

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
12 JANUARY 2017

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 12 January 2017

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, Robin Guest, Ray Hughes, Richard Jones, Brian Lloyd, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton, Ian Smith, Nigel Steele-Mortimer and Arnold Woolley

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Bernie Attridge and Dennis Hutchinson

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Finance; Councillor Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Chief Executive

Senior Manager, Human Resources and Organisational Development - for minute numbers 66 & 68

Chief Officer (Governance), Service Manager (Customer Support) and Customer Service & Registration Manager - for minute 67

Corporate Finance Manager - for minute number 69

IN ATTENDANCE: Democratic Services Manager and Committee Officer

71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

There were no declarations of interest.

72. PEOPLE STRATEGY 2016-2019

The Senior Manager, Human Resources and Organisational Development presented the draft People Strategy 2016-2019 which built on the foundations of previous work and incorporated the findings of an independent assessment of corporate services.

Work on the Strategy had involved a wider stakeholder group and set out roles and responsibilities across the workforce. The Strategy was intended for more wider use and the Council's approach was viewed as good practice by other authorities. A clear vision was set out to manage future changes with key outcomes aimed at supporting the achievement of the Council's Improvement Priorities. The development of a detailed action plan would enable the delivery of each of the five key strategic objectives.

The Chief Executive thanked the Committee for its past role in helping develop the Strategy and spoke about the need for a wide level of ownership. Of the five themes, 'Developing Workforce and Leadership Capacity' and 'Managing Performance' were considered the most stable whilst 'Planning the Workforce of

the Future' and 'Recognition and Reward' were viewed as more challenging due to the difficulties of recruitment and retention in a competitive job market.

Councillor Robin Guest paid tribute to the work of the late, former Chief Officer (People & Resources) and said that pressures on the workforce should not be underestimated. Following a query, it was stated that national Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were under review and that only one on attendance management/absence applied in this case. The Senior Manager spoke about the aim to increase participation on the management development programme which would impact positively on all areas.

Councillor Billy Mullin thanked the Senior Manager and her team for their work and highlighted the importance of individual responsibility across the workforce on appraisal completion.

In response to a question from Councillor Richard Jones on the reported number of leavers in Social Services, it was explained that this was due to the way in which seasonal workers had historically been categorised on the system and that there would be consistency in future reporting.

The Chief Executive highlighted the recruitment of experienced Social Workers as a risk area whilst the difficulties in recruiting to social care was recognised regionally and nationally.

On the theme of leadership capacity, Councillor Paul Shotton asked about engagement with Coleg Cambria on management programmes. The Senior Manager reported a significant increase in the cohort for the programme with additional programmes now being sought. The Chief Executive spoke about the mentoring of individual managers following structural reviews and reappointments, and remained concerned about resilience and succession planning within a leaner workforce.

Councillor Arnold Woolley asked about the Council's ability to cope with any potential mental stresses on the workforce as a result of increasing pressures. The Senior Manager explained the proactive approach involving management training programmes to help identify stress and easy access to the Occupational Health Unit to enable targeted interventions.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee endorses the revised People Strategy 2016-2019 including the vision, outcomes and priorities and the specific roles and responsibilities of Human Resources and Development, Chief Officers, Managers/Supervisors and employees, in implementing this strategy;
- (b) That the Committee supports the development of a detailed action plan which will be shared in draft for comment before being taken to Cabinet; and
- (c) That the Committee invites period performance reports against key success measures (twice per annum).

73. DIGITAL STRATEGY

The Chief Officer (Governance) introduced the proposed Digital Strategy 2017-22 which replaced the existing IT Strategy and incorporated all of the Council's strategic aims for the IT service.

The six themes of the Strategy comprised four relating to front-line services and two directly linked to IT services which had been developed to support the Council's Improvement Priorities. The proposed delivery of 'digital first' services would maximise opportunities to access a range of Council services electronically to meet customer expectations - an approach already demonstrated by some other councils and across the private sector. The Strategy also reflected feedback from the recent Member workshop. A detailed action plan would monitor progress of the delivery of high-level actions and it was suggested that this be reported through the Organisational Change Overview & Scrutiny Committee as the most appropriate forum.

In response to comments from Councillor Ian Smith on 'digital first', the Chief Officer said that 89% of the adult population in the UK were able to access the internet with the majority doing so on a daily basis. By delivering services in this way, other councils had been able to free up resources to provide alternative support to individuals who were unable to access the internet. The Service Manager (Customer Support) and Customer Service & Registration Manager explained that dealing with digital exclusion formed part of the Strategy and they highlighted the range of support available to customers at Flintshire Connects offices and libraries to access online services. The Chief Executive acknowledged that some individuals may opt to use traditional methods of communication such as telephone, face-to-face or post, which would continue to remain available. However, the shift in recent years to maximise online opportunities meant that more options needed to be explored.

Councillor Aaron Shotton clarified the aim to extend online services for all residents who chose to use this method whilst ensuring that others were not disadvantaged. He went on to refer to the Council's role in the Universal Credit rollout pilot and the need to move forward and meet customer expectations whilst generating efficiencies.

The Chief Officer said that whilst the 'Digital business and community' theme comprised a number of supportive actions, the wider Strategy sought to ensure that no-one was excluded with additional help available and savings used to deliver alternative means of accessing services.

Councillor Paul Shotton acknowledged the assistance available at Flintshire Connects and stressed the importance of customer feedback in moving forward.

Councillor Robin Guest spoke in support of the report on the basis that customers were made aware of all options available to them. On the suggestion for the topic to be under the remit of the Organisational Change Overview & Scrutiny Committee, he asked whether officer responsibility for the Strategy would transfer accordingly. It was confirmed that the Chief Officer (Governance) would remain the lead officer for the Strategy which included a range of actions to

be taken forward across a number of portfolio areas. Councillor Aaron Shotton referred to the development of the Strategy, with involvement by all Chief Officers, and to include wider ICT opportunities to support economic development and lobbying for improved broadband services.

The Chairman and Councillor Richard Jones both spoke in support of the Committee retaining responsibility for monitoring progress of the Strategy. Members agreed with the suggestion by officers that this decision be left until the new Terms of Reference were agreed at the start of the new Council term.

Councillor Jones pointed out that the remaining 11% of adults who did not use the internet included the most vulnerable residents, for whom face-to-face contact with the Council may be vital. Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer also raised concerns if services were to become fully digital. The Customer Service & Registration Manager spoke about the sensitive approach to services such as registration and blue badges, and the gathering of feedback from Members and customers on priority areas. The Chief Officer highlighted the importance of links between the Digital Strategy and Customer Service Strategy to deliver services in accessible ways to the customer using a collective approach across the Council.

On the action to seek to improved broadband speeds in the county, Councillor Marion Bateman asked whether areas of poor coverage would be prioritised. The Chief Officer said that progress in working with BT and Welsh Government to make improvements across the county would be tracked in the action plan. The Chief Executive said that whilst progress had been made on prioritising urban and business areas, some other areas remained a challenge. He suggested that the new regional Director of BT, Alwen Williams, be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to provide an update on the broadband programme.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin spoke in support of the report and asked about the use of outdated iPads and the potential for enhancing young people's access to the internet to improve education. The Chief Officer provided explanation on the programme for the replacement of IT infrastructure and investment in schools, whilst the Strategy included investment in skills to support digital use. He also advised on the process in place for dealing with Council iPads reaching the end of their life.

Concerns were raised by Councillor Arnold Woolley on IT security, in particular for online payments, and the importance of safeguarding both the customer and the Council. The Chief Officer explained that rigorous checks were undertaken on security levels through the 'Public Sector Network'. He gave assurance that stringent policies were in place to provide security on emails and payment transactions.

In response to comments from the Chairman, the Customer Service & Registration Manager explained about the acknowledgement of enquiries made on the website and progress monitoring of actions available on the mobile app.

The Chief Executive advised that the comments made by the Committee would be reflected when the report was presented to Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the proposed digital strategy before its adoption by Cabinet; and
- (b) That the Committee will retain Overview & Scrutiny responsibility for the Digital Strategy, pending a decision after the Election about the most appropriate committee.

74. WORKFORCE INFORMATION REPORT - QUARTER 2 2016/17

The Senior Manager, Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR & OD) presented the quarterly update report on workforce information which focussed on organisational performance and trends.

A continued decrease in headcount figures was reported and there was an improvement in employee attendance compared with the same period in 2015/16 with progress on track to meet the target. There were also improvements in the completion of appraisals where outcomes were being reviewed to inform training and development. Agency worker spend was significantly above target during the period mainly due to long-term vacancies in Streetscene & Transportation and spend outside the Matrix contract in Social Services. Since compilation of the report, the number of active agency placements had reduced considerably from 168 to 88. The recruitment of former agency workers to 55 permanent posts in Streetscene would be reflected in the figures and spend level for Quarter 3.

The Chief Executive referred to the changes in the Streetscene service which had impacted on the length of time taken to fill vacancies. He said that context was needed on recent press coverage of the agency worker figures and that an improved position expected in next period would be maintained. The Senior Manager shared up-to-date information showing 19 agency workers were currently engaged in the service, having reduced from 119 reported in September 2016.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed the improved attendance figures, pointing out that agency worker figures had not been a concern as there had been widespread recognition about the recruitment situation.

The Chairman asked whether the aspirational target of £1.25m spend on agency workers was considered realistic. The Senior Manager said that this target was achievable and that the long-term vacancies in Streetscene could not have been predicted. She went on to explain that whilst the permanent appointments had been made in September 2016, commencement dates depended upon clearance times which impacted on the figures reported.

Councillor Robin Guest pointed out that the overspend on Streetscene agency workers was offset by salary savings from the vacancies. In Social Services, it was explained that spend had been affected by vacancies that were difficult to fill or required specialist agencies outside the Matrix system. The Chief Executive spoke about the challenges in recruiting experienced professionals and that interim appointments were only made as a last resort. Work was being done

on agency workers in social care and off-contract appointments, and would be reflected in the next quarterly report.

In response to questions from Councillor Richard Jones, the difference between headcount figures and full-time equivalents was explained by dual positions held by a number of individuals. The Senior Manager agreed to seek clarification on the reason for the difference in reported statistics between teacher age profiles of 35-44 and 45-49. On the recruitment of long-term agency workers, she explained that support was available for those wishing to apply for permanent positions and that reasons were established for those who did not apply or were unsuccessful.

On equality and diversity, it was noted that the pie chart did not accurately reflect the figures for sexual orientation and that the category for 'other' should be included in 'prefer not to say'.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee accepts the Workforce Information Report for Q2 2016-17.

75. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING (MONTH 8)

The Corporate Finance Manager introduced a report on the revenue budget monitoring position for 2016/17 as at Month 8 for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) prior to its consideration by Cabinet on 17 January 2017.

On the Council Fund, the overall projected in-year position had improved by £2.886m due to the inclusion of previously approved accounting changes for Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) which more than offset an operating deficit of £1.810m, and meant that net spend at the end of the financial year was now projected to be £1.076m lower than the budget.

Reference was made to two significant in-year pressure areas for Out of County Placements and Professional Support within Children's Services and the mitigating actions being taken to reduce costs.

It was also reported that 89% of planned efficiencies included in the budget were expected to be achieved.

On the HRA, an overspend of £0.037m was reported, with reserves projected to be within recommended guidelines.

Councillor Paul Shotton praised the change in MRP accounting policy which had reflected positively on the outturn. He expressed appreciation for the team in working to provide bus services to schools following the demise of GHA Coaches and asked for clarity on the distribution of the Welsh Government grant for replacement services. The Chief Executive advised that the grant would not cover the full cost of continuing with all of the services and that this remained an ongoing risk area. Whilst Flintshire would receive the majority share of this income, it was likely that 50% of the cost would need to be met by the Council.

On bus services, Councillor Richard Jones commented on the use of smaller companies and deposit requests from larger companies as ways of reducing risk and protecting the Council. The Chief Executive spoke about the increased costs involved in re-procuring services and the limited competition in the market.

Following a question from Councillor Robin Guest on unearmarked reserves, the Corporate Finance Manager confirmed that the £0.076m allocated for play schemes was for the current financial year and that the additional sum quoted for 2017/18 would need to be taken from the remaining amount.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Revenue Budget monitoring Report for Month 8, 2016/17 be accepted; and
- (b) That having regard to the extent of the detail provided in the report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific issues which it wishes to bring to the attention of the Cabinet.

76. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Forward Work Programme was considered and the following actions agreed:

- The Budget Part 3 closing strategy would be considered along with the Capital Programme at the all-Member budget meeting on 20 January 2017.
- An additional item on cyber-crime was scheduled for the meeting on 9 March 2017 with Sergeant Peter Jones of North Wales Police in attendance. Members were asked to forward any questions/issues to the Democratic Services Manager in advance of the meeting.
- Following earlier discussion, Alwen Williams of BT would be invited to a meeting to discuss the broadband programme, in the current municipal year if possible.

On the Welsh Language Policy to be considered at the meeting in February 2017, the Chief Executive was pleased to report that all queries had been resolved satisfactorily with the Welsh Language Commissioner to achieve a reasonable set of Standards for the Council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme, as submitted, be approved with amendments; and
- (b) That the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Chair, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, should this be necessary.

77. **MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE**

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00am and ended at 12.15pm)

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Chairman