

MINUTES of the meeting of the **COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at 10.30 am on 2 April 2014 at Ashcombe Suite, County Hall, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2DN.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Wednesday, 30 April 2014.

Members:

- * Mr Nick Skellett CBE (Chairman)
- * Mr Eber A Kington (Vice-Chairman)
- A Mr Mark Brett-Warburton
- * Mr Bill Chapman
- * Mr Stephen Cooksey
- * Mr Bob Gardner
- * Dr Zully Grant-Duff
- * Mr David Harmer
- A Mr David Ivison
- A Mr Adrian Page
- * Mrs Denise Saliagopoulos
- A Mr Chris Townsend
- * Mrs Hazel Watson
- A Mr Keith Witham
- A Mrs Victoria Young

Ex-officio Members:

- * Mr David Munro, Chairman of the County Council
Mrs Sally Ann B Marks, Vice Chairman of the County Council

Substitutes:

Colin Kemp
Nick Harrison
Margaret Hicks
Richard Wilson

Present:

Mr David Hodge, Leader of the Council

* = present

21/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Mark Brett-Warburton, David Ivison, Chris Townsend, Keith Witham and Victoria Young. Colin Kemp, Nick Harrison, Margaret Hicks and Richard Wilson acted as substitutes.

22/14 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 5 MARCH 2014 [Item 2]

These were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

23/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were no declarations of interest. However, Eber Kington asked for it to be noted that he volunteered as Chairman for Fundraising for the Epsom & Ewell Citizen's Advice Bureau.

24/14 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses: None.

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Committee had received a number of questions from Hazel Watson. These questions and responses were tabled at the meeting and are included as an appendix to these minutes.
2. Hazel Watson asked a supplementary question about when and by whom the decision on the future use of the Runnymede site was made. It was agreed that a written response would be provided following the meeting.

Recommendations:

None.

Actions/further information to be provided:

A response to Hazel Watson's supplementary question will be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

Committee Next Steps:

None.

25/14 RESPONSES FROM THE CABINET TO ISSUES REFERRED BY THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 5]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses: None.

Key points of the discussion:

1. The Committee noted the responses given at the Cabinet meeting on 25 March 2014. The Chairman proposed that the matters related to this response were discussed alongside the budget monitoring item.

Recommendations:

None.

Actions/further information to be provided:

None.

Committee Next Steps:

None.

26/14 REPORT OF THE WELFARE REFORM TASK GROUP: THE IMPACTS OF WELFARE REFORM IN SURREY [Item 6]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses:

Mary Burguieres, Policy and Strategy Partnership Lead Manager

Jisa Prasannan, Scrutiny Officer

Ben Robinson, Strategic Partnership Manager

David Harmer, Chairman of the Task Group

David Hodge, Leader of the Council

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Chairman of the Welfare Reform Task Group presented the report to the Committee, outlining the key findings of the group's work. It was explained that there were a number of concerns regarding the assessment of those eligible for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). It had been identified that a high number of assessments were being challenged through the appeals process, and a significant number of these appeals had been successful. It was commented by the Chairman of the Task Group that this represented a significant waste of public money, and also suggested that the assessment process was not robust. The Chairman of the Task Group also highlighted the injustice to claimants caused by the time it takes to get from assessment to appeal.
2. It was highlighted that ATOS Healthcare had indicated that its contract to undertake the face to face assessments for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) would be coming to an end. The Committee discussed concerns regarding the future commissioning of this work, given the reputational and operational risk attached to this high profile area.
3. The Leader of the Council gave an early oral response to the recommendations of the Welfare Reform Task Group. This included a commitment to:
 - (i) protect the Local Assistance Scheme (LAS) funding under spend from 2013/14 in a separate reserve;
 - (ii) lobby central government through the Local Government Association and the County Council's Network on improving the delivery and roll out of Universal Credit, in particular simplifying the application process; and

(iii) work with the members of the Welfare Reform Task Group and officers to take forward recommendation 12, writing to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions explaining the County Council's concerns over the Employment and Support Allowance and work capability assessments for claimants.

4. The Committee discussed the role of the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) in supporting those affected by welfare reform. It was noted that there was evidence of an increase in the number of enquiries since the introduction of the reforms. However, some Members expressed the view that these were showing signs of stabilising. It was recognised that an increase would be anticipated during any significant period of change in welfare reform. The Committee praised the work of the CAB, and a number of Members commented that the Council should continue to develop strong partnership working with the organisation. The Leader of the Council stressed the importance of local support such as the Local Assistance Scheme which utilises the Surrey Re-Use Network and CABs, in helping mitigate the impact of welfare reform.
5. The Committee raised a number of questions regarding the commissioning of getWIS£, in particular whether the contract had a set of identified success criteria for the amount invested. Further details were also requested regarding the geographical availability of the service across the county, and whether there was a break clause in the contract. It was agreed that these details would be circulated to the Committee following the meeting. The Leader of the Council informed the Committee that he had sought a number of assurances from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, prior to the cabinet decision in February 2014 to extend the agreement with getWIS£ for a further two years.
6. Members of the Task Group commented that they had experienced shock at some of the things they had been informed about regarding the impact of welfare reform in Surrey. In particular, it was highlighted that there had been significant delays in the appeals process for decisions regarding ESA, and that this had impacted on people's health and wellbeing. It was also highlighted that the complexity of forms and assessments was judged to present a significant barrier for those reliant on some form of welfare support.
7. Members of the Committee highlighted the role of libraries in providing IT access to complete online benefit claim forms, and asked that consideration be given to extending internet access time in libraries to those applying for Universal Credit online, as the forms typically took up to two hours to complete.
8. The Committee discussed the potential to develop a simpler assessment process for welfare support, and raised a number of questions about how the Council and partners could work together to ensure people could access support services to apply for Universal Credit and other welfare support. It was highlighted that there were a wide number of care and benefit assessments, and the Committee commented that there was a strong case to be made for developing a

common assessment for these multiple claims. The Committee agreed to add an additional recommendation to those proposed by the Task Group, asking that the Leader of the Council lobby central government on simplifying the Universal Credit application process and explore options for a common assessment for claimants across welfare benefits and support.

9. The Leader of the Council commented that the central Government decision to discontinue the Local Assistance Scheme grant funding after 2015 concerned him, and expressed the view that it could potentially lead to a number of families developing longer term support needs unnecessarily. It was highlighted that this could lead to more families needing to access the Supporting Families programme in order to have those needs met.
10. The Committee thanked the Task Group as well as the officers that had supported it, and praised the report that had been produced. The Committee agreed to the Task Group recommendations. The Committee agreed that the Welfare Reform Task Group should remain in place to use its expertise in a monitoring capacity.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Adult Social Care, Children Schools and Families, Libraries, Public Health and Finance teams to continue to monitor impacts of the welfare reforms on service users and services, and provide a joint update through the Welfare Reform Co-ordination Group to the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2014. Adult Social Care to include a summary of the impact of the welfare reforms on carers and Children Schools and Families to include a summary of the impact of the welfare reforms on care leavers in their updates.

Recommendation 2: The Welfare Reform Co-ordination Group be encouraged to continue to collate data on the impact of the reforms on residents and the cumulative impact of the reforms, and to share information and good practice within the group, and to report on progress to the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the update report in September 2014.

Recommendation 3: Surrey County Council's Organisational Development Team analyse training needs on welfare reform in the Council and explore how such training can be disseminated throughout affected council services and ensure consistency with training being delivered by partner organisations.

Recommendation 4: Surrey's Welfare Reform Co-ordination Group to work with the Head of Family Services to explore the potential for the Supporting Families Programme (which is being extended through the Public Services Transformation Network) to provide early help/intervention to some of those families who are most severely impacted by the welfare reforms.

Recommendation 5: Any Local Assistance Scheme (LAS) funding left unallocated at the end of 2013/14 is ring-fenced and rolled over into 2014/15 and continues to be committed to supporting residents in crisis through the LAS.

Recommendation 6: Shared services to provide an update on improvements to the LAS scheme and take up of the fund, as part of the update report to the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2014.

Recommendation 7: Surrey County Council to continue lobbying central government to provide funding for emergency crisis support for residents (known as the Local Assistance Scheme in Surrey) beyond 2015.

Recommendation 8: The Adult Social Care Committee to closely monitor the delivery of this service by getWIS£ and report back to the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee as appropriate.

Recommendation 9: Surrey County Council's Adult Social Care Commissioners, to work with Surrey's Welfare Reform Co-ordination Group, Public Health and getWIS£ to:

(a) promote the getWIS£ advice and support service to all Surrey GPs through Surrey's 6 Clinical Commissioning Groups; and

(b) continue to raise awareness of this service among key partners including District and Borough Housing and Benefits Officers and social housing providers;

to ensure Surrey residents receive early help in dealing with the welfare reforms.

Recommendation 10: The Public Health team to report to the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee with findings from their food access needs assessment, to inform the Committee's work around reviewing the impacts of welfare reform in Surrey.

Recommendation 11: Surrey County Council to work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions, District and Borough Councils, housing providers and the Voluntary, community and faith sector to prepare for the introduction of Universal Credit, taking into consideration the concerns and recommendations highlighted in this report, and report back to the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee on progress. This preparation should include:

(a) researching and understanding the need for digital access and support across Surrey;

(b) the County Council better understanding the potential demand on IT resources as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit to enable Surrey to properly prepare for this, including reviewing budget provision;

(c) reviewing the demand for money management advice and assessing existing service provision, in order to make evidence-based recommendations for sourcing the necessary support; and

(d) lobbying central government to ensure that support to access Universal Credit is adequately funded.

Recommendation 12: The Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions explaining the Task Group's concerns over the

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) process including the following recommendations:

(a) That firms carrying out the medical work capability assessments (WCA) for benefit claimants, on behalf of DWP:

- (i) treat benefit claimants like customers; and
- (ii) ensure appropriately qualified persons carry out these medical assessments.

(b) Bureaucracy within the ESA claims and appeals process be reduced. In particular:

- (i) DWP to provide information on the number of medical certificates posted by claimants but not received by DWP and the reasons for this,
- (ii) DWP to accept claimant medical certificates for longer periods while claimants await mandatory re-consideration and tribunal decisions. This will save GP and claimant time and expense in having these certificates frequently renewed or re-requested where certificates have been sent by post but not received by DWP.

(c) DWP's benefit claim forms and decision letters to signpost claimants to advice and support services to enable claimants to seek early help, preferably locally based organisation, such as local authorities, housing providers and Citizens Advice Bureaus.

(d) DWP to build a closer working relation with partners in the Welfare Reform Co-ordination Group, to bring about pro-active information sharing and signposting particularly where claimants have been sanctioned by DWP decisions and therefore lost their passported benefits, such as housing benefit.

(e) DWP to use lessons learned from the ESA process and apply this to the roll-out of the Personal Independence Payments.

Recommendation 13: The Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on simplifying the Universal Credit application process and exploring options for a common assessment for claimants across welfare benefits and support.

Actions/further information to be provided:

None.

Committee Next Steps:

Task Group report and recommendations approved by COSC to be presented to Cabinet on 22 April 2014.

27/14 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT [Item 7]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses: Kevin Kilburn, Deputy Chief Finance Officer

David Hodge, Leader of the Council

John Furey, Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways & Environment

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Chairman of COSC informed the Committee that the Sub-Group had considered COSC's recommendations and the Leader's response on the budget, and discussed their concerns about the response not addressing specific concerns around savings identified as part of the Family, Friends and Community Support project, with the Deputy Leader. The Sub-Group had felt that the way COSC's scrutiny recommendations were responded to by Cabinet had not been satisfactory. However, further to the discussion with the Deputy Leader at the Sub-Group meeting, there was some acceptance that things could have been handled differently.
2. The Committee reviewed the Cabinet response in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2014-19 and noted the projected outturn for 2013/14. Members queried what management action savings had been identified in Adult Social Care for 2013/14 and whether these had been achieved. Officers agreed to provide a written response outlining the nature of the savings, as well as confirmation of whether they had been achieved once the financial outturn report for the year had been produced.
3. The Committee expressed concern about the ability of Family, Friends and Community Support to deliver savings for 2014/15. It was queried whether there had been progress on an Invest to Save bid to increase capacity within the directorate. Officers commented that they invited bids to the Invest to Save panel from the directorate, but that it would require the development of a robust business case. The Committee commented that there was a need to ensure action was taken in a timely fashion in order to meet the savings targets in year.
4. There was a discussion around the MTFP and the role of Select Committees in making recommendations in the budget setting process. The Leader of the Council acknowledged that there had been changes to the MTFP and that reserves had been allocated to reduce the savings requirements for Adult Social Care in 2014/15. This was to enable the directorate to develop and implement the work of the Family, Friends and Community Support project.

[David Hodge left at 12.15pm]

5. The Committee was informed that the flooding report to Cabinet in July 2014 would outline the final costs, as well as proposal around how these costs were met. It was highlighted that a number of announcements were still being made by central Government, and that the final cost to the council would be clearer following negotiations. The Committee was informed that the uncertainties around cost would not delay responses or road repairs, as it was important to ensure that work was undertaken and completed before next winter. The Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways & the

Environment gave assurances that work would commence in mid-May 2014 and complete in October of the same year. It was further highlighted that £10 million of capital spending had been allocated to flooding recovery at the Cabinet meeting on 25 March 2014. It was commented that there was a list of key areas impacted by the flooding that would be circulated to the Committee members.

6. The Committee was informed that the flooding recovery would not impact in the delivery of Project Horizon. It was commented that it would run alongside the flooding recovery work.
7. The Committee was told that information regarding the flooding had been requested from the Environmental Agency and Thames Water under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act (2010). This information would outline what had occurred and why, as well as give indication of measures required to mitigate the impact of future events. It was agreed that the response to this request would be shared at the next Committee meeting for consideration, and then circulated to the Environment & Transport Committee.
8. The Cabinet Member for Transport, Highways & the Environment commented that he intended to allocate £3 million to address gully and ditches maintenance, and that this work would be undertaken as part of the flooding recovery. It was highlighted that some of the damage to bridges could not be assessed fully until the flood waters had reduced.

Recommendations:

- a) That the information provided in response to the Section 19 request be brought to the Committee for discussion at the earliest opportunity: following discussion, the Committee to refer detailed issues to the Environment & Transport Select Committee for further consideration if necessary.

Action by: Deputy Chief Finance Officer

- b) That the report to Cabinet in July 2014 on the flooding response and cost is considered at a future Committee meeting.

Action by: Chairman/Democratic Services

Actions/further information to be provided:

Flooding information related to affected highways and infrastructure resources be circulated to the Committee.

Action by: Deputy Chief Finance Officer

**28/14 RECOMMENDATION TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME
[Item 8]**

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses: None.

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Committee noted its recommendation tracker and forward work programme. There were no further comments.

Recommendations:

None.

Actions/further information to be provided:

None.

Committee Next Steps:

None.

29/14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING [Item 9]

The Committee noted that its next meeting would be on 30 April 2014 at 10.30am.

Meeting ended at: 12.35 pm

Chairman

Questions to Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 2 April 2014

**Hazel Watson
Dorking Hills**

- I. Members were informed on 14 February that the Runnymede Centre had been handed to the Army to help with the response to flooding. Has the situation changed?**

This did occur and the site was fully vacated of SCC staff (except facilities staff). The Army took overall responsibility and management of the site. The Army fully vacated at the end of February.

- II. If the Army have departed from the Runnymede Centre, why has it remained closed, when and how were members informed, and who made the decision to do so?**

The Runnymede Centre reopened on Monday 10 March to staff for hotdesking, training and meeting space. Tenants, some of whom may have been displaced, were also encouraged to return from 10 March. It is not closed.

During the period from 28 February to 10 March the site was closed to SCC staff (except facilities staff). This was to enable a clean-up and repair programme to happen.

- III. When will the Runnymede Centre reopen and what are the preconditions required for it to do so?**

Please see above

- IV. Is it accurate that 150 members of staff have been relocated from their normal place of work at the Runnymede Centre to other County Council locations? If so, which other locations?**

From mid-February a number of staff who had Runnymede as their primary-base was moved to work from other sites. The bulk of staff were from Children's services and their roles (in the main) includes peripatetic working. The majority of these staff were moved to Quadrant Court to work with colleagues in that office building. A team of Adults Social Care staff were also relocated to Quadrant Court. Other staff continued to hotdesk from other sites including District and Borough locations.

- V. Is it accurate that staff formerly based at the Runnymede Centre have been refused access and that in some cases locks have been changed on their office doors, preventing them from accessing files and collecting personal**

belongings? If this is accurate, what is the legal position of denying staff access to their personal belongings?

Staff were refused access by the Army to the building for the period that the Army commissioned the site. In addition from end of February to 10 March, whilst clear-up was undertaken they were not able to access the buildings. During these periods, essential filing, equipment and personal belongings were moved upon request.

We are not aware of any code or lock changes on office doors. Two main side doors accessing the centre have been closed to staff entry meaning that staff now have to walk through the main front doors, through the reception area to get onto site. Staff have not been prevented from getting their personal belongings since 10 March.

VI. Which services previously based at the Runnymede Centre are being based elsewhere and what is the impact on service users?

Runnymede is part of the corporate office portfolio not an “operational” service-user site. In terms of staff and the impact of general service provision on customers; An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been produced as part of the Making A Difference Programme which includes Runnymede. Furthermore, this is being re-evaluated as part of a new staff consultation period specific to Runnymede which commences 2 April – 30 April.

VII. What are the medium to long term plans for the use of the Runnymede Centre, such as a decision to permanently close it?

The medium term plans are for the site to continue as a corporate building for hotdesking, training and meeting space. There will be no teams permanently based there in the future which was recommended as part of the original Making a Difference Programme.

The longer term plan for the site is to become part of SCC secondary school provision, meeting a need for additional school places in the area. The new school would open in 2017 and as such the site will be required to be developed from 2015.

VIII. How much money is being saved by Surrey County Council while the Runnymede Centre is closed, noting the following extracts from the Budget Monitoring Report to Cabinet 25 March 2014:

45. Business Services (BUS) projects a -£6.2m full year underspend. BUS has delivered this year's efficiency savings, brought forward some of next year's and is also achieving one-off revenue savings. The underspend is an increase of -£0.6m compared to last month. The increased underspend reflects utility costs savings and the impact of rescheduling training courses due to take place at the Runnymede Centre.

51. *HR and Organisational Development forecasts -£0.5m year end underspend, a change of -£0.2m compared to last month. This is caused by several factors including delays to delivering training courses as a result of not being able to use the Runnymede Centre*

The Runnymede Centre was only closed for a two week period from when the Army vacated the site to it reopening following clear-up and repairs on 10 March. There are no buildings savings associated with this period as the site was still staffed, and all utilities continued; heat, light, security etc.

The extracts above relate to cancellation of a number of training courses for which a new venue could not be found at short notice to host the event. This amounts to approximately £30K over a period of up to 4 weeks (February-10 March). Training commenced again at Runnymede on 10th March. The other underspends due to staffing, occupational health and other training give rise to the additional £0.2m within HR.

Nick Skellett, CBE
Chairman of Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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