

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 MARCH 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Thursday, 13 March 2014

PRESENT:

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Marion Bateman, Clive Carver, Ian Dunbar, Andy Dunbobbin, Ron Hampson, Richard Lloyd, Mike Lowe, Paul Shotton, Ian Smith and Arnold Woolley

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: Peter Curtis, Richard Jones and Tim Newhouse
Chief Executive and Corporate Finance Manager

CONTRIBUTORS:

The Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management, Head of Finance, Finance Managers and Principal Accountant for minute number 84, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development for minute number 85

IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer

81. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

In the absence of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, the Member Engagement Manager sought nominations for a Chair for the meeting. Councillor Ian Dunbar nominated Councillor Marion Bateman and this was duly seconded.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Marion Bateman be Chair for the meeting.

82. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

83. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 28 January 2014, 3 February 2014 and 13 February 2014 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

Matters Arising – 13 February 2014

Councillor Haydn Bateman referred to the fourth paragraph on page 19 and his comment about leachate processing. The Member Engagement Manager advised that the Corporate Finance Manager who was not in

attendance at this meeting had provided a response and that any further requests for information should be discussed with the officer when he was available.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

84. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2013/14 (MONTH 9) AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013/14 (QUARTER 3)

The Head of Finance introduced a report to provide Members with the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2013/14 (Month 9) information for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which was being submitted to Cabinet on 18 March 2014. She introduced the Finance Managers and Principal Accountant to the Committee.

For the Council fund, the projected net in-year expenditure was reported to be £1.981m less than budget which was an increase of £0.913m on the £1.068m reported at Month 8 and this was reflected in the table at paragraph 3.01. The main reasons for the change were in Environment, Community Services, Lifelong Learning and Central & Corporate Finance and the details were provided in paragraphs 3.04 to 3.07. One request for carry forward to 2014/15 of £0.051m to provide resource to ensure the continuity of the operational response team linked to the welfare reform service was being recommended to Cabinet. Progress of the efficiencies were detailed in paragraph 3.10 which currently indicated that £4.060m of the £5.331m included in the budget (76%) would be achieved, resulting in a net under-achievement of £1.271m; the full details were provided in appendix 9. Paragraph 5 detailed the monitoring budget assumptions and new risks which included costs involved in relation to the former chemical plant in Sandycroft (Euticals Ltd) which were being monitored monthly.

In referring to the table on page 26, Councillor Clive Carver queried why some budgets had been reduced which had then resulted in an overspend and he also asked why there was a significant underspend in Finance. The Head of Finance said that overall the Council's budget had remained at £259.752m but that approvals of virements between budget heads could result in the revised budget being shown in different services, however, the total would always remain the same for the year. On the issue of the underspend in Finance of £1.102m, the Head of Finance explained that the service was responsible for the collection of council tax and the better than budgeted for collection rate had resulted in an underspend; the full details were provided in appendix 5.

Councillor Ian Dunbar welcomed the increased collection rate of council tax. He queried what was meant by 'the anticipated number of three year old children attending childcare settings is less than previously anticipated' referred to in paragraph 3.06. The Head of Finance responded that she would provide a written response to the Committee following the meeting.

Councillor Richard Lloyd referred to the lack of work being undertaken on the site of the former Euticals Plant at Sandycroft and said that his request for further clarification at the Committee meeting on 16 January 2014 had not yet been provided. He asked for a breakdown of costs involved. The Head of

Finance advised that she had provided a response following the meeting but that she would obtain the up to date information and would circulate it to the Committee. Councillor Haydn Bateman said that he believed that material was being removed from the site and that it was taking time to make the site safe. Councillor Bateman also asked about the £0.200m income from Deeside Power which was referred to in paragraph 3.04. The Head of Finance said that it was in connection with the Deeside Power Station and Gaz de France and that the £0.200m income was received each year for them being on the site and that in the past, this had been paid in arrears. However, following feedback from the Council's auditors that an accounting adjustment should be reflected in 2013/14 accounts this had resulted in accounting figures for two years being reported in the same year.

In response to a query from Councillor Paul Shotton about the projected increase in income due to an additional one off amount of £0.243m which had been received from the Welsh Government (WG) in respect of the First Steps Improvement Package, the Finance Manager said that WG had changed the rules in 2010/11 that Councils were only permitted to charge £50 per week for social care. In 2011/12, an amount was included in the Revenue Support Grant but the full amount had not been paid and at that time this was reflected as a budget pressure to meet the shortfall. Due to this, Flintshire County Council had lost income but had been compensated by way of a one-off grant payment of £0.243m from WG in 2013/14 which had been counted as windfall income as the pressure had already been recognised within the service area.

Capital Programme (Month 9)

The Head of Finance introduced a report to provide Members with the Month 9 (end of December) capital programme information for 2013/14 which would also be submitted to Cabinet on 18 March 2014.

The table at paragraph 3.01.1 set how the programme had changed during 2013/14 with the revised figure being £30.960m for Council Fund and £12.126 for HRA. The changes during this period were reflected in the table at paragraph 3.02.1 and full details were provided in appendix A. The capital expenditure compared to budget and the rollover to 2014/15 were reported and if approval was given to the rollover request, the total Early Identified Rollover into 2014/15 would stand at £6.006m.

On the issue of rollover into 2014/15, Councillor Ian Dunbar asked whether a scheme would be removed from the programme if it had been put forward but not started. The Head of Finance responded that if the scheme was WG funded and WG were supportive of it being spent in a different year then it could be rolled over but a problem could occur if the funding needed to be spent in a specific year.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be noted.

85. WORKFORCE INFORMATION QUARTER 3 OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2013

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced a report to provide Members with an update for the third quarter 2013/14 for the following:-

- Establishment
- Headcount
- Agency
- Early Retirements (First and third quarter reports only)
- Turnover
- Diversity
- Absence

On the issue of Agency placements, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development indicated that the number of placements for December had reduced from 184 in 2012 to 150 in 2013 which was a significant reduction and this was also reflected in the total hours worked reported in paragraph 3.05. The overall saving was reducing due to an reduction in the volume of agency workers used. Of the ten early retirements for the period July to December 2013, eight had been on the grounds of redundancy which would result in a recurring saving once upfront costs had been paid out. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development welcomed the overall reduction in absence compared to the same period last year and said that it was forecast that the figure for the whole year would be 10.03 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) days which was a significant improvement on 2012/13. There was also an improving trend of employees achieving 100% attendance and full details for each of the Directorates were reported. An electronic self service system was being piloted in Streetscene for recording sickness absence which would be implemented across the organisation. The category 'other' had also been removed from the information completed to report absence but the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that it was still appearing in the workforce information data as it was used as a holding category for instances where the reason for absence had not been confirmed.

Councillor Clive Carver asked about the iTrent system reporting an increased in vacancies of 135 which did not reflect the current position. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development responded that an exercise had been undertaken which had identified that the number of vacancies was less than 135 and she advised that she would send information on the figures to the Committee following the meeting.

Councillor Carver also referred to the 100% attendance of 72% for quarter 3 2013/14 and raised concern that the figures suggested that the average absence for those not attending 100% of the time was approximately six or seven weeks. Councillor Carver asked for drilled down statistics on the employees who had been absent. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that it was her preference that the information continued to be reported as it was now as it allowed the tracking of progress and benchmarking with other quarters. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Management welcomed the downward trend in absences and the increase in 100% attendance when compared to the previous year.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that for future reports, she could consider including information on short and longer term absences. Following a further question from Councillor Carver, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development commented on the introduction of the Physiotherapy Service within Streetscene to deal with muscular skeletal problems which was to be rolled out to other targeted areas in the future; an update would be provided to a future meeting.

In referring to the reported figures for early retirements, Councillor Arnold Woolley sought assurance that none of those who left the employment of the authority would be taken back on in alternative roles or consultancy posts. He also queried the increase of 15 FTE when the headcount had shown a reduction of 19% over recent years. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development responded that the headcount figures did not include relief workers but added that the total FTE (full time equivalent) figure should not have increased. She advised that she would check the information and provide a response following the meeting. On the issue of those leaving the employment of the Council and returning in a different role or as a consultant, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development commented that this would be avoided wherever possible. There was the opportunity to consider including further controls in the Council's Early Retirement Policy which was currently under review. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Management also indicated that this issue had been raised by Cabinet Members and that during the restructure of the authority, sufficient replacements would be put in place to ensure that previous employees did not return in an alternative or consultancy role.

Councillor Ian Dunbar welcomed the report and the reduction in absence figures. He asked for details on which areas the reductions in agency workers had taken place and queried the final sentence in the section on Lifelong Learning about an increase in absence not being an unusual trend for quarter 3. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development responded that through reviewing the placements and other options to differently resource requirements in the Directorates of Community Services and Environment, the numbers of agency workers required in these areas had reduced. She provided details of ongoing work in Streetscene to maximise the flexibility of the workforce with new Part 3 terms and conditions to make the service more effective which would also significantly reduce the Agency numbers. On the increase in quarter 3, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that this was a seasonal trend given the higher number of absences relating to colds, flu and infections. Councillor Dunbar also queried whether absences for stress were still showing a trend. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that it was in the top three reasons for employee absence and she spoke of the work with managers to identify the issue and target it more effectively.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed the continued reduction in agency workers and said that it was right to recognise and praise the employees who achieved 100% attendance but raised concern about the blip in iTrent on the vacancy figures. In response the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that iTrent was only as good as the information held on it and

added that it was important to maintain the quality of the data. Councillor Shotton also queried whether any favourable results had been identified during the Physiotherapy pilot scheme within Streetscene. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that overall the scheme had been very successful but added that it had been difficult to identify trends because in the past, not all musculo-skeletal related absences had been accurately recorded as there had been an over-reliance on categorising absences as 'other'.

In response to a comment from Councillor Ron Hampson about employee absences being at a higher rate than the private sector, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development concurred that the figures did not compare well with the private sector and the organisation needed to continue to manage attendance as a priority. Councillor Hampson also queried whether employee absence would be taken into account during any decisions about compulsory redundancy. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that the selection criteria in the redundancy policy included attendance, performance and skills & experience and that this had been agreed with the Trade Unions.

RESOLVED:

That the Workforce Information for quarter three for 2013/14 be noted.

86. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Member Engagement Manager introduced the report to enable the Committee to consider the Forward Work Programme.

He explained that the meeting which was scheduled for Thursday, 10 April 2014 was to be moved and that he would liaise with the Chairman to identify a suitable alternative date. The Member Engagement Manager also detailed the items which were due to be considered at the meetings scheduled for 10 April and 8 May 2014.

In response to a question from Councillor Clive Carver about why recent meetings were finishing much earlier than in the past, the Member Engagement Manager explained that it could be due to a number of factors, which he detailed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be agreed; and
- (b) That the Member Engagement Manager liaise with the Chairman to re-arrange the meeting of the Committee scheduled for Thursday, 10th April 2014.

87. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press and no members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.10 am)

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Chairman