

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 June 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Shane Hebb (Chair), Graham Snell (Vice-Chair), Steve Liddiard, Robert Ray and Deborah Stewart

Apologies: Councillor Martin Kerin

In attendance: Steve Cox, Assistant Chief Executive
Sean Clark, Head of Corporate Finance
Karen Wheeler, Head of Strategy & Communications
Sarah Welton, Strategy & Performance Officer
Stephanie Cox, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

As the meeting held on 26 March 2015 was inquorate, the Committee noted the discussions and resolutions that had been previously made at both the 3 February 2015 and 26 March 2015 meetings of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to approve the minutes.

The Chair requested an update on the development of a pop-up window to enable users to provide feedback regarding functionality, which was detailed under minute number 28 'Customer Services/Channel Shift'. Officers advised that the Digital Board had noted the request, which would then be updated on the website.

The Chair further welcomed the recommendation under minute number 29 'Review of the Employee Performance Framework' that encouraged the performance management of staff to continue to align with Corporate Priorities.

The Minutes of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 3 February 2015 and 26 March 2015, were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests declared.

4. Corporate Priority Activity Plan 2015-16 and Corporate Scorecard Targets

The Strategy and Performance Officer introduced the report which set out what the Council was expected to deliver during 2015-16 and how progress would be monitored as part of the corporate strategic planning process.

Councillor Stewart welcomed the report but questioned how Members could evaluate the impact of cuts on the overall budget. The Strategy and Performance Officer advised that if a performance indicator had been negatively affected by budget savings that would be reported in more detail during the mid-year and end of year reports.

The Head of Corporate Finance informed the Committee that there was a separate budget reporting process through the 'Shaping the Council' report which was referred to meetings of Cabinet.

The Chair observed that not all of the indicators documented in Appendix 1 were detailed in Appendix 2 and questioned how performance was monitored against those particular indicators. In response the Strategy and Performance Officer explained that not all indicators were quantifiable by statistics or required further investigation to ensure data quality, and as a result were reported within the mid or end of year reports.

The Chair requested officers to provide a list of measurable performance indicators so that the Committee could have confidence the Corporate Scorecard reflected the Corporate Plan.

The Committee agreed that any 'Red' Key Performance Indicators should be reported in more detail, as was the case during the previous year, so that these could be carefully monitored.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Corporate Priority Activity Plan as detailed in Appendix 1 be noted.**
- 2. That the corporate scorecard indicators and targets as detailed in Appendix 2 be noted and any comments be made.**

5. Terms of Reference

The Assistant Chief Executive advised that a number of the partnerships had changed name and that these would need to be refreshed for future publication.

A Member proposed that 'Member Development' be included on the Terms of Reference, following which it was agreed that Democratic Services would determine the appropriate remit for this function.

It was agreed that the amended Terms of Reference would be circulated by Democratic Services to the Chair and Vice-Chair for approval.

The Committee noted the date the Constitution was last updated and Members were encouraged to ensure that their latest versions were the most up-to-date or download and view via a mobile device, such as an iPad.

6. Budget Update

The Chair advised that an accompanying note had been published online, circulated to all Members by email and tabled at the meeting.

The Head of Corporate Finance provided an update on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and set out the proposed approach to shaping the Council for the future, which included a proposal for Budget Review Panels being developed in consultation with Group Leaders.

A brief discussion took place on whether the Budget Review Panels would meet the suggested 'Zero Based Budgeting' process which had been proposed by a number of Members of the Opposition.

The Committee were advised that the Budget Review Panels were expected to set out what the Council should provide under Statutory and Non-Statutory obligations, examine what could be provided differently (and by whom) and whether the right outcomes were being delivered.

Members questioned how savings were determined, and whether this was achieved through "top slicing", to which it was explained that historically this had been the case but the Budget Review Panel's would set out a different approach for the 2016/17 budget.

The Committee were advised that each Overview and Scrutiny Committee had a standing budget item to discuss budget savings in more detail if required for each meeting, and that appropriate issues for consideration for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be Council Tax Collection and alternative Delivery Models – such as the Digital Programme.

The Committee were informed that engagement and communication with residents were essential and that 'Let's Talk' sessions helped to communicate key messages.

The Chair asked whether savings targets were included in officer's performance objectives, to which it was explained that each team had a detailed service plan which linked into personal objectives.

The Council Tax base rate was subject to discussion and how a Council Tax freeze grant or percentage increase would impact upon the budget.

The Chair felt that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be responsible for reviewing the final work of the Budget Review Panel in order

to act as a critical friend and ensure any proposals were fit for purpose, even if this included convening an extraordinary meeting of the Committee.

The Head of Corporate Finance advised that it was anticipated the Budget Review Panel would meet on six occasions before September, following which a summary report could be provided to the Committee for consideration.

The Committee agreed that they wished to examine the work of the Budget Review Panel in order to add value to the budget shaping process, and proposed that a recommendation be included to that effect.

RESOLVED:

That a summary of the work undertaken by the Budget Review Panel, once concluded, be referred to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review and comments.

7. Work Programme

Councillor Stewart observed that it would be beneficial to hold the first meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees in July to enable Members Training to take place beforehand.

Councillor Liddiard proposed that a report be included on the work programme for early in the municipal year to review the Members Register of Interests and DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check process.

The Head of Corporate Finance requested that a standing budget item be included on the work programme for each meeting, which could be removed if no update was needed.

Councillor Liddiard further requested an update on the Digital Programme and Channel Shift as he was concerned the process was still confusing for some residents.

Councillor Stewart asked for an item to be included on Training and Development for both officers and members.

Councillor Hebb requested that an update be provided on the following matters:

- A report to outline the Council's labour costs, to include a full list of the number of staff employed on a permanent, fixed term, agency and temporary basis, following the Leader's suggestion at Full Council on 24 June 2015.
- The Council's approach to the pre-election period, otherwise known as 'purdah', to include its legal obligation.
- A review of the Council's Election Process, including the advantages and disadvantages of alternative models.

- Empowering Small Businesses, including Business Rate Relief.

Officers explained that the scrutiny of Business Rate Relief and empowering small businesses fell under the remit of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted, subject to the amendments detailed above.

The meeting finished at 8.20 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**