

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at 10.30 am on 3 October 2013 at Ashcombe Suite, County Hall, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2DN.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 7 November 2013.

**Members:**

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

**Substitute Members:**

Mrs Fiona White

**Present:**

Mr Peter Martin, Deputy Leader

\* = present

**67/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]**

Apologies were received from Stephen Cooksey. Fiona White attended as a substitute.

**68/13 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 12 SEPTEMBER 2013 [Item 2]**

An amendment was made to the first line of page 4 of the minutes to read, "commented that significant progress had been made to identify...". Subject to this amendment, the minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

**69/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **70/13 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]**

There were no questions or petitions to report.

## **71/13 RESPONSES FROM THE CABINET TO ISSUES REFERRED BY THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 5]**

There were no referrals made to Cabinet at the last meeting so there were no responses to report.

## **72/13 DIGITAL BY DEFAULT [Item 6]**

**Declarations of interest:** None.

**Witnesses:**

Paul Brocklehurst, Head of Information Management and Technology (IMT)  
Lucie Glenday, Programme Director for Superfast Broadband  
Mark Irons, Head of Customer Services  
Nigel Lewis, Chair of Age Action Alliance Digital Inclusion Group

Peter Martin, Deputy Leader of the Council

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. The Committee was given a brief outline of the national context in relation to a digital by default approach. It was commented that central Government was expecting to make large efficiency savings as a result of adopting a digital by default approach; however, the view was expressed by officers that these savings would not all be achievable. Members also challenged the estimated cost-per-transaction reductions made by moving to digital services, as it was felt that this failed to account for the process and cost of staff time. The Committee highlighted the need to consider the national picture in relation to digital services, as it would inform residents' expectations and views.
2. The Committee was informed that a digital approach could be viewed as not simply a move to put more transactional services online, but as a way of streamlining back office functions and processes. It was highlighted that this could be supported through a more intuitive approach to procurement, ending an over-reliance on IT suppliers, particularly where business processes were being made to fit the technology procured.
3. The Committee was informed that central Government was in the process of developing a new Digital Inclusion strategy and identifying a supplier for assisted digital; this was where the service user received additional support in order to access digital services. It was highlighted by witnesses that there were a number of factors to consider when addressing issues around digital inclusion. These included age-related barriers; some forms of disability; and those who would be unwilling to use online or digital services. The Committee expressed concerns about the requirement to apply for Universal Credit online, and how this could potentially disadvantage vulnerable claimants. It was

suggested that this was an area of exploration for the Committee's Welfare Reform Task Group.

4. The Committee raised a number of questions in relation to accessibility and what role it played in ensuring the Council was sufficiently encouraging people to use digital services. It was highlighted that work was being undertaken alongside the delivery of the Superfast Broadband project to ensure that residents were given the opportunity to develop their digital skills. Witnesses commented that there was a need to consider where continuing support arrangements might be required for those accessing digital services. The Committee was told that there was work being undertaken by the Council to identify which services, such as Adult Social Care or Meals-on-wheels, could be used to facilitate ongoing support arrangements within residents' homes. It was also highlighted that the Council was supporting Carers UK in making a bid to the National Lottery to assist carers in accessing online services.
5. The Committee was informed that the Council did not have an overarching digital strategy, as IMT worked to meet the requirements of individual directorate and service strategies. Officers commented that different support was aligned according to individual service needs. The Committee was told that each directorate had a technology board, comprised of officers from across services and IMT, which met regularly to identify their needs and requirements.
6. The Committee was informed that Customer Services viewed its approach to service delivery as based primarily around customer needs. It was highlighted that the Council's website was in the process of being refreshed, with the majority of test users commenting that they preferred the redesign. The Committee was told that the redesign had been informed by the Society of IT Managers (SocITM) standards. These had led to new customer feedback tools and a "find my nearest" functionality was being introduced.
7. The Committee was told that the Customer Service Excellence programme was working with individual services to take a holistic approach to how they improve their delivery and access to information. It was highlighted that this work had been undertaken initially with Highways, as this was an area that received a significant number of customer complaints. The Committee was informed that the introduction of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system was hoped to improve the co-ordination of back office functions and how effectively queries were resolved.
8. Members questioned where the overarching responsibility for the Council's website lay. It was confirmed that the website was hosted by Customer Services, but that individual services took responsibility for the content of their pages. It was highlighted that there were approximately 8,000 pages and that the new customer feedback tools would be able to link feedback with specific pages, thereby identifying areas for improvement or good practice.
9. Officers highlighted the role of the Continual Improvement Board in ensuring that directorates were joining up areas of work at a corporate

leadership level. It was commented that there were some areas where it was deemed unnecessary or inappropriate to join up digital platforms.

10. Officers confirmed that they had visited a number of local authorities to discuss various digital approaches; amongst them were Hounslow, Oxfordshire and Kingston. The view was expressed by officers that Hounslow's approach could be considered particularly well-suited to a unitary authority. Members stressed the importance of ensuring that residents were receiving a coherent online experience, where digital services operated in a consistent and joined-up way. The work of Government Digital Services to develop consistent open standards across departments was highlighted as an example of this.
11. The Committee queried whether there was a Cabinet Member specifically tasked with the responsibility of digital services, and whether a single digital strategy had been considered. The Committee was informed that the Cabinet jointly recognised the role of digital technology in creating greater efficiencies. The Superfast Broadband project and the number of School Admissions applications being made online were highlighted as particular areas of success in this area. It was commented that a digital approach was pursued wherever it was deemed appropriate.
12. The Committee sought reassurances around the data security principles, and were informed that the County Council used the Government Connect (GCSX) network, which complies with national security standards.
13. The Committee asked what potential barriers there were for expanding digital services. It was highlighted that there was a need to prioritise high-volume transactions, such as online library renewals, and ensure these were working effectively before encouraging lower volume transactions to increase. It was also highlighted that factors such as capacity and how well-equipped services were for changes to digital approaches were also considerations.

**Recommendations:**

- a) That the Cabinet considers developing a high-level strategy document to help guide its approach to the digital delivery of both back-office and front-line services.

Action by: Cabinet

- b) That consideration be given to identifying a Cabinet Member to take lead responsibility for the Council's overall approach to the digital delivery of services.

Action by: Cabinet

- c) That the Welfare Reform Task Group investigates the impact on users of the requirement for Universal Credit applications to be made online.

Action by: Welfare Reform Task Group

- d) That the Committee receives 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.

Action by: Head of IMT/Head of Customer Services

**Actions/further information to be provided:**

None.

**Committee Next Steps:**

None.

**73/13 BUDGET MONITORING: AUGUST 2013 [Item 7]**

**Declarations of interest:** None.

**Witnesses:** Paul Carey-Kent,  
Kevin Kilburn, Chief Finance Officer

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. A summary of the discussion held at the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee's Performance & Finance Sub-Group was shared with the Committee. The Performance & Finance Sub-Group considered the August 2013 budget monitoring report at its meeting on Monday 30 September 2013 and identified the following issues for further discussion by the Committee:
  - Uncertainties relating to the revenue budget, in particular the likelihood of achieving the savings target for social capital in Adult Social Care in the current financial year (paragraph 10 on page 38).
  - Further information was requested about the reasons behind the increase in the number of IT users in the Council from 7,700 in 2011/12 to just under 10,000 this year (paragraph 35 on page 43), and whether better planning could have prevented this becoming a budget pressure in the current year.
  - Information was requested about the number of the total staff vacancies as at 31 August 2013 (683) which were filled by temporary staff (page 48).
2. The Sub-Group also stressed the need for Select Committees and the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be provided with sufficient detail of potential savings identified by the Cabinet to enable them to provide effective challenge and robust advice. This was particularly crucial if the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee was to fulfil its role of reviewing the Council's overall position recommending any re-allocation of funds from one directorate to another.

3. The Committee commented that there were still significant concerns with regards to the likelihood of Adult Social Care meeting its 2013/14 savings. Members were informed that the Adult Social Care Select Committee had made two recommendations to Cabinet with regards to this. Members expressed concerns that the budget-setting process had allocated such a significant saving to social capital measures.
4. Officers commented that the expectation had been that there would be some slippage in the savings targets related to social capital, and that Whole Systems funding had been set aside to meet any shortfall. It was highlighted that no request was to be made to draw down this funding, until the potential to make these savings within the financial year had been assessed. The Committee was informed that any use of this funding would have to be done in consultation with the health service. Officers informed the Committee that they anticipated the measures related to social capital would begin to show an impact by the September 2013 budget monitoring stage.
5. The Committee asked for clarification regarding the usage of Whole Systems funding. Officers commented that this was money the NHS was required to allocate to the local authority, with the intention of offsetting an increase in demand on acute services in the health service, through preventative work. It was highlighted that other local authorities had used the funding to met shortfalls in their budgets.
6. Officers highlighted that the average cost per service user in Adult Social Care was coming down, and that the level of demand had remained consistent this year. Members were informed that future savings identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) had been made anticipating increased demand.
7. The Committee queried whether £3.3 million of funding for sexual health services for Public Health that had been delegated to the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in error was recoverable. Officers confirmed that there were ongoing discussions with the CCGs in order to claim back this funding. It was clarified that sexual health services were being provided, but that the absence of funding was preventing new initiatives from beginning.
8. The Committee was informed that a budget pressure in relation to an increase in IT users was result of actions identified within the MTFP to improve efficiencies within services. Officers commented that they confident that the spend could be contained within the IMT budget. The Committee asked for further information with regards to why this increase had not been anticipated within the business planning for the current financial year.
9. The Committee asked for further details on the savings planned for the next financial year. It was confirmed that these would be communicated as part of the ongoing business planning process in the coming few months.
10. Members asked for further details regarding the usage of the Ranger House, the Parkside House, and Egham purchases. It was confirmed this would be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

**Recommendations:**

None.

**Actions/further information to be provided:**

Information was requested to address the second and third bullet-points from the Sub-Group report.

Officers to provide details on the following:

- IMT Business Planning and the increase in the number of IT users
- The usage of the Ranger House, the Parkside House, and Egham purchases.

**Committee Next Steps:**

None.

**74/13 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. Members were informed that the Welfare Reform Task Group had agreed its terms of reference, which would be circulated to the Committee for comment.

**Recommendations:**

None.

**Actions/further information to be provided:**

None.

**Committee Next Steps:**

None.

**75/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING [Item 9]**

The Committee noted that its next meeting would be held at 10am on 7 November 2013. The Chairman asked Members to note that this meeting would be held at Epsom Town Hall.

Meeting ended at: 1.07 am

---

**Chairman**

This page is intentionally left blank