

VALUE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday 19 September 2012

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Mills (Chair), Rowley (Vice-Chair), Abbasi, Fooks, Fry, Gotch, Haines, Kennedy, McCready, Simmons and Sanders.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer), Mathew Metcalfe (Democratic and Electoral Services), Helen Bishop (Head of Customer Services), Nigel Kennedy (Head of Finance), Jane Lubbock (Head of Business Improvement) and Tim Sadler (Executive Director Community Services)

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anne-Marie Canning, Sajjad Malik and Oscar Van Nooijen (Councillor Gill Sanders attended as a substitute).

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee agreed to amend its programme of meetings to meet as follows:

Monday 5th November 2012 – Special meeting at 5.30 pm

Tuesday 27th November 2012

Monday 28th January 2013

Wednesday 3rd April 2013

All meetings would be in the Town Hall and start at 6.00pm unless otherwise stated.

15. STANDING ITEM: WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended) updating the Committee on the work programme for the current year.

Pat Jones from Law and Governance introduced the item.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) That Councillor Pat Kennedy would replace Councillor James Fry on the Finance and Performance Panel;
- (b) That a special meeting of the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee would be held on Monday 5th November 2012 at 5.30pm to consider the call-in of the "Parking in parking areas adjacent to Parks – monitoring" report considered by the City Executive Board at its meeting on 12th September 2012;
- (c) That the following items would be added to the agenda for the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee on 27th November 2012:
 - (i) Complaints Monitoring
 - (ii) Covered Market Briefing Paper

16. STANDING ITEM: REPORT BACK ON THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD AND ON MATTERS OF INTEREST TO THE COMMITTEE

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a paper (previously circulated, now appended) which detailed recommendations made from the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee and its Panels to the City Executive Board, between June and September 2012 and where available the responses received.

The Committee was informed of the responses from the City Executive Board to recommendations made from:

- (i) The Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 25th June 2012;

Treasury Management Annual Report 2011/12 and Revised Treasury Management Strategy 2012/13

Recommendation: To request the City Executive Board to keep under review the effects of "Right-to-Buy" within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, with particular regard to income streams, and our ability to be flexible within the funding of the capital programme so as to allow the Council to use all of the capital receipts from any sales.

City Executive Board Response:

- (1) Note the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2011/12 as set out in sections 1 - 48 of the report;
- (2) RECOMMEND Council to agree the changes to the Treasury Investment Strategy as referred to in sections 49-51 of the report;
- (3) To keep under review the effects of right to buy on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and to ask the Executive Director, Organisational Development and Corporate Services to report in the Autumn in the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy review on the effects on the HRA Business Plan of right to buy take-up.

Financial out-turn for the year ending 31st March 2012

Recommendations:

- (a) That all carry forward requests are supported taking into account that the Committee had noted that in some service areas, had the money been spent as planned in year, it would have placed them in a position of overspend. The most significant of these being the Museum request from Policy Culture and Communications and brings into sharper relief the under achievement of income in the Town Hall.
- (b) To request that the £0.5m surplus be placed in reserves and its use considered during the up and coming budgetary process rather than earmarking it at this stage for capital;
- (c) To request Board Members and Senior Officer consider the effects of delays in recruitment on services and plans and to allow for any “catch-up” required within future planning.

City Executive Board response:

- (1) Note the financial outturn for 2011-12 of £25.3 million which was £0.5 million favourable compared to the approved budget for 2011/12;
 - (2) Approve the transfer of the £0.5m surplus to Earmarked Reserve for funding Capital subject to further discussion in the Autumn in the context of the review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy;
 - (3) Approve transfers to the General Fund and HRA Working Balances of £0.8 million and £0.6 million respectively;
 - (4) Approve the carry forward requests as detailed in Appendix B to the report;
 - (5) Note partnership payments to staff as detailed in paragraphs 37-40 of the report;
 - (6) To note advise given by the Executive Director, Organisational Development and Corporate Services on recruitment (paragraph 7 of the Scrutiny report refers) and to ask Executive Directors to consider the effects of delays in recruitment on services and plans in terms of planning work programme delivery.
- (ii) Asset Panel held on 24th September 2012

Paper from the Asset Panel appended to these minutes.

Response – The City Executive Board note the Scrutiny comments and agreed to recommend the Asset Management Plan 2011-14 to Council for adoption.

(iii) Finance and Performance Panel held on 28th August 2012

Changes to Business Rate

Recommendation: The Finance and Performance Panel of the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee felt that the levy being 82% was too high and noted that this would form part of the City Councils response to current Government consultation.

City Executive Board response: Accepted the Scrutiny recommendations and agreed to adopt the report recommendations.

April to June 2012/13 - Quarter 1 Corporate Plan Performance report

Recommendation: To request that the indicators for a Vibrant and Sustainable economy be reviewed as the Panel felt that it was clear if the Councils policies were sufficient enough to fully capture a vibrant and sustainable economy as it felt that only having 3 indicators was not sufficient.

City Executive Board response: Accepted the Scrutiny recommendations and agreed the report recommendations.

(iv) Youth Ambition Panel held on 10th September 2012

Recommendation 1 - That a clear outcome framework for this programme is set now. This should include long term aims and short term measures and targets towards those aims. This framework should provide for links to each investment made through both expectations for the individuals involved and overall.

Recommendation 2 - That the steering arrangements for the project are concluded as a matter of urgency to allow for clear focus.

Recommendation 3 - A minimum of a three year programme is set that has a mixture of sustainable provision and space for one off activities linked to clear need and outcomes. These principles should be passed into the consideration of all matched or grant funded activities that are commissioned.

Recommendation 4 - To have robust and clear commissioning processes that ensure programme providers share our ambitions, have the skills to deliver and can demonstrate they have the pathways and trust of the communities and individuals we want them to work with.

Recommendation 5 - To identify at the earliest opportunity isolated groups of young people outside of the target areas and bring forward suggestions of how support can be provided to these in a cost effective way.

City Executive Board response: Accepted the Scrutiny recommendations and agreed the report recommendations.

17. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE LOCAL COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT SCHEME

The Head of Customer Services submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which provided an update on the City Councils approach to Local Council Tax Benefit Scheme and the transition to the Universal Credit.

Helen Bishop, Head of Customer Services presented the report and highlighted that Officers had been working on a consistent approach to a scheme across the County as a whole. The Council was expecting a 10% reduction in its cash grant which on current estimates could lead to a deficit of £190k in 2013/14.

In response from to questions Helen Bishop said that the design of the scheme would be the same as now for those in receipt of Council Tax benefit and that no decision had been taken on any possible changes to the exemption classes to Council Tax.

With regard to questions concerning a possible reduction in the amount of second home discount, Helen Bishop said that there could be scope for people to claim that they are the only one in the property and so claim the 25% single person discount, when in fact it is not their main home.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To support the agreement by the Leaders Group to retain the current benefit levels;
- (b) To note and support that the Council could if it wished change the exemption classes should there be the need to “plug” any funding gaps;
- (c) To request the Head of Customer Services to provide a list detailing the exemptions that other Local Authorities offered;
- (d) To request the Head of Law and Governance to write to the Leader of the Council requesting modelling information to be made available;
- (e) To thank Helen Bishop for updating the Committee.

18. TRANSITION TO THE UNIVERSAL CREDIT

The Head of Customer Services submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) which updated the Committee on the City Councils approach to the transition to the Universal Credit.

Helen Bishop, Head of Customer Services presented the report and highlighted that the Council was in the process of preparing its client base for the change. She said that across the country, six demonstration sites had been chosen of which the City Council was one. It was felt that in order to provide the best service it was right to be in at the beginning so as to iron out any problems before the full scheme was introduced.

Helen Bishop said that the Councils bid was based on co-ordination of the advice available and support to the claimant to help them reduce their dependence on benefit.

In response to questions on the risk profile, Helen Bishop said that claims when received were passed to an agency which used information to give a risk rating. She added that the Council did not have access to the information that the agency used.

Helen Bishop said with regard to rent arrears that there was approximately £60k of arrears on the accounts of tenants on the pilot scheme and that it was very unlikely that tenants on the pilot would be switched back the current system when the pilot ended. Any administration costs were covered by the Administration Grant, but this grant would reduce over the coming years.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To thank Officers for attending the meeting and for their work on the pilot scheme;
- (b) To request that when the most up to date information on the rent arrears levels was available this was made available to the Committee.

19. LOCAL PROCUREMENT

The Head of Business Improvement and Technology submitted a paper (previously circulated, now appended) which responded to the Committees inquiry into the extent of the Councils local procurement in support of the local economy and the potential to do more.

Jane Lubbock, Head of Business Improvement and Technology presented the paper.

In response to questions Jane Lubbock said that the current contract procedure rules stated that a minimum of one quote had to be obtained for contracts under a certain amount, but more could be sought. She added that it was a case of being able to manage the number of responses received, taking into account the value of the contact.

With regard to the local definition, Jane Lubbock said that the Council used the OX postcode or that the company/organisations headquarters was based in Oxfordshire.

Members asked which contracts could not be let locally and why. In response Jane Lubbock said that the Council had to ensure that it did not discriminate in the tender. The Council did however build into the tender specification that the living wage for Oxford would be required, a need for apprentices and carbon reduction measures etc. She further added that the fact that many of the Councils services were provided in-house, did help to achieve a higher rate of local spend.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To thank Jane Lubbock for updating the Committee and for attending the meeting;
- (b) To request that the Procurement Strategy, currently being produced was submitted to the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee for comment, before it was considered by the City Executive Board.

20. MINUTES

The Committee agreed to approve the minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting held on 25th June 2012.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.40 pm