

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE - TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Monday, 30 March 2015

Present: Councillor J Williamson (Chair)

Councillors P Doughty J Walsh
M Daniel I Williams
R Gregson A Sykes
M Patrick T Anderson
C Muspratt T Pilgrim
L Reecejones P Gilchrist

Deputies: Councillors G Ellis (In place of B Berry)
S Williams (In place of K Hodson)

In attendance: Councillor A Jones

26 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.

27 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee meeting held on 4 February, 2015.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of 4 February, 2015 be approved.

28 DIRECTORATE PLAN 2015/16

The Head of Financial Services presented the report of the Strategic Director of Transformation and Resources with the 2015-16 Directorate's Plan for the

Committee's consideration. The plan identified the activity that would be delivered in order to meet the Corporate Plan priorities, and included appropriate measures of success that could be monitored and reported upon throughout the period of the plan.

The plan would be subject to regular monitoring and review by the Directorate's management team with regular reports presented to the portfolio holders. A quarterly report would be presented to the Policy & Performance Committee to consider and identify areas to review and scrutinise in more detail. The Plan gave details of ten key projects which the directorate delivered or contributed to.

Responding to comments from Members the Head of Financial Services stated that the reference to reconfiguration of the library service was in relation to the presently agreed saving. The Head of Business Processes also responded to Members' questions and made a number of comments, including:

- Discussions were under way with library user groups, or due to be arranged in respect of libraries opening for activities or groups outside of the new opening hours. He would, in consultation with the Library services Manager, expedite arrangements for a meeting with the Hoylake Library user groups.
- A number of library staff had applied for EVR or voluntary severance and a small number of staff had already had agreement to leave, though more decisions were due to be taken in the coming weeks over how many more staff could be released.
- He acknowledged that there had been teething problems with the new rotas for staff as no member of staff had had their hours changed but he was confident of making the Community Library savings agreed by the Council.
- It was a target to make sure no library should have to close due to staff sickness, although this had happened in recent weeks but he was confident these issues would be settled over the coming weeks. There was a balance to be struck between the issuing of enough keys to staff to make sure this happened and not having too many sets of keys leading to an increase in risk.
- There had been a fairly complicated plan in place for the reconfiguration of the library service to try and cover most eventualities, any immediate shortfalls were identified and responded to. A six month review would be undertaken and he would be happy to bring back an interim report to the next Committee meeting.

A Member also suggested that the Library Review may be a piece of work a Task and Finish group could look at in the new municipal year.

With regard to the Council's Customer Access Strategy, the Head of Business Processes elaborated upon those services which were easier to make available online and those which were problematic. Housing benefit applications for example had to be completed on a 32 page form, which was not easy to reproduce online.

He also gave details on the five strands which would be incorporated into the new Transaction Centre, payroll and payments, business support, customer transactions, revenues and benefits. The customer transaction centre would enable savings in staffing costs to be made with more automated telephone responses. There was a need, however, to balance this with the need for some customers also to be able to talk directly to a human being. The idea of a webchat or webhelp facility was also being looked into.

He further reported that as from 2 April, no cashier facility would be available and the Council would not be taking any more cash payments, people would be directed to either a post office or a paypoint facility in a local shop where they would be able to pay cash.

With regard to the savings identified for 2015/16 in the financial planning section of the Plan, the Head of Financial Services stated that the reference to 'Reduce the Cost of Democracy - £130,000' should in fact read, 'Reduce the Cost of Democracy and External Audit Fees' and £100,000 of this saving would be through the reduction in the audit fees element of this.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to use the information contained within the directorate plan to inform its future work programme and that an interim report on the reconfiguration of library services be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

29 **DIRECTORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Head of Financial Services introduced a report which outlined the current performance of the Department (as at 31 January, 2015) against its Directorate Plan for 2014/15.

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

- Percentage of implementation of Windows 7 and Office 2010 (TRCP01)
- Percentage of Performance Appraisals completed (TRCP03)
- Percentage of suppliers paid (or payment terms) within 30 days (TRDP06)
- Percentage of local SME suppliers paid within 10 days (TRDP07)
- Reduction in the total number of published supplementary agendas for Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings (TRDP10)

- Percentage of Leadership Development Programmes completed (TRDP11)
- Percentage of Management Development Programme modules completed (TRDP12)

The Head of Financial Services elaborated upon the reasons for these poorer performing measures and the actions being taken to improve them.

Members expressed particular concern at the poor performance of the Performance Appraisals (TRCP03) measure, the margin of non-compliance and the detail and effectiveness of the corrective actions as Members had expressed concerns throughout the year over performance.

In response to Members' comments, the Head of Financial Services stated that the Directorate was aware of the issues regarding the poor performance on Performance Appraisals completed. This was a Council-wide requirement that was reported by Human Resources and the Strategic Leadership Team had acknowledged the poor corporate performance for 2014/15. The Appraisals process had been reviewed for 2015/16 and this included plans for these to be completed by the end of August, 2015.

There were questions on employees leaving the Council and the level of consultation over the changes within the Council. In response Members were advised that employees and Trade Unions were engaged throughout the consultation process over changes through re-modelling and restructuring and those leaving would have had an exit interview.

Concern was also expressed at the measure on the Management Development Programme (TRDP12) and the need to know what modules managers were expected to undertake and what modules had been completed. It was also suggested that to see progress made from previous years comparative data should be provided.

The Head of Financial Services stated that performance for 2014/15 did not reflect those who had completed the modules in previous years. The module requirements had been reviewed. To increase compliance and reporting in 2015/16 the requirements were being incorporated within the revised performance appraisal process.

It was requested that information be provided to Committee on the modules that were included in the Development Programme and the numbers of managers who had completed the modules.

The Head of Financial Services suggested that it might help Members if the Head of Human Resources reported to Committee in July on the Performance Appraisal process for 2015/16. It was agreed that this should include the Appraisal format and the performance to date in 2015/16.

With regard to the indicator TRDP10, and a reduction in the number of published supplementary agendas, the Head of Legal and Member Services stated that one of the actions being taken to improve this performance was the implementation during the next municipal year of 'reports management' through the Mod.Gov system so that all reports would be generated through this system thereby imposing greater discipline on report authors to meet deadlines.

Resolved –

(1) That a note be provided to all Committee Members on the modules in the Management Development Programme and the number of managers who had completed the modules.

(2) That with regard to Performance Appraisals a comprehensive report be provided for the next meeting of the Committee and presented by an officer from Human Resources.

30 **FINANCIAL MONITORING 2014/15**

The Head of Financial Services introduced a report which set out the financial monitoring information for month 10 (January 2015) 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.

He gave details of the three 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. Cabinet and Council had, in December, 2014, agreed further proposals for future service provision and the undelivered savings would be implemented alongside these.
- Discretionary Relief – Cabinet, on 6 November 2014 had agreed to fund a Discretionary Relief scheme from the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve releasing budget.
- Credit Card Charges – Implementation of this charge on credit card transactions had been delayed.

He updated the Committee on the latest forecast underspend of the revenue budget as at the end of January, 2015 which was £759,000 and elaborated on the measures in place to address those savings which were red rated.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

31 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee considered a report from the Chair which updated Members on the current position regarding the Committee's work programme.

At the previous Committee of 4 February, it was agreed that the Task and Finish Review on the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme should recommence. Furthermore, Cabinet had agreed, at its meeting on 10 February, 2015 the following budget resolution:

"This fund provides financial assistance to people in dire need. The government transferred responsibility for administering this from DWP to the Council together with a grant of £1.1m. The government announced that this grant was being cut with effect from March 2015. The Council has £600,000 in a reserve for this fund. Cabinet intends to make this available together with the anticipated underspend in 2014/15 of £300,000 to create a fund totalling £900,000 available in 2015/16. This will provide a local scheme to fill the gap left by the government's unwillingness to assist the most vulnerable in our communities. It is proposed that the 2014/15 policy be continued until the end of July 2015. In the interim, Cabinet asks the Scrutiny Review Group which has been set up to look at this fund to meet in order to make recommendations as to how this resource should be allocated."

The Panel had convened on 25 February, for the scoping meeting for the review, with one of the outcomes being that the review would be carried out in a single evidence session over the course of a full day. It was also agreed that representatives from a small number of organisations would be requested to attend the evidence session to enable the Review Panel, at its meeting on 9 April, to arrive at its findings and recommendations. The Panel's final report would be referred to Cabinet in June for consideration of the recommendations made. To avoid an additional committee meeting being scheduled for the purpose of approving the final report, the Chair, Party Spokespersons and Members of the Review Panel had agreed that this Committee should be requested to delegate authority to the Review Panel to refer the final agreed report to Cabinet.

With regard to the Freedom of Information Scrutiny Review, which was completed in April 2014, the Committee received an update on the recommendations of the Review in an appendix to the report.

Responding to Members' comments the Head of Legal and Member Services acknowledged that he would report back to the Committee on progress with the recommendations, and although nominations for departmental champions had been made they were not all in post yet, this would be completed after Future Council remodelling was complete. The FOI team was providing support and assistance to potential champions. There were some technical

difficulties in managing and tracking FOI requests made via the “Whatdotheyknow” site and the Council’s CRM system. Alternative IT solutions were being explored.

Performance in responding to FOI requests within the required timescale was, over at least the last eighteen months, consistently above the 85% target, apart from one month in December 2014, when it dipped to 84% which was principally due to the unpaid leave closedown. The number of requests being made was on average 140 – 150 a month, costing the Council approximately £7,000 a week to deal with (which was the sum reported when the FOI Review was undertaken). Work was continuing on making the Council’s Website more user friendly and transparent so that as much information requested through FOI’s was readily available and accessible.

Resolved –

- (1) That the work programme for 2014/15 as shown in the appendix to the report be approved.**
- (2) That the Terms of Reference of the Local Welfare Assistance Task and Finish Review Panel be varied and that the Panel be given delegated authority to refer the final report directly to Cabinet.**

32 **VOTE OF THANKS**

The Chair thanked all the Members of the Committee for their work over the past municipal year and the officers who had supported the Committee in its work. Members thanked the Chair for her work in chairing the Committee over the past municipal year.