

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 JULY 2013

PRESENT :

Councillor Shaw (In the Chair),
Councillors Adshead, Bowker, Candish, Chilton, Cordingley, Mrs. Dixon, Duffield, Higgins, John Reilly and D. Western; Councillor Lloyd (ex officio Member of the Committee); and Mr. D. Kitchen and Ms. D. Haddad (Education Co-Opted Members).

In Attendance

Senior Democratic Services Officer (J.M.J. Maloney),
Democratic Services Officer (H. Mitchell),
Chief Executive (T. Grant) (item 43),
Joint Director, Children, Young People and Families (Social Care) (C. Ramsden) (item 44).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Colledge (item 43), Brophy, Bruer-Morris, Holden, Procter, S. Taylor and Wilkinson.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Ms. Gallagher and Goodstadt.

38. NOTING OF THE CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN FOR 2013/14

RESOLVED – That it be noted that Councillors Shaw and Cordingley had been appointed by Council at its meeting on 22nd May as Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of this committee for the municipal year 2013/14.

39. TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED – That the Terms of Reference for this committee, as agreed by Council at its meeting on 22nd May, be noted.

40. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

RESOLVED – That the Membership of this committee, as appointed by Council at its meeting on 22nd May, be noted.

41. MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Meetings held on 2nd April and 5th May be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made by Members.

43. REVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS 2012-13, INTRODUCTION TO NEW CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN 2014-15

The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive were in attendance to introduce a report which provided a review of the Council's achievements during 2012/13, and introduced the new Corporate Priorities and Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) for 2013/14, to inform the development of the Scrutiny work programme.

The Leader drew attention to a number of significant operational changes which had already been implemented, and achievements notwithstanding the challenging financial context. These included the introduction of a new payroll system, the renovation of the Town Hall, enhanced links across the community, the Council's contribution to the Olympics, work in the various localities and strengthening of the Local Strategic Partnership, town centre redevelopments, on which the experience from Altrincham was being rolled out to other areas, and success in recruiting numbers of new apprentices. Whilst changes to priorities made benchmarking with previous years more difficult, current performance monitoring was showing good performance, notable within the Council's efficiency programme and with Council Tax collection rates. In view of the current and projected challenging financial climate, the Corporate Priorities had been refreshed to reflect this. The intention was to re-shape the Council, working with communities and with businesses, to enable it to continue to deliver its priorities with an emphasis on a partnership approach and a mixed economy.

An opportunity was provided for Members to ask questions on the presentation. This led to a wide-ranging discussion which centred on: progress against a number of specific performance indicators; the potential impact on services, public expectations, Council Tax levels and the Council's staff, of reducing levels of discretionary funding; scope for demand management, technological innovation and more streamlined working with partners to enhance operational efficiency; the extent to which funding reductions could be mitigated by implementation of a new operating model and / or democratic structure for the Council; the scope for enhancing both local and regional collaboration amongst partners to secure efficiencies and economies of scale; the possibility to support funding by appropriate pump-priming, securing regional grants and private sector contributions via Infrastructure Levy, etc.; and plans for further works in town centres.

In concluding the discussion, the Chairman thanked the Leader and Chief Executive for their presentation, indicating that it would be of assistance to Scrutiny in developing its work programme. In turn the Leader welcomed the opportunity to engage with Scrutiny in developing the Council's challenging agenda, and suggested that there were a number of areas in which its input could potentially be beneficial, including the forthcoming Waste and Parking Services contracts.

RESOLVED: That the content of the presentation, the issues raised by Members and potential implications for the Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

*Scrutiny Committee (17.7.13)***44. OUTCOME OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION'S PEER REVIEW OF SAFEGUARDING**

The Joint Director, Children, Young People and Families (Social Care) was in attendance to brief the Committee on the outcomes from the Safeguarding Peer Review which had been undertaken in February 2013. The service had found the review beneficial, and its findings reflected the service's own assessment of its strengths and areas for further work. The Committee received for information the feedback letter and summary supplied by the Local Government Association, and the Joint Director introduced key features of the detailed action plan which the service had compiled in response. The Chairman thanked the Joint Director for the detailed summary, and it was agreed that, if any Member of the Committee had further queries, or wished for any additional information, they were at liberty to approach the Joint Director directly, outside the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the report and presentation be noted.
- (2) That Members refer any further queries or information requests directly to the Joint Director, Children, Young People and Families (Social Care).

45. APPROACH TO BUDGET SCRUTINY 2014-15

The Democratic Services Officer introduced a report seeking to secure agreement from the Committee on an approach to Budget Scrutiny, based on feedback from Scrutiny Members and other key stakeholders. In discussion it was agreed that the approach in the previous year had been reasonably effective, and did not require significant amendment. A number of observations were, however, made. Previous scrutiny was based on the various Council directorates, and, given the change to their structure in the interim, it was agreed that further consideration was required to ensure that this remained appropriate and practicable. The previous practice of an initial "scene-setting" briefing from the Executive Member for Finance and Director of Finance was strongly supported. It was also noted that there had been some imbalance of numbers across the various Scrutiny review groups in previous years, and that this should be borne in mind for the forthcoming exercise. Subject to these observations, the recommendations set out in the report were supported. In discussion, Members agreed that they would wish to revisit the outcomes from the previous budget scrutiny exercise, and that feedback should accordingly be brought to a forthcoming meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the report be noted.
- (2) That, subject to the observations now made by the Committee, the recommendations for budget scrutiny s set out in the report be endorsed.
- (3) That feedback from the previous budget scrutiny exercise be brought to a forthcoming meeting.

46. DRAFT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013-14

The Democratic Services Officer presented a report which set out the current position on the Committee's proposed work programme for the current year, and sought views from Members on possible additions to be included, either for the full Committee's attention or for referral to a topic group. Members were advised of the process which had been introduced to ensure that any project selected for scrutiny would be likely to secure deliverable outcomes, and the Chairman noted that there was always a need to retain a degree of flexibility in the programme to accommodate significant but unforeseen matters arising.

In this light the Committee noted a number of provisional suggestions from Members about areas of potential interest. These included: supplementary work on the existing Community Assets project; Housing Availability / Social Landlords (which linked closely to an existing reserve project); possible issues arising from the presentation by the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive on Corporate Priorities and the Annual Delivery Plan; and a range of issues within the field of schools and education. On the latter, it was noted that a liaison meeting with the Corporate Director might be beneficial, to review her Directorate's business plan and identify where Scrutiny input might best be targeted.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the report be noted.
- (2) That the officers make arrangements to review the work programme in the light of Members' observations.

47. TOPIC GROUP B: OUTCOME OF THE COMMUNITY ASSET FRAMEWORK REVIEW

Councillor Reilly introduced this item, informing the Committee of the work the topic group had undertaken, and the letter which had been sent to the Executive Member, setting out the Group's conclusions. It was reported that the Executive Member and Corporate Director had acknowledged the input from Scrutiny, and that the Executive would take the group's findings into account in developing its approach to the management of Community Assets.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted and welcomed.

48. TOPIC GROUP B: OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW OF INVESTMENT IN STREETLIGHTING

Councillor Reilly introduced this item, informing the Committee of the work the topic group had undertaken, which had included being provided with a Health Impact Assessment, and thanked Members of the Group for helping to undertake this review in a very timely fashion. The Group's observations had been forwarded by letter to the Executive Member, and it was understood that that the Executive was keen to take on board the issues raised. The Chairman thanked the topic

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group for its input, and noted that the Committee would look forward to developments as the Executive took forward its consideration of this issue.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted and welcomed.

49. UPDATE FROM THE TOPIC GROUP CHAIRMEN

In addition to the reports already received earlier in the meeting, Councillor Chilton advised the Committee of the conclusion of his topic group's review of Doorstep Crime, whose outcomes had been presented to the Executive. An initial response had been received, and a formal response was due to follow in due course. The group was intending to commence its next review, into cycling in the borough, shortly; and Councillor Chilton requested that any potentially interested members contact him with a view to participation.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the report be report be noted and welcomed.
- (2) That any Members interested in participating in the forthcoming review of cycling advise Councillor Chilton accordingly.

50. URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)

(a) Overview and Scrutiny Annual Impact Report 2012/13

[Note: The Chairman agreed that this item be considered as Urgent Business in order to allow the report to be finalised in time for prompt referral to Council.]

Members were invited to consider a tabled draft of the Annual Impact Report, which was to be presented to Council in due course. It was requested that any comments be forwarded to the officers by 26th July at the latest, and the Committee agreed that authority to finalise the text in consequence be delegated to the Democratic Services Manager in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of this Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the report be noted.
- (2) That any comments by Members be forwarded to the officers by 26th July at the latest, and that authority to finalise the text of the report be delegated to the Democratic Services Manager in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and finished at 7.45 pm