

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 15 July 2014

Present: Councillor J Williamson (Chair)

Councillors P Doughty I Williams
M Daniel A Sykes
R Gregson T Anderson
M Patrick B Berry
C Muspratt K Hodson
L Reecejones Tracey Smith
J Walsh P Gilchrist

In attendance: Councillors A Jones A McLachlan

1 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.

2 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee meeting held on 14 April, 2014.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of 14 April, 2014 be approved.

3 FUTURE COUNCIL

The Director of Resources introduced a report and gave a presentation which provided the Committee with an update as to the progress of the Future Council project, as well as an opportunity to engage with and influence the

emerging options which were being developed in order to transform the Council and achieve the savings required of the Council.

The emerging options would be further developed and then published by the Chief Executive, as officer budget options, for full public, staff and service user consultation in September 2014.

The Director set the context for the project in that investment decisions and budget savings were to be made according to three key priorities:

- Tackling health inequalities, poverty and disadvantage - narrowing the gap between the richest and poorest communities in the borough
- Protecting the vulnerable, making sure people were safe and felt safe – and could remain independent as long as possible
- Driving economic growth – investing in Wirral's future

The Council was also committed to ensuring that savings were identified and delivered based on the following principles where possible:

- Spend less on the cost of running the Council
- Broadest shoulders to bear the greatest burden
- Mitigate the impact of savings on frontline services

Current projections of savings were for a total of £70million would be required by 2018.

Responding to comments from Members, the Director and Kevin MacCallum, Corporate Marketing Officer, made a number of comments, including:

- Officers would look at how Constituency Committees would be involved in the consultation process in light of the fact that some were scheduled to meet late in October.
- The officers would ensure that cross-cutting options identified by the Future Council process would be cross checked with the principles for making savings.
- There would be a long consultation process with the public through September / October and although clarity was needed by November, it would be an ongoing process up until the budget was set in February, 2015.
- Pre-decision scrutiny by Policy and Performance Committees on options would start at the September meetings for feedback to Cabinet in November. The public consultation would run concurrently with the Committees'.
- The Committee could invite as many external experts as it wished to be involved in the process, there would be time enough once the options, which were still being developed, were published in September.

- Options which had a particular staff impact were subject to staff consultation and if options had a particular impact on specific groups then they would be consulted.
- The website would be updated weekly as to where particular public consultation events were taking place. A programme of events would be put in place although this would remain fluid to enable the consultation team to respond to particular requests at short notice. Officers would ensure that Members were kept updated.

The Chair, referring to a proposal that had been made at the Coordinating Committee proposed that a meeting of Policy and Performance Committee Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Spokespersons or their nominees be convened before September 2014 to discuss how to deal with the Future Council scrutiny process. Workshop sessions on the Future Council options could be held in public.

A Member suggested that the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Constituency Committees could be invited to the Chair and Vice-Chairs meeting, although another Member cautioned against this as the Constituency Committees acted independently of each other.

Resolved – That the report, presentation and comments be noted.

4 **DIRECTORATE PLAN / PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Director of Resources presented a report which outlined the year end performance of the Department against its Directorate Plan for 2013/14 in a Performance Dashboard. It also presented the 2014/16 Directorate Plan and current performance against its delivery, as at 31 May 2014. It translated the priorities set out in the Plan into a coherent set of performance outcome measures and targets.

The report also included appendices with exception reports on those four items which had been 'red' rated for non-compliance against the specified target. The four measures rated red were:

- Percentage of adult care packages supported by Direct Debit
- Percentage collection rate on additional debit re: impact of Council Tax Support Scheme, discount and exemption
- Percentage recovery of personal finance unit charges (historic charges)
- Percentage of personal finance unit assessments completed within timescale

In response to comments from Members the Director of Resources stated that each target had been reviewed for this year. Workshops had taken place in the Department on corporate values but she would ensure the information as to whether they had been completed across the Council was circulated to the

Committee. The Department continued to work hard to meet the target for payments to local small and medium enterprises but capacity issues remained.

The Head of Legal and Member Services reported that in respect of the Freedom of Information Scrutiny Review, the various actions agreed by the review were being worked through and that the statistical analyses requested would be available for the next meeting.

The Head of Business Processes responded to Members' comments, in respect of the adult care packages supported by direct debit some clients did not want to pay by direct debit. There was a resource issue with staff having to spend time telephoning people to encourage them to switch to direct debit. Direct debits were approximately ten times cheaper than other methods of collection. Other Local Authorities had not been able to reach the target the Council was aiming for; whatever number increase was achieved would be a saving.

The Council Tax Support Scheme was a local scheme only for working age claimants giving up to 78 per cent support. If people didn't pay the 22 per cent then the Council was obliged to take action to recover this through a liability order. Court costs of £90 were added on by the Department of Work and Pensions but these costs were accounted for and the Council could not make any profit on these. With regard to the percentage collection rate on additional debt, the target was 0.2 per cent lower for 2014/15 as a reflection of what the true situation would be with collection being harder in the second year.

Resolved - That the Performance Dashboard and Directorate Plan be noted.

5 **FINANCIAL MONITORING 2014/15 MONTH 2 (MAY 2014)**

The Director of Resources presented the financial monitoring report for Month 2 (May 2014) in respect of the budget performance for the Transformation and Resources Directorate.

The report gave details of performance against revenue and capital budgets and in year efficiency savings for 2014/15. The Director drew the Committee's attention to the currently forecast underspend of £21,000 in respect of the revenue budget.

The Director gave details of the two savings which were red rated:

- Libraries and One Stop Shops - savings were initially predicated on revising opening hours, introducing lone working with support from volunteers and / or agile workers. These measures had yet to be

introduced, but compensatory savings, primarily from vacant posts had been found.

- Discretionary Relief - savings were expected to be delayed by 3 months resulting in a deficit of 25% (£80k). Compensatory savings would need to be identified.

Responding to comments from Members, the Head of Business Processes reported that he had no specific figures with regard to the number of volunteers who had come forward to work in libraries. If no volunteers were to come forward the Department would be working on how best to continue with the number of libraries and discuss this with the trades unions. The intention was to maximise support from the community. A meeting had been held with the Friends of the Library Group, they were keen to be involved as were some user groups and friends groups attached to particular libraries.

The Department would make sure that libraries with individual workers and volunteers working alongside were properly risk assessed.

Resolved – That this Committee notes the report.

6 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered a report from the Director of Resources which updated Members on the current position regarding the Committee's work programme. Consideration would need to be given to the need for flexibility in the work programme, particularly in terms of scrutinising options arising from the Future Council Programme in September.

The Chair informed the Committee that she had met with the party spokespersons and they had agreed that in light of the forthcoming Future Council scrutiny to be undertaken, the review on sickness absence be deferred. A task and finish review on the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme should, however, proceed as soon as possible. If Members had any other suggestions to be included on the work programme they should liaise with their group spokesperson.

The Director of Resources suggested that it could inform the scrutiny work on the Future Council options and could be undertaken in advance of publication of these options. She confirmed that the Authority would have discretion over the use of the unspent grant monies.

Responding to comments from Members, the Head of Business Processes stated that the weekly payments from the LWA scheme were currently around £24,000 but he would supply an update on this figure for the Committee and the Task and Finish Group. He confirmed that a letter had been sent to the Government Minister asking the Government to rethink its position on the

LWA grant funding for 2015/16 and beyond, but to date no response had been received.

In response to a Member's comment, with regard to a proposed scrutiny review on shared services, the Scrutiny Officer confirmed that as the possibility of shared services with Cheshire West and Chester Council had been put on hold it was not appropriate at this time to go ahead with this review.

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

Resolved –

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That a Task and Finish Group be established to look at the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme with the following Members: Councillors Tom Anderson, Phil Gilchrist, Louise Reecejones, Matthew Patrick and Tracey Smith, all of whom had volunteered to be on this group.