff and services which would be affected.

Chris Hyams, Head of HR & Organisational Development introduced this option. Responding to comments from Members she indicated that the proposal to introduce four days unpaid leave would result in a 1.5% reduction in pay for all non-schools staff. Ms Hyams gave the Committee an example of scales of pay and the amount of reduction per month a person could lose. This proposal would realise a saving of £1.5m per annum. The proposed changes to enhancements would affect approximately 1,200 employees. Regular discussions were taking place with the Trade Unions on these proposals.

When asked about staff who hold more than one job with the Council, Ms Hyams indicated that a number of part time staff had more than one job and that a contract of employment was given for each post held. When asked by Members about transitional pay arrangements. Ms Hyams confirmed that the current transitional pay policy applies to contractual earnings for one year, up to £2,000. Ms Hyams agreed to circulate comparisons of the payment of enhancements in neighbouring authorities.

In relation to car allowances, Ms Hyams indicated that the proposal was to stop paying essential car user allowance and pay a mileage rate at HMRC rates. Studies from other Authorities had shown that this could cause a short disruption.

3. Procurement

The Chair indicated that a Special meeting of the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be held to discuss the savings if Members so wished.

4. Treasury Management

In response to Members, Mr Peter Timmins, Interim Director of Finance agreed to provide a summary explanation of the breakdown of the reported 1.7 million Treasury savings.

5. Civic Services

Surjit Tour, Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management explained the option and indicated that the civic diary for mayoral events would be managed in a more proactive way to ensure that events are used as a learning experience for the forthcoming Mayor/Mayorress.

Members expressed concern and indicated that the public reaction to the mayor attending events had always been well received and they were not in favour of reducing events if there is a high public demand.

6. Four Year Election

The Chair suggested that the Committee note the report and await further information in due course.

7. Reduce Cost of Democracy/ Restructure of Civic/Committee Services and Electoral Services

The Chair suggested that the Committee note the report and await further information in due course.

8. IT Services

The Chair suggested that the Committee note the report and await further information in due course.

9. Better Use of Buildings

Mr Ian Brand, Head of Asset Management introduced this option. In response to Members comments, Mr Brand indicated that in relation to Acre Lane, consultation was needed to be held with schools who may wish to choose alternative venues. An understanding was needed as to the future business model; this would entail a detailed piece of work. It was recognised that staff may need to work in different ways i.e. agile working.

As Acre Lane came under the remit of both Asset Management and Children and Young People, Mr Brand indicated that discussion would be held with both Departments to agree a solution. If Acre Lane was to be kept a substantial programme of repair and maintenance works was needed.

In response to Members, Mr Brand explained the view previously expressed by the Interim Director of Regeneration, Housing that the demolition of the Finance Municipal Building could have a negative impact on Hamilton Square. A Member questioned this view, and in further discussion it was suggested that use of the cleared site for car parking could support the re-use of Birkenhead Town Hall.

10. Transforming Business Support

Chris Hyams, Head of HR and Organisational Development introduced this option

11. Restructure of Legal Services

Surjit Tour, Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management responded to Members and indicated that the options key area was to look at external legal spends; how the department instructed legal advice and personnel and to look at bringing back outsourced services.

12. Asset Management Restructure

Ian Brand, Head of Asset Management introduced this option and answered questions from Members in relation to use of consultants and shared services.

13. HR Restructure

Chris Hyams, Head of HR and Organisational Development introduced this option

The Chair suggested that the Committee note the report and await further information in due course.

14. Libraries and One Stop Shops

In response to Members, Mr Peter Timmins, Interim Director of Finance agreed to provide confirmation as to the size of, and what was remaining in the book fund.

Members raised concerns regarding the impact the new welfare reform would have on staff working at the One Stop Shops, which may have health and safety implications.

Members asked if a schedule of chosen sites and timescales for implementation could be provided to enable them to assist at the planning stage. Mr Peter Timmins agreed to provide this.

15. Revenues and Benefits

In response to Members, Mr Peter Timmins, Interim Director of Finance agreed to provide information regarding the savings in relation to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

The Chair thanked the Members for their input and indicated that if Members had further comments these could be fed directly to the appropriate Officers.
