

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD AT 10 AM ON 26 NOVEMBER 2013**

Present

J Young (Chairman)	K Gibbs (substitute)
W Archibald	R Hirst
S Barker	M Mackrory (Vice Chairman)
M Buckley (Vice Chairman)	V Metcalfe
G Butland	M Page
J Chandler (substitute)	C Seagers
J Deakin	

The following officers were also present in support of the meeting:

Robert Fox	Scrutiny Officer
Graham Hughes	Committee Officer

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

The Committee Officer reported apologies for absence from Councillors R Lord and J Pike (for whom Councillors K Gibbs and J Chandler attended as substitute respectively) and Councillor P Oxley.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3(i). Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2013, were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3(ii) Matters Arising

- (i) The scoping document for a scrutiny of the Local Highways Panels was being developed and it was expected that the Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee would lead the scrutiny;
- (ii) Further information on uncollected library fines would be submitted to the Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee early in 2014.
- (iii) A further meeting of the Procurement Task and Finish Group would be held that afternoon (with an Interim Report from the Group considered elsewhere on the agenda);
- (iv) A paper on progressing the work of the Engaging with Essex Task and Finish Group in relation to public speaking at Full Council and committee meetings would be presented to the next meeting;
- (v) Members had previously highlighted that local authority schools may be incurring higher heating bills than necessary due to inadequate insulation. This matter was being considered by the Scrutiny Board;
- (vi) The Chairman had written to the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning to seek assurance that all schools, governors and youth

organisations had been included in the consultation on youth services. It was understood that there had been a high public response rate to the consultation;

- (vii) A scoping document for the John Ray Infant School rebuild would be submitted to the next meeting.

4. Transformation – Phase 2

Paul Abraham, Director for Transformation, joined the meeting and gave a presentation updating members on Transformation Phase II.

The draft budget gap was forecast to grow to approximately £235 million by 2016/17 as a result of reducing funding, increased demand for services and inflationary pressure. In response, the County Council were now operating a new model which separated commissioning from delivery of services. The County Council would become more agile and flexible whilst delivering improvements in performance and efficiency. A whole organisation approach had been taken rather than being conducted within self-contained divisional entities. As a result, Lead Commissioners would have to access resources from across the organisation as required rather than from a rigid directorate structure. It was expected that this would encourage longer term planning for resources. During the presentation, and subsequent questions and answers, the following were highlighted and/or discussed:

- (i) Employees would be equipped with new technology to enable flexible working including the issue of laptops, new telephony and enhanced wi-fi in most County Council premises. Future telephony would be via a mobile or via a lap top computer using headphones, which should provide significant future savings in lieu of expensive land lines. It was **agreed** that further information be provided as to whether there was the capability to be able to conduct face to face conference calls on laptops;
- (ii) Equality Impact Assessments were conducted and, if necessary, certain employees would be exempted from the flexible working changes and/or provided with specialist furniture and/or equipment to meet their particular individual needs;
- (iii) The County Council were moving towards a two employees to one desk ratio in open plan office environments to encourage more efficient and intelligent use of office space and flexible working arrangements. However, employees would still have a base area from which they would operate when in the office. These changes would enable some of the County Council's property estate to be decommissioned. There was also now increased meeting room accommodation at County Hall;
- (iv) Key functions were co-located to enable flexible joined-up working;
- (v) The new operating model would have the ability to be flexible and respond to peaks in demand;
- (vi) Members questioned the transparency in respect of certain aspects of the new operating model, and particularly highlighted the recruitment and appointment process for commissioners. It was confirmed that both Tier 2 and 3 appointments had been as a result of an internal and external selection process and that a number of the new commissioning roles had

- been filled by external candidates. Successful internal candidates had had to demonstrate their competency in being able to adjust to being a commissioner of services;
- (vii) Members cautioned whether external appointees would have sufficient understanding of member involvement in the organisation;
 - (viii) Members cautioned that it was important to ensure the right balance of power between providers and commissioners;
 - (ix) Members were assured that the future scrutiny process would include the ability to hold commissioners to account. Individual enquiries could be taken up with the relevant Cabinet Member as before.
 - (x) A new corporate outcomes framework was being developed enabling future commissioning to be based on outcomes rather than outputs. Members cautioned that the focus should not solely be just on cost and that the framework should continue to encourage discussions on other priorities as well;
 - (xi) Members cautioned that the ability to successfully commission services depended on there being suitable providers existing. A Market Development Team had been established to identify future commissioning aspirations and, where there were gaps, they were tasked to develop service provision through community and charitable sectors. It was highlighted that strengthening and increasing the local resilience of local communities was part of the Community Budgets project. It was **agreed** that the Scrutiny Board should be asked to determine the most appropriate approach towards a possible future scrutiny of Community Budgets;
 - (xii) In the interests of maintaining stability during the initial stages of Transformation II, Corporate Services had not been included in the current restructuring to split commissioning roles from delivery but this would be reviewed at a later stage;
 - (xiii) Corporate / Support services had been restructured in line with the rest of the organisation in order to support the new commissioning organisation, and deliver efficiency savings. The Cabinet had agreed that commissioners should use the County Council's support services for a minimum of two years to ensure stability – but after that other options might be explored including free market choice.
 - (xiv) The County Council was on track to deliver efficiencies of approximately £50 million in 2013/14. It was **agreed** (i) that a breakdown of component parts of these savings would be circulated to committee members; (ii) that peer analysis of meeting cost pressures be circulated; and (iii) consideration be given to arranging a private member workshop to brief and give advance notice to committee members on future cost saving proposals on a confidential basis;
 - (xv) Members referred to the various on-going public consultation exercises on proposed changes to services. It was suggested that these needed to be 'joined-up' where possible so as to enable everyone to see the 'big picture'. Further efforts to improve public engagement in these consultation processes was encouraged;
 - (xvi) Plans for Health and Social Care integration were being developed to deliver more efficient and 'joined-up' services. It was acknowledged that each Clinical Commissioning Group would likely have different views and

- visions on the integration. Members also questioned the process for future scrutiny of the Health and Wellbeing Board;
- (xvii) Family Solutions Teams were operating alongside a multi-agency early advice hub to manage demand from the most complex families in Essex in the most efficient and effective manner. These teams had assisted around 800 families during the current year and would be aiming to be able to assist up to 1400 families next year;

It was **agreed** that a further update would be provided in February 2014 as part of a quarterly schedule of updates. Paul Abrahams was then thanked for his attendance and left the meeting.

5. Management of Sickness Absence

The Committee considered report CSC/15/13 presenting an update on rates of sickness absence in comparison to ECC targets and to external benchmarks. Bob Whiting, Head of Human Resources (Family and Adult Operations), joined the meeting to introduce the report and to answer questions.

In the last four years ECC absence levels had not increased beyond 3.1% and for the year to date were currently running below the ECC target of 3%. Absence rates remained below the County Council benchmark and the public services benchmark reported in the 2013 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development absence survey. The County Council's social care directorates, Adults (currently 4%) and Schools Children and Families (currently 3.1%) continued to have the highest absence levels, in line with similar directorates in other county councils.

Subsequently the following were highlighted and/or discussed:

- (i) Stress related absence had remained constant;
- (ii) The next Staff Survey would be in January 2014 and the wellbeing index that had been introduced in the last survey would enable measurement of movements in staff perception;
- (iii) In conjunction with Learning and Development, the County Council were offering staff training courses on change management, resilience and preparing for interviews. A Change Management Team were focussed on providing support across the whole organisation;
- (iv) Staff were generally being given greater flexibility in where and how they undertook their work so as to have greater control over their work/life balance;
- (v) Members suggested that it would be helpful to have a breakdown of the number of sick days in each service;
- (vi) Cancer as a reason for absence had significantly increased;
- (vii) Employees could self-certify their sickness for up to 7 days and it would be reported on-line by their Line Manager;
- (viii) In cases of stress and depression and similar conditions, management could refer employees to Occupational Health. There were also counselling services available and it was suggested that further promotion of these services be considered. Members cautioned that not all stress

- would be work related. Members were invited to visit the County Council's Well Being service;
- (ix) It was confirmed that 29 working days taken as sick in any leave year would trigger Human Resources to contact the local line manager to address the matter;
 - (x) There was currently a consultation process underway with unions on some limited changes to Terms and Conditions. The main change highlighted was that new staff would only be entitled to statutory sick pay in their first year of service;
 - (xi) Members speculated on the effect on absence levels of the Transformation programme and also with the County Council having fewer directly employed staff;
 - (xii) It was confirmed that more detailed departmental information was also reviewed monthly by Human Resources management to identify any local trends.

It was **agreed** that (i) the Committee should receive a further report early in 2014 (ii) to be scheduled after the Staff Survey (in January) had been completed so that those results were also included; (iii) to include further information on the apparent significant increase in cancer related absences identifying any underlying causal factors and how the County Council might improve information about health promotion in this area; (iv) to include more information on the Wellbeing service; (v) to include anonymised example case studies; and (vi) include more information on the trigger points for the involvement of occupational health in cases.

Thereafter, Bob Whiting was thanked for his attendance and he left the meeting.

6. Procurement Task and Finish Group

The Committee considered and noted a report (CSC/16/13) comprising the Interim Report of the Procurement Task and Finish Group.

It was suggested that the Federation of Small Businesses be invited to nominate small business representatives to trial the procurement portal.

7. Work Programme

The Committee considered and **Agreed** the Forward Look/Work Programme 2013/14 (CSS/17/13) subject to Broadband Coverage in Essex being rescheduled later in 2014. Some members highlighted the benefits of more integrated approaches across the county citing the work of the Traveller Liaison Committee as an example.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on the rise of Cabinet on Tuesday 17 December 2013 in Committee Room 2.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 11.51 am.

Chairman
17 December 2013