

MINUTES of the meeting of the **COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 7 November 2013 at Epsom Town Hall, The Parade, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 5BY.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Wednesday, 4 December 2013.

Members:

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

Ex-officio Members:

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

Substitute Members:

- * Mr Chris Norman

* = present

76/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Denise Saliagopoulos and Chris Townsend. Chris Norman attended as a substitute for Denise Saliagopoulos.

77/13 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 3 OCTOBER 2013 [Item 2]

An amendment was made to the third line of Item 73/13 paragraph 8 to read, "Officers commented that they were confident that the spend could be contained within the IMT budget." Subject to this amendment, the minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

78/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were no declarations of interest.

79/13 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

There were no questions or petitions to report.

80/13 RESPONSES FROM THE CABINET TO ISSUES REFERRED BY THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 5]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses: None

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Committee was provided with a response from the Cabinet Member for Business Services regarding the Committee's recommendations on Digital by Default. Members thanked the Cabinet Member for the response, though raised concerns that their first recommendation was not considered within the answer and requested this be answered at its next meeting in December. The Committee strongly felt that a strategy should be developed in the future.
2. It was felt that the paragraph explaining the role of the Chief Digital Officer could be made clearer, and the role should focus on improving the links between the County Council and outside organisations.

Recommendations:

- a) The Cabinet Member for Business Services is requested to consider the Committee's recommendation, from its October meeting, regarding the development of a high-level strategy document to help guide its approach to the digital delivery of both back-office and front-line services.

Action: Cabinet Member for Business Services

Actions/further information to be provided: None.

Committee next steps:

The Committee to be provided with a further report at its meeting in December 2013, summarising services already delivered digitally by the Council, and outlining initiatives in place or proposed to ensure a co-ordinated approach.

81/13 RECOMMENDATION TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 6]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses: None.

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Committee discussed the merits of scrutinising all the Select Committee Forward Work Programmes during Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings. It was felt by Members that this would be beneficial as it would enable Chairmen to identify items which cross Committee remits and provide Members with a full overview which does not feature within the Scrutiny Bulletin.
2. Members expressed concern regarding the impact of the Welfare Reform on Surrey, in particular regarding the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) having not received the funding required to deliver the services, and sought assurances that the Task Group would fully look into the policy decision behind CAB not receiving the funding. The Chairman of the Task Group assured the Committee that the Group was inspecting the process behind the decision, in particular why funding was through a grant process rather than a contract. The Task Group was aware that the CAB were under immense pressure, with an increasing workload without the increase in funding, and were in discussions with Get Wise to solve the disjoint between the groups which had occurred.
3. The Committee was informed that the Chairman had requested a report from Sue Lewry-Jones regarding Members' concerns on the impacts of the Welfare Reforms and the current situation regarding CAB.
4. The Vice-Chairman of the Communities Select Committee confirmed he would raise concerns regarding grant funding and would suggest an item for the Select Committee's Forward Work Programme.

Recommendations: None.

Actions/further information to be provided: None.

Committee next steps:

The Committee to consider the Forward Work Programmes of the Select Committees at its meeting in December 2013.

82/13 BUDGET MONITORING - SEPTEMBER 2013 [Item 7]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses: Kevin Kilburn, Deputy Chief Finance Officer

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Committee was informed that the Performance and Finance Sub-Group had met earlier in the week to discuss the finance reports and had provided a summary of their discussion. There was an overriding concern regarding Social Capital and the Strategic Director and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care had been invited to attend the Committee's December meeting to address Members' concerns.
2. Members requested that the Strategic Director's report should include some examples of Social Capital so they would be able to prepare questions for the item in advance.
3. The Committee requested that some benchmarking takes places, where expenditure per head for different services is compared to other similar local authorities. Members were aware this would be difficult with the dissolution of the Audit Commission but felt it would be beneficial as it would enable Members to challenge how a directorate or service was performing.
4. Concerns were raised by Members that the budgetary information provided to Select Committees during budget workshops did not have sufficient detail to effectively scrutinise budget plans.
5. Members queried the attempts made to recover debt and were informed by the Deputy Chief Finance Officer that debt recovery was often a sensitive issue, but that efforts were being made to recover the debt. A Rapid Improvement Event had been set up which was looking at the process and improvements which could be made.
6. The Committee were informed that there had been a rise of £4.1m of non-care debt since the formation of the Clinical Commissioning Groups. This was due to the time it takes for new organisations to get settled and some disagreements to the amount to be charged for some contracts. The Finance team had set aside £500,000 as a contingency for this period of transition, and were in the process of agreeing the payment of contracts.

Recommendations:

- a) That a report be provided on the Social Capital initiatives in Surrey, including how the expected outcomes would be achieved and details of other councils adopting a similar approach.

Action by: Strategic Director for Adult Social Care

- b) The Committee requests officers consider benchmarking expenditure per head against other local authorities.

Action by: Deputy Chief Finance Officer

Actions/further information to be provided: None.

Committee next steps: None

83/13 IMPROVING STAFF MORALE AND WELLBEING [Item 8]

Declarations of interest: None.

Witnesses: Carmel Miller, Head of HR & OD

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Vice-Chairman explained that there were three strands of work for the Committee to consider over the year relating to Human Resources (HR) which were; the role of HR in the morale and wellbeing of staff, how HR makes a difference to residents, and pay and rewards, including benchmarking with other local authorities. Furthermore, work was being done to make sure reports from HR were briefer to ensure Members received the information that was necessary.
2. The Head of HR & OD informed the Committee that Surrey County Council was a good employer, and improvement had been seen particularly in the last four years. This was due to a number reasons including; competitive rates of pay, training, flexible working and employee support. Despite these improvements she was keen to stress that it was important the organisation did not become complacent, and were in the process of building upon the Surrey's People Strategy to ensure the Council was able to be one of the best local authorities to work for.
3. There were 183 work places within Surrey County Council and it was important to ensure every area was of a high quality and staff felt motivated and connected to the rest of the organisation.
4. The Employee Survey 2012 showed Surrey County Council had some way to go as regards "I feel I can influence change". It was important staff feel empowered to have a voice about how their service can improve and change..
5. Members raised concerns over the working practices of the Highways department as it was often difficult to get in contact with officers. The Head of HR stated that she was working with Jason Russell, Assistant Director of Highways, to implement a culture change within the department. A deep dive diagnostic had been completed and the issues had been identified. Management skills were being developed to improve staff morale and the delivery of services.
6. Members felt it was important to not just concentrate on high level development as staff often required assistance with the development of basic skills and knowledge.
7. The Committee queried how many people had felt they had been bullied and what was being done to minimise this figure. Members were informed that 15% of employees felt they had experienced bullying, which was relatively low in comparison to the BBC which had a level of 40%. The Head of HR confirmed this was a priority for the

next four years and all managers would be undergoing training to enable them to challenge inappropriate behaviour. Furthermore, the council is exploring a new “Restorative” approach to dealing with conflict at work which could be much more effective than the current “adversarial” approach which neither staff nor management found helpful in resolving problems and performance issues at work.

Recommendations:

- a) The Committee receive a report on Surrey’s People Strategy at a future meeting.

Action by: Head of HR & OD

Actions / further information to be provided:

The Committee to be provided with a copy of Surrey’s People Strategy.

Committee next steps: None.

84/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING [Item 9]

The Committee noted that its next meeting would be held at 10.30am on 4 December 2013 at County Hall.

Meeting ended at: 11.30 am

Chairman