

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12th DECEMBER 2012

PRESENT:

Councillor B. Shaw (In the Chair),
Councillors Adshead, Bowker, Candish, Chilton, Cordingley, Mrs. Dixon, Duffield,
Higgins and D. Western.

In Attendance

Senior Democratic Services Officer (J.M.J. Maloney),
Democratic Services Officer (H. Mitchell),
Acting Director of Transformation & Resources (I. Duncan) (part only),
Joint Director of Operations (J. Willmott) (part only),
Customer Development & Support Services Manager (C. Lamb) (part only),
Business Change Manager (S. Gannon) (part only).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Anstee (item 18) and Dr. Blackburn (item 19).

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Reilly and Lloyd (ex officio Member of the Committee).

16. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 3rd October 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No such declarations were made to this meeting.

18. COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT AND BENEFIT CHANGES – OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION

The Executive Member for Finance, with supporting officers, was in attendance to introduce, and respond to the Committee's questions in relation to, a draft report to the Executive setting out the outcome of a consultation exercise undertaken regarding options in relation to the proposed Localised Council Tax Benefit Scheme.

The Executive Member emphasised to the Committee that, whilst the Executive currently had a preferred option, the decision had not yet been taken, and any further comments that the Committee might make would be taken into account in preparing final proposals for the Executive's consideration. The committee took the opportunity to discuss with the Executive Member a range of issues including the nature of the consultation exercise and responses received, the rationale behind the determination of preferred options, future communications with those affected, the scope for any further review of adopted system in the light of experience following implementation, and the Council's approach to take-up of the DCLG transitional grant.

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Following the withdrawal of the Executive Member, the Committee welcomed what it felt had been a helpful and thorough report, and the opportunity to be involved in the formative stages of the proposals' development. In the context of the wider climate of financial austerity, and in particular forthcoming changes to welfare provision, a number of Members expressed concerns regarding the potential impact on advice and support services; and it was agreed that the committee should request that the Executive ensure, in setting the budget, that such services remained sufficiently robust to enable affected vulnerable residents to navigate through the changed system.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the content of the report, and the responses of the Executive Member, be noted.
- (2) That the Executive be thanked for its provision of a helpful and comprehensive report.
- (3) That that the Executive be requested to ensure, in setting the budget, that advice and support services remain sufficiently robust to enable affected vulnerable residents to navigate through the changed system.

19. PROPOSED MODEL FOR LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE IN TRAFFORD

The Executive Member for Community Health and Wellbeing and Joint Director of Operations were in attendance to introduce a paper setting out details of the proposed Model for Local Welfare Assistance which would be submitted for the Executive's consideration in the New Year, and seeking any views which the Committee might have in relation to the proposals.

Members were advised that the background to the proposals was the abolition, with effect from 1st April 2013, of the Social Fund as part of the wider welfare reform and localism agendas. An options appraisal had been carried out to identify the most appropriate delivery model for a replacement locally-based system, which would emphasise a range of targeted and signposted interventions, not necessarily involving direct cash payments, as these generally did little to address underlying symptoms of financial difficulty.

An opportunity was provided for Members to raise issues and concerns. These centred on: comparisons of the current with the proposed scheme; identification of common key trigger events / pathways for likely applicants; the availability of clearly-identifiable contact points for information / receipt of applications; the support to be provided to the Council's partners in the scheme's delivery; governance arrangements and risk assessments, including in relation to potential demands on the fund; and information availability for local Members to assist them in advising constituents in relation to the scheme's provisions.

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Following the withdrawal of the Executive Members and supporting officers, the Committee reviewed the report and presentation which it had received. Members agreed that they would have welcomed a greater depth of information. It was suggested that further input from the Committee might be desirable, perhaps by means of a topic group; but the envisaged January 2013 decision date for the Executive did not make this feasible. It was agreed that authority be delegated to the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, to summarise the Committee's concerns in a letter to the Executive Member for Community Health and Wellbeing, to allow the Executive's decision to be informed by the Committee's consideration. It was further agreed that the Committee might wish to consider incorporating a post-implementation review of the scheme into its future work programme.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the content of the Executive's responses, and the observations made by the Committee, be noted.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, to summarise the Committee's concerns in a letter to the Executive Member for Community Health and Wellbeing.
- (3) That in due course consideration be given to incorporating a post-implementation review of the Welfare Assistance scheme into the Committee's future work programme.

20. BUDGET SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received for information the draft report which had been prepared following the Scrutiny Committees' recent review of the Executive's budget proposals for 2013/14. Members were advised that, once cleared as agreed by all the Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, the report would be formally referred to the Executive in time for it to be considered by the Executive in taking its decisions on the forthcoming year's budget.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.

21. REVISED SCRUTINY PROTOCOLS

The Committee received a draft Scrutiny Protocol, developed in the light of recent structural changes, and intended to provide a broad framework and shared approach for stakeholders involved in the exercise of the Scrutiny function. The Committee was invited to provide any feedback it wished and, subject to that, to recommend the protocol to Executive / Council for adoption within the Council's Constitution. The Committee was advised that a protocol covering Health Scrutiny specifically would be similarly referred to the Health Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the content of the report and draft protocol be noted.
- (2) That the Protocol be endorsed for recommendation to the Executive and Council for adoption within the Council's Constitution.

22. UPDATE ON TOPIC GROUP WORK PROGRAMMES

In relation to the Development of a Community Asset Framework, the Committee was informed that a broad-ranging introductory meeting had been held between Topic Group B, the Executive Member and officers. In the light of information received, the Group had identified a number of key workstreams, and determined an initial scope for the project, with potential for further future expansion if that were considered appropriate in due course. A further meeting was envisaged early in the New Year.

On Doorstep Crime in Trafford, the Topic Group had received a briefing from the Head of Public Protection; an officer report on scoping proposals was awaited, and it was envisaged that a meeting would be held in the near future to allow the group to develop the proposals further.

RESOLVED: That the content of the update reports be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 p.m. and finished at 7.54 p.m.