

MINUTES of the meeting of the **COUNCIL OVERVIEW BOARD** held at 10.30 am on 3 June 2015 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, 1 July 2015.

Elected Members:

- * Mr David Munro (Chairman)
- * Mr Eber A Kington (Vice-Chairman)
- * Mr Mark Brett-Warburton
- * Mr Bill Chapman
- * Mr Stephen Cooksey
- * Mr Bob Gardner
- * Mr Michael Gosling
- * Dr Zully Grant-Duff
- Mr David Harmer
- * Mr Nick Harrison
- * Mr David Ivison
- * Mr Colin Kemp
- * Mrs Denise Saliagopoulos
- Mrs Hazel Watson
- * Mr Keith Witham

Ex officio Members:

Mrs Sally Ann B Marks, Chairman of the County Council
Mr Nick Skellett CBE, Vice-Chairman of the County Council

Co-opted Members:

Substitute Members:

In attendance

1/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Hazel Watson and David Harmer.

John Orrick acted as a substitution for Hazel Watson.

2/15 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 23 APRIL 2015 [Item 2]

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

3/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

No Declarations of Interest were received.

4/15 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

No questions or petitions were received.

5/15 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE [Item 5]

This was the first meeting of the Council Overview Board. The new Chairman took the opportunity to welcome the Board Members, in particular the Members new to the Board.

6/15 RESPONSES FROM THE CABINET TO ISSUES REFERRED BY THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 6]

The Board noted the response from Cabinet regarding using the small budget improvements to mitigate some of the savings in Children, Schools and Families. The response is detailed in the reports.

7/15 RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 7]

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. With regards to recommendations tracker reference COSC 49, Members agreed that this item should remain 'live' until they were entirely satisfied that information requested by the Board was provided by officers in a timely manner.
2. The Board emphasised the importance of all actions on the recommendations tracker being completed, and agreed to carry forward the recommendations of the former Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee into the new remit of the Board.
3. The Board noted and agreed the Recommendations Tracker and Forward Work Programme.

8/15 REPORT OF THE WELFARE REFORM TASK GROUP [Item 8]

Witnesses:

Bob Gardner, Chairman of the Welfare Reform Task Group

Kevin Kilburn, Deputy Chief Finance Officer

Denise LeGal, Cabinet Member for Business Services and Resident Experience

Helen Rankin, Scrutiny Manager

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Chairman of the Welfare Reform Task Group introduced the report, which included an annex detailing progress against recommendations made by the original Task Group in April 2013.
2. Overall, the Task Group was generally satisfied that Surrey County Council (SCC) was prepared for the reforms, however they remained very concerned about the impact the changes to the welfare benefits system continues to have on the residents of Surrey.
3. The Chairman of the Task Group explained the concern that Members had about the impact of the time taken during the appeal process on a vulnerable person's mental health and wellbeing. It was noted that often a large percentage of negative benefit decisions were overturned at appeal, incurring unnecessary costs that could have been avoided if the correct decision had been made in the first instance.
4. The Board expressed their view that the application stage could be too difficult for claimants and emphasised the importance of information hubs being available in each borough. The Council Overview Board Chairman explained that he had visited a number of hubs across the County and was impressed by the service. It was suggested that the Resident Experience Board review how each hub is utilised by the community.
5. The Board questioned whether funding for the continuation of the Local Assistance Scheme and the GetWise service would be available in the current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Officers responded that ongoing funding of such services and schemes would be dealt with through the summer refresh of the MTFP.
6. There was a discussion around the use of libraries as a frontline service for those seeking benefits advice. The importance of training staff to be prepared for the queries and questions residents might have in the light of the reforms was highlighted. The Welfare Reform Task Group Chairman commented that library staff were currently preparing for the introduction of Universal Credit. Members also felt that it was crucial that the Council's contact centre staff were adequately trained to deal with or signpost residents regarding benefit queries.
7. The Board discussed housing benefit and were concerned that this was not directly paid to landlords. It was noted that national policy currently dictated that that housing benefit be given first to the claimant so they could pay their own rent. This was to give tenants more social responsibility; however, the Board recognised that in some cases this method would not prove effective. This matter was dealt with under Recommendation 8, detailed below.
8. The Board agreed that the Task Group would continue to meet to investigate Welfare Reform matters further.

Recommendations:

The Board endorsed the Task Group's report and recommend that:

1. The case for continuing funding for the Local Assistance Scheme in Surrey is reconfirmed as part of the budget and service planning cycle, having due regard to usage, need, benefits and cost of delivery.
2. That the getWiSE or a similar service, be extended for a further 3 years, with a built-in review of usage and need on an annual basis.

3. That careful consideration be given to the role of Libraries as a 'gateway to County services' when developing a vision for the future of the Surrey Library Service and that the Resident Experience Board (previously Communities Select Committee) continues to monitor the progress.
4. A Member representative of the Welfare Reform Task Group be invited to be briefed on the Universal Credit pilot in Elmbridge, and agree a protocol for keeping the Task Group informed.
5. That a structured project plan for the Universal Credit roll Pilot in Elmbridge be shared with Members of the Task Group.
6. A robust monitoring scheme needs to be introduced to measure uptake of staff accessing training but also measuring the numbers starting the programme and the number of staff completing the training.
7. The Task Group to explore further the length of time it can take claimants to reach tribunal when they have launched an appeal against a benefits decision and request further information about how the assessment process has improved since moving to the Maximus contract.
8. Surrey's District & Boroughs and Housing Associations ensure that all options are explored for alternative payment arrangements for vulnerable claimants.
9. The Welfare Reform Coordination Group continues to work with partners to ensure that the reforms, including the introduction of Universal Credit, are communicated widely with residents and services across the County.
10. The Surrey County Council Contact Centre is adequately trained to deal with, and signpost, callers to the correct services, particularly during the initial period of Universal Credit.
11. The Welfare Reform Task Group should continue for a further year, meeting quarterly to monitor the impact of the reforms. The Chairman of the Task Group to engage with the Resident Experience Board to carry out future work.
12. The Welfare Reform Task Group to investigate the disparity between hardship fund spending in different districts and boroughs in Surrey.

Action/further information:

The Resident Experience Board will consider how each Information Hub across the County is and can be utilised by the community.

Committee Next Steps:

- The Chairman to write to the Leader of the Council highlighting key aspects of the Board's debate and detailing the recommendations from the Task Group.
- The report of the Welfare Reform Task Group to be shared with the Social Care Board.

9/15 EQUALITY, FAIRNESS AND RESPECT STRATEGY 2015-2020 [Item 9]

Witnesses:

Robert Cayzer, Senior Policy Manager
 Andrew Evans, Strategic Partnership Manager
 Abid Dar, Senior Equality, Inclusion and Wellbeing Manager
 Denise LeGal, Cabinet Member for Business Services and Resident Experience

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Cabinet Member introduced the report. The purpose of the Strategy was to protect both residents and staff by ensuring they are safe, happy and healthy. The strategy was evidence based and would be presented to Cabinet on 23 June 2015.
2. The Board were informed that Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) were becoming a process, to support this e-learning, classroom and 1-2-1 training was being offered to staff in effectively completing EIA's.
3. One Member was concerned that the Strategy underestimated life expectancy in some parts of the County. This would be raised by the Member outside of the meeting, with the relevant officers.

Recommendations:

1. The Board resolved that the Strategy be endorsed and commended to Cabinet for approval on 23 June 2015

Action/further information to be provided:

None.

Committee Next Steps:

Mr Bill Chapman to raise concerns about the accuracy of life expectancy information in the strategy, with the relevant officers.

10/15 APPRAISAL COMPLETION UPDATE REPORT FOR APPRAISALS COMPLETED IN 2014/15 [Item 10]

Witnesses:

Carmel Millar, Director of People and Development
 Denise LeGal, Cabinet Member for Business Services and Resident Experience

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Cabinet Member and Director of People and Development introduced the report and informed the Board of the significant progress made with the number of completed appraisals, since Members had first scrutinised this topic. Thanks were expressed to

the Board for the drive to increase the number of appraisals completed.

2. Officers clarified that all staff including part-time were included in the overall reported figures. Social work students, bank staff, staff on maternity leave or still on probation period were not included in the reported figures. After excluding those staff, 6700 staff were eligible for appraisal.
3. The Board questioned how the quality of appraisals and employee satisfaction was measured. The next stage of the project was to focus on ensuring quality appraisal conversation to work towards a link between pay progression and performance.
4. Concern was raised that there could be too much focus on the completion of appraisals rather than the quality. The Cabinet Member added that staff morale had been raised since the drive to complete appraisals; this had been shown in feedback received from staff.
5. There was a discussion around the proposed frequency of reporting to the Board, it was agreed that appraisal completion should come back to the Board as part of a larger item including other work force aspects such as sickness, which had been improved to 6.5 days as a result of an investment in training.
6. The Board suggested that appraisals completion should only be reported in the future if the staff survey results demonstrated low take-up or quality of appraisal.

Resolved:

1. The Board noted the achievement of 98% completion of eligible appraisal conversations across the organisation for 2013-2014.
2. The Committee noted the development of the quality checking process for appraisals and the overall drive for quality appraisal conversations across the organisation.

Further information to be provided:

None.

Committee Next Steps:

The Board resolved for an update of HR functions including appraisals to be included in the agenda for the October 2015 Board.

11/15 DATE OF NEXT MEETING [Item 11]

The next Council Overview Board will be held on Wednesday 1 July at 10.00am.

Meeting ended at: 1.20 pm

Chairman