

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6th FEBRUARY 2013

PRESENT:

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

In Attendance

Senior Democratic Services Officer (J.M.J. Maloney),
Democratic Services Officer (H. Mitchell),
Director of Finance (I. Duncan) (item 25).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Butt (invited Member of Health Scrutiny Committee) and Councillor Williams (item 25).

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Shaw, and from Councillors Harding and Holden (invited Members of Health Scrutiny Committee).

23. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th December 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Lloyd declared a Personal Interest in any item which might relate to Trafford Domestic Abuse Services, in view of her Directorship of that organisation.

25. RESPONSE TO BUDGET SCRUTINY 2013-14

The Executive Member for Transformation and Resources and Director of Finance were in attendance to introduce the Executive's formal response to the Budget Scrutiny report, which had been agreed at the Executive's previous meeting. The Committee was reminded that since that meeting, a number of supplementary queries had been raised, and copies of the Executive's written response to these were also tabled for ease of reference.

The Committee's discussions concentrated to a significant extent on the financial uncertainties arising from the newly-introduced system of allocating income from Business Rates, and in particular the fact that a high proportion of the Council's rateable value was subject to appeal. Members were advised that, whilst this matter was to a great extent beyond the Council's control, representations had been made to the relevant bodies (notable DCLG and the Valuation Office); and that, the current uncertainty had resulted in the Greater Manchester Councils agreeing not to pursue a pooled approach, at least at this stage.

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Consideration was being given to the appropriateness of allocating reserves to meet any potential shortfall in revenue; further detail would be included within the Executive's overall budget proposals. It was also likely that in future the outcome of significant appeal cases would be reported to Members as part of the ongoing monitoring of the revenue budget.

Members noted the supplementary response which had been given to queries raised in relation to other potential areas of budgetary uncertainty, proposed savings in relation to Supporting People services and proposals regarding the management of the Mersey Valley. On the latter, it was agreed that a further paper would be prepared for Members setting out further background to the savings proposals and how they would be achieved in practice.

The Chairman then thanked the Executive Member and Director of Finance for their attendance and the information which they had supplied and, following their withdrawal, the Committee considered what actions it wished to take further to the response received. It was agreed that after a suitable interval the Committee should revisit progress on the Executive's formal responses, with particular reference being made to the impact of Business Rates, Waste Management and Human Resources proposals. The proposed Mersey Valley supplementary report was welcomed, and it was suggested that clarification be sought from the Executive Member on an issue which had arisen from AGMA scrutiny regarding a potential refund to Local Authorities from the AGMA Waste Management levy, particularly in the context of identified waste management budgetary pressures.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the content of the report, and the further responses by the Executive Member, be noted.
- (2) That the Committee, as part of its ongoing work programme, revisit progress on the Executive's formal responses to its Budget Scrutiny report.
- (3) That the officers arrange for responses to be brought to Members in relation to the Mersey Valley and Waste Management Levy issues identified above.

26. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION'S PEER REVIEW: CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING

The Committee received for information a paper which set out details of the background to, and process associated with, the LGA's Safeguarding Children Peer Review of the Council which was taking place between 4-8th February. Members noted the paper's content, and agreed that in due course the assessors' feedback, probably in conjunction with the Executive's response, should be referred to Scrutiny for consideration. It was agreed that the Chairmen of the Scrutiny Committees would discuss the detailed arrangements for this, including the timing and what kind of Scrutiny structure would be best to review this item.

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RESOLVED –

- (1) That the content of the report be noted.
- (2) That the Chairmen of the Scrutiny Committees be invited to consider, in liaison with Topic Group Chairmen if appropriate, arrangements for reviewing the outcomes of the Peer Review process.

27. UPDATE ON TOPIC GROUPS

In relation to the Development of a Community Asset Framework, Councillor Reilly advised that the duration of the project now appeared to be expanding, partly in view of its potentially broad scope, but also because it had not yet been possible to secure the comprehensive schedule of relevant assets which represented key information for the project. It was agreed that the extended duration would be acceptable provided that useful outcomes resulted; and that Topic Group Members should meet with the Executive Member and incoming Corporate Director to secure the information which the group required. In relation to the Doorstep Crime study, Councillor Chilton reported that a constructive meeting had been held to review Trading Standards work in this area, and that an action plan was in place covering engagement with other stakeholders. A meeting was scheduled for mid-March, which was likely to be the Group's concluding meeting on this topic. In discussion, the Committee's Members were requested to encourage their colleagues to engage with the ICAN project. On the Dignity in Hospitals project, Councillor Butt reported that topic group members would be reporting back on 19th February on the individual workstreams which they were researching, and advised the Committee of a range of stakeholders to be consulted. On the Personalisation Agenda, Councillor Lloyd reported that an initial meeting had been held with the Executive Member; the project's scope was being further focussed and refined, and further meetings would be held accordingly.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the content of the update reports be noted.
- (2) That a meeting be held with the Executive Member and incoming Corporate Director, Economic Growth and Prosperity, to secure information required for the Community Asset Framework project.
- (3) That the Committee's Members encourage their colleagues to engage with the ICAN project.

28. RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S LETTER: ESTABLISHMENT OF A CO-ORDINATING EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Committee received for information the response received from Councillor Dr. Barclay to the letter of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman which sought to clarify the Executive's position in relation to a recommendation arising from the Scrutiny review of Domestic Violence.

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Whilst welcoming the Executive's nomination of a Co-Ordinating Executive Member in this area, some disquiet was expressed on the part of Members that the review's recommendations had been described as "unwieldy", and that the Executive would focus on those which were "achievable within current resources". Members noted that the review had made recommendations in areas where they were considered appropriate, and that it had sought to minimise any recommendations which might entail additional commitment of resource. In discussion it was requested that the officers circulate a full list of the recommendations, including those which had not been accepted by the Executive; and noted that monitoring of the implementation of recommendations would be incorporated as appropriate within the Scrutiny work programme.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the content of the correspondence, and the Executive's response, be noted.
- (2) That the officers circulate to Members an amended full list of the recommendations arising from the Domestic Violence review, including those which had not been accepted by the Executive.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 p.m. and finished at 7.37 p.m.