

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE - COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 30 September 2015

Present: Councillor M McLaughlin (Chair)

Councillors	C Muspratt	D Burgess-Joyce
	W Smith	W Clements
	M Sullivan	A Sykes
	KJ Williams	S Williams
	T Anderson	P Gilchrist

10 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Brightmore, B Kenny and J Williamson.

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

No declarations of interest were received.

12 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 June 2015 be confirmed as a correct record.

13 **NOTICE OF MOTION - 44 COUNCILLORS**

The Committee considered the following Notice of Motion referred to it by the Council at its meeting on 20 October 2014 (Minute No. 57 refers). It had been proposed by Councillor J Green and seconded by Councillor L Fraser that:

'Council notes the recent decision taken by Knowsley Council to begin consulting its residents over reducing the number of Councillors from 63 to 45.

This Council believes that instead of presenting the public with petty, vindictive, rehashed and previously rejected budget options including:

- pulling the plug on school crossing patrols

- introducing car parking charges at Wirral's Country Parks
- not filling grit bins
- removing Council Tax over 70s discount
- closing public conveniences
- increasing fees and charges for football pitches, allotments, bowling greens, burials and cremations

The Leader of the Council should be consulting the public over reducing the number of Councillors.

In the absence of the Leader of the Council's willingness to act Council requests the Boundary Commission for England commence an inquiry into the number of Councillors, and the electoral cycle, in Wirral, on the Council's wish to reduce the number of councillors to 44.

Council therefore instructs the Chief Executive to invite the Boundary Commission for England to meet with representatives of all parties represented on the Council and agree a timetable for the inquiry.'

The Chair set out the way in which she intended to deal with this item of business. As Councillor J Green was not in attendance at the meeting she invited Councillor L Fraser to address the Committee and set out the reasons for the Motion. The matter would then be open for debate, Councillor L Fraser would be given two minutes to respond to what was said and following that the Committee would reach its conclusions.

Councillor L Fraser informed that, in the light of the diminishing size of the Council's work force, following the cost-cutting departure of more than 2,000 staff consideration should be given to consulting residents of the Borough on reducing the total number of Wirral Councillors. She proposed that the Boundary Commission be requested to assess Wirral's requirements with a view to cutting the number of Councillors from 66 to 44. Councillor L Fraser proposed that as the Council's middle managers' pay had reduced by 10% Councillors should make cuts as well. She proposed that at a time when employees were being asked to do more for less and go the extra mile, the number of Councillors should be reduced and elections should be held every four years.

Councillor L Fraser informed that the Local Government Association had a view which it had reached this year, that the public wanted each Councillor to represent a distinct area. This enabled them to be held to account. She was aware that some Councillors took on some additional duties as a matter of choice but she did not consider that should be a mitigating factor. Reducing 66 Councillors down to 44 meant there would be two to represent each ward.

Councillor L Fraser made reference to Knowsley Council who was reducing the number of its Elected Members from 63 to 45 in order to make savings of

£250,000 over the next two years. She quoted the Council's Leader, Andy Moorhead who had said that

"It was a tough decision, but the right one. Quite simply, it means that us as Councillors have to work that bit harder. We're asking our employee to do exactly the same. I think it is fair that we do the same."

Councillor L Fraser proposed that the Chief Executive be requested to write to the Boundary Commission to invite it to undertake an eight week consultation exercise on whether to conduct a Local Government Boundary Review in Wirral.

Some Members considered that what had been proposed was a good idea and the way forward, particularly as members of the public found three Member wards very confusing. Also, it did not necessarily follow that there would be a Local Government Boundary Review after the Parliamentary Boundary Review which was due to begin next spring.

A Member informed that no options were off the table and reducing the number of Councillors would be considered. However, what was currently proposed was a very big step especially as there had been a significant increase in the workloads of Councillors. Another Member informed that the Government was making savage cuts and people were turning to their Councillors for help like never before which meant a significant increase in their workloads. He considered that the Council should write to the Government about the damage it was causing by its austerity measures.

Some Members informed that they provided cover for each other in three Member wards and that they worked well together as a team.

The Committee noted that a recent Local Government Boundary Commission Review had resulted in a reduction in the number of Elected Members in Knowsley but the point was made that it was not one of Wirral Council's comparator councils. In Warrington the Boundary Commission had agreed that the number of Elected Members should increase from 57 to 58. A Member pointed out that the average ward in Liverpool consisted of approximately 2000 people whereas the figure for Wirral was 3,000 plus.

The point was made that the Council now had a system of Constituency Committees and Members were working in their local communities with community groups. Also, there had been mass reductions in Council staff and Councillor's workloads had increased because staffing levels had decreased. Communities needed to be engaged more and more.

Councillor L Fraser responded informing that it was not automatic that a Local Government Boundary Review would be carried out after the next Parliamentary Review. She also informed that she was disappointed at the

political response from one Member as she considered that she had not been political in anyway. It was appropriate to reduce the number of Councillors as the number of staff had been reduced.

The Chair informed that the Council was getting better at scrutiny. She considered that there was merit in this Notice of Motion. The Council needed to look at the cost of democracy in the light of its budget but comparisons with Knowsley were not relevant because of the size of its wards in comparison to Wirral. Also, no rationale had been put forward for the 33% reduction in the number of Elected Members. The Chair was of the view that consideration must be given to whether the Boundary Commission was the appropriate body to carry out a review and that this was a much more complex issue than this Notice of Motion led Members to believe.

The Chair also informed that good scrutiny depended on those involved avoiding the practice of retreating into Party Political bunkers and that the wording of the Motion, she supposed was a reflection of the context in which it was proposed, made it difficult for the Council to achieve. Stripping away the rhetoric, there was a serious issue of how good representation of the people should be working and that was what was concerning the Committee this evening.

The Chair reported that the Committee had heard a number of points being made during the evening, some which obviously seemed to indicate that there was some value in the Notice of Motion. She considered that the overriding feeling of the Committee was that this was a more complex issue than the Notice of Motion suggested and that there were issues which did need more exploration before binding conclusions were reached.

For those reasons the Chair proposed the following Motion which was seconded by Councillor C Muspratt:

‘That

- (1) the Committee thanks the Mayor for the referral of this Notice of Motion and regrets that there has been a delay in it being brought to the Committee for its consideration, though it accepts that this was due to a number of circumstances which were not in its control; and
- (2) the Committee considers that factors to be considered when determining what constitutes proper, fair representation of Wirral’s population go beyond simply numbers and so proposes that it establishes a Task and Finish Panel to undertake a more in depth examination of the issues and that this be added to the Committee’s Work Programme.

This Motion was put to the vote and was carried 8 for to 5 against.

Councillor T Anderson proposed a further Motion which was seconded by Councillor A Sykes as follows:

‘That the Boundary Commission be invited to carry out a Local Government Review of the number of Councillors in Wirral.’

This Motion was put to the vote and lost 5 for to 8 against.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Committee thanks the Mayor for the referral of this Notice of Motion and regrets that there has been a delay in it being brought to the Committee for its consideration, though it accepts that this was due to a number of circumstances which were not in its control; and**
- (2) the Committee considers that factors to be considered when determining what constitutes proper, fair representation of Wirral’s population go beyond simply numbers and so proposes that it establishes a Task and Finish Panel to undertake a more in depth examination of the issues and that this be added to the Committee’s Work Programme.**

14 WIRRAL PLAN: A 2020 VISION

The Committee received a presentation by the Strategic Director – Transformation and Resources on the Wirral Plan: A 2020 Vision.

The Strategic Director highlighted that the Council Plan had now been agreed with partners and local agencies and was now called the Wirral Plan. The priorities in taking the Council forward covered the three areas of People, Business and Environment and he went through the timetable to progress the implementation of the Delivery Plan.

The Committee gave consideration to the initial scrutiny of the Plan; future work programmes and the next steps. Phase one, initial scrutiny and Phase two (the compilation of future work programmes) would be dealt with by the Committee. The Committee would be responsible for agreeing a consistent process for Phase 1 scrutiny and considering prioritisation and areas of potential overlap between the other Policy and Performance Committees.

It was noted that the Cabinet would receive feedback on the Plan at its meeting in February 2016 following three Workshops being held for all non-Executive Members to participate in. In depth scrutiny would be carried out at these Workshops which it was hoped could be held on the dates set aside for the other three Policy and Performance Committees (the Chair would agree the dates for these in consultation with Committee Chairs and Group

Spokespersons) and a consolidation report would be prepared for a meeting of this Committee in November 2015.

The Strategic Director informed the Committee that there would be wide ranging scrutiny and Members would be requested to look at the key priorities that would emerge over the coming weeks. Also, the Chancellor would deliver his Autumn Statement in November and the Committee would look at how that fitted in with the Council's financial situation.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the way forward in respect of the scrutiny work required on the Wirral Plan: A 2020 Vision described by the Chair and Strategic Director for Transformation and Resources as set out above be agreed; and**
- (2) a hard copy of the Strategic Director's presentation be sent to all Members of the Council who are also Members of the Policy and Performance Committees.**

15 **2015/16 QUARTER 1 CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

A report by the Strategic Director – Transformation and Resources set out the Council's Quarter 1 (April to June) performance against the delivery of the 2015/16 Corporate Plan as agreed at Council on 8 December 2014. The report was attached as Appendix 1 and detailed progress made against a suite of agreed key performance indicators.

The Committee noted that whilst the Corporate Plan 2015/16 had been superseded by the Wirral Council Plan: 2020 Vision, it still formed the basis of the in-year performance management framework. The Committee also noted that a new Performance Management Framework would be developed for the Council Plan once the associated delivery plan had been finalised.

Members then asked officers a number of questions and it was noted in particular that:

- The percentage of performance appraisals completed by September 2015 was lower than expected. However, by Quarter 2 it was expected that there would be a significant improvement.
- GP Practices were self-employed contractors who the Council commissioned to deliver the Health Check Service. If they did not do this they did not get paid. It was a constant battle to encourage Practices to promote the Services. The clinical case for Health Checks was not accepted by everyone.

- A number of Performance Indicators were the subject of Scrutiny Task and Finish Work. This was a good sign that the Policy and Performance Committees were picking up areas of service that needed looking at in more depth. The Member Training Steering Group would be considering a request to provide Members with training on Performance Indicators.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted.

16 **FINANCIAL MONITORING OUT-TURN 2014/15**

A report by the Acting Section 151 Officer set out the Financial Monitoring Out-Turn for 2014/15 as reported to the Cabinet on 13 July 2015. This was to provide the Committee with an opportunity to scrutinise the 2014/15 financial performance and highlight any areas for further clarification.

Attached to the report were:

- The Cabinet Report - 13 July 2015 – Financial Monitoring Out-Turn
- Appendix 1 - Revenue Out Turn
- Appendix 2 - Capital Out Turn
- Appendix 3 - Collection Summary

The Acting Section 151 Officer reported that the Accounts for 2014/15 had been published that afternoon and the revenue outturn was underspent £0.5m, an improvement on the £0.8m overspend that had been projected at Month 10. The capital spend was £32.5m and this compared to a predicted spend at Month 10 of £39.5m.

The Committee considered Appendix 3 to the report and noted that the Council Tax Collection rate had increased from 95.4% in 2013/14 to 95.5% in 2014/15. The Business Rates Collection Rate had increased from 96.9% in 2013/14 to 98.2% in 2014/15. Also, the level of Sundry Debt arrears had increased from £23.5m at 31 March 2014 to £30.9m at 31 March 2015. The figures included £14m of invoices that had been raised in the final week of the financial year. The Committee noted that by 30 April 2015 the arrears had been comparable with April 2014.

The Appendix also included details of further write-offs totalling £0.47m of which £0.42m related to Adult Social Services. The Committee was told that these would be charged against the provision for bad debts and reflect the on-going programme to review outstanding debts.

A Member questioned the writing-off of debts and the Acting Section 151 Officer informed that where there was no possibility of collecting a debt it was

written off. He agreed to write to all Members of the Committee setting out the reasons why debts could not be collected.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report and its Appendices be noted.

17 2014/15 REVENUE/CAPITAL MONITORING PROGRESS REPORTS

A report by the Acting Section 151 Officer provided the Committee with the Quarter 1 Revenue and Capital Financial Monitoring details, as report to the Cabinet on 27 July 2015. This allowed the Committee to scrutinise progress against the 2014/15 revenue and capital budgets and highlight any areas for further clarification.

Appended to the report were:

- Cabinet Report 27/07/15 Revenue Monitoring 2015/16 Quarter 1.
- Cabinet Report 27/07/15 Capital Monitoring 2015/16 Quarter 1.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report and its Appendices be noted.

18 POLICY INFORM BRIEFING PAPERS - SEPTEMBER 2015

A report by the Strategic Director – Transformation and Resources provided the Committee with the September Policy Inform Briefing Papers which included an overview of ongoing and recent national legislation, potential implications for the Council and emerging policies.

Appended to the Strategic Director's report were:

- Appendix 1 – Policy Inform: Families and Wellbeing.
- Appendix 2 – Policy Inform: Regeneration and Environment.
- Appendix 3 – Policy Inform: Transformation and Resources.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report and its Appendices be noted.

19 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A report by the Chair of the Committee set out the Scrutiny Work Programme. The report included the Committee's Work Programme (Appendix 1). It also included the Work Programmes of the other three Policy and Performance

Committees (Appendix 2 – 4). This was to enable the Committee to undertake its Constitutional role

‘To determine the overall Work Programme of the Policy and Performance Committees, including ensuring there is an overall planned approach to in depth review’.

Since the last meeting of the Committee on 23 June 2015 a scrutiny review into Cumulative Impact Policy had commenced and was scheduled to report back to the Committee in February 2016. A summary of the task and finish reviews currently in progress across the other three committees was set out in the Chair’s report. The Chair informed that it was very important that only work a Committee was able to deal with was added to its Work Programme.

The Chair informed that further to the launch of the Wirral Council Plan: A 2020 Vision, the Policy and Performance Committees had been given an opportunity to review the details set out in the associated Delivery Plan which was scheduled for publication in October. This would provide Members with a chance to influence the shape of the Plan which was due to be finalised in February 2016.

In order to ensure consistency, the Committee would give consideration to proposing a co-ordinated approach to this work. This would involve considering which elements of the Delivery Plan should be prioritised for initial scrutiny and how those activities which align with the remits of more than one committee should be reviewed. An approach that could be adopted would be to have a single workshop for each of the three Council Plan priorities organised around question and answer sessions with the relevant Lead Officers. It may be necessary to hold a Special meeting of the Committee in December 2015 to scrutinise the Council Plan and if this was the case the Chair would do this in consultation with Group Spokespersons.

RESOLVED:

That the content of all four of the Council’s Policy and Performance Committees’ Work Programmes be noted.