

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 13 November 2013

Present: Councillor S Whittingham (Chair)

Councillors S Foulkes B Mooney
A Hodson D Roberts
A Brighouse J Stapleton
P Doughty D Elderton
P Glasman A Sykes
M McLaughlin S Williams

Apologies Councillors RL Abbey L Fraser

24 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ron Abbey and Leah Fraser.

25 **CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST RELEVANT
AUTHORITIES (DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS) REGULATIONS
2012, INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DECLARATIONS**

No declarations of interest were received.

26 **WIRRAL IMPROVEMENT BOARD REVIEW - DRAFT FOR
CONSULTATION**

The Committee had received the Draft Improvement Board Review Report which had been commissioned by the Wirral Improvement Board to ascertain exactly where the Council was at with its improvement journey and to assist it to consider next steps.

The Director of Public Health/Head of Policy & Performance was in attendance at the meeting and made a presentation on the key findings of the review. She noted that there had been five key areas for improvement identified by the Improvement Board as follows:

- Leadership: Political and Managerial
- Corporate Governance and Decision-Making
- Corporate Plan
- Budget and Financial Stability

- Critical Services Areas: Safeguarding and Developing the Economy

The Director of Public Health/Head of Policy & Performance highlighted the main findings of the draft report, which set out what had been done so far in terms of Political Leadership, Managerial Leadership, Corporate Governance and Decision-making, the Corporate Plan, Budget and Financial Stability and critical Service Areas.

The Committee was then invited to consider and comment on the content of the Draft Review Report.

A Member told the Committee that his view was that it was a good independent report and he thanked everyone who had been involved in the work behind it. He considered that the Council had acted appropriately, in the wake of some highly critical reports that had undermined the public's confidence in it, by seeking outside help and establishing the Improvement Board which had now been meeting for 21 months. As a result, improvements had been made and the Council was now at a point where it could move forward on its own.

The Member informed that the Audit and Risk Management Committee had made vast improvements to how it functioned and carried out its work. The views of independent people were considered critical here because the public were critical of politicians and the Council wanted to achieve excellence status.

The Member made the point that large organisations did make mistakes but they should not be castigated over them. The Council had needed to respond to its mistakes in an appropriate way. He also referred to the level of savings that the Council needed to make and the difficulty of trying to bring about improvement at the same time.

The Member reported that the Policy and Performance Committees were now working hard on scrutiny and needed to take on board the comments in the Draft Review Report about 'Scrutiny' Committees. There had been various levels of Member engagement and the Member gave credit to the Political Group Leaders who had worked together and had accepted the findings of a number of critical reports of an independent nature. He commented that the Council's improvement journey had been recognised by others outside the Council.

Another Member agreed with what had been said and drew attention to a lot of positive changes which had been made whilst the Improvement Board had been in place. He pointed out that the word 'embedding' came up time and time again in the Draft Review Report and agreed that this was the process the Council needed to go through.

The Member also told the Committee that it was important that the Council had solid governance arrangements in place whilst all the necessary changes were taking place. He referred to the proposal to co-opt independent people to sit on the Audit and Risk Management Committee in the future and told the Committee that he believed that this would provide continuity. He also warned against being complacent as there was still a lot of work to be done to bring about improvements.

A Member informed that since she had been elected onto the Council in 2010 there had been a positive transformation. She considered that it would be unfortunate to lose a critical friend at this stage and welcomed the Improvement Board's return next year to check that the Council was still making progress.

Another Member drew attention to the Members' Training Programme and informed that Organisational Development Officers had put a lot of work into it. There was still work in progress and the Member urged all Members to be encouraged by this and take the opportunity to profit from the training being provided for them.

A Member made reference to the large remit of the Policy and Performance – Families and Wellbeing Committee. She informed that there was cross party concern over this. Therefore, it was imperative that Members agreed how to schedule work, scope reviews and use task and finish groups in order to cope with such a heavy work load. Members would also need to continuously monitor the situation and keep the operations of this Committee under constant review.

A Member referred to the effort, time and energy Members and Officers had put into bringing about improvements. A number of individuals had led the way and they were to be congratulated.

A Member noted that a consultation exercise with the Council's employees would end on 13 December 2013. He asked if the subsequent findings would be shared with the Improvement Board. The Director of Public Health/Head of the Policy Unit informed that the Improvement Board would receive these findings when it returned to Wirral in March 2014.

The Committee noted from the Draft Review Report that informal feedback from Council meetings had been largely positive, with a sense that the business of the Council was more the focus of discussions, whereas, previously, the debates had often held little immediate local relevance. However, to test the views more fully, it had been intended that a survey would be sent to all Elected Members during October 2013 to gather views and comments to determine whether the revised Council meeting arrangements were fit for purpose or whether further amendments were required. Members were aware that this had not been done.

The Head of Legal and Member Services reported that, unfortunately, the survey had been delayed. Members could now expect to be surveyed in January 2014 and the findings would be reported to the Improvement Board in March 2014. The Director of Public Health/Head of the Policy Unit informed that she would feed this back to the Chair of the Improvement Board so that she could amend the Final Review Report to reflect this change.

A Member was concerned that the report drew conclusions when the necessary questions had not yet been asked and decisions were being made based on wrong information.

A Member reported that she now had a better understanding of the Council, her role and how to engage with residents. It had been time consuming but it had also been very successful. She agreed that the Draft Review Report was a good one and that a lot of good work had contributed to it. However, she warned that the Council must not take its eyes off the ball now, as there were still improvements to be made.

Another Member informed that she had been elected onto the Council in 2000. Since then there had been a massive change in how Officers engaged with Members. She felt that she was becoming a better Councillor and was able to represent her electorate in a much better way.

A Member reported that a lot of people had expressed concerns over the paperwork that had to be assimilated. He considered that Members should concentrate their minds on scrutinising what was going wrong and how to put it right. Dashboards were important here as they highlighted issues of concern.

RESOLVED:

That this Committee welcomes the Report. It clearly states that the Authority is moving in the right direction.

This Committee pledges to play its full part in continuing that direction of travel.

All Members will be encouraged to engage in the next steps identified within the report.

We must not be complacent as we still need to improve in many areas identified in the report and embed positive changes.

We thank all members of the Improvement Board for their help.

We thank all employees and Members for their efforts in this journey of improvement.

We would recommend the approach adopted by the Local Government Association, in piloting sector led improvement, and would recommend it to others who find themselves in difficulties.

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