

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting held at County Hall
Colliton Park, Dorchester on 18 February 2013.

Present:-

Trevor Jones (Chairman)
David Harris (Vice-Chairman)

Geoffrey Brierley, Derek Burt, Colin Jamieson and Howard Legg.

Officers:

Elaine Taylor (Director for Corporate Resources), Robin Taylor (Senior Policy and Performance Manager), Mark Taylor (Head of Internal Audit, Insurance and Risk Management), Peter Illsley (Head of Corporate Finance) and Helen Whitby (Principal Democratic Services Officer).

The Following officers attended for certain items, as appropriate:

John Alexander (Policy and Performance Manager), Richard Kirby (Records Management and Data Protection Officer) and Richard Pascoe (Head of ICT and Business Transformation).

Apology

37. An apology for absence was received from William Trite.

Code of Conduct

38. There were no declarations by members of any personal or prejudicial interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

39. The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2013 were confirmed and signed.

Matters Arising

Progress on Matters Raised at Previous Meetings

Minute 6 – Update on Actions arising from the External Auditor’s Report

40. The Committee were reminded that at their previous meeting they had requested a concluding report to be provided on the SAP system, including the 2009 Deloitte findings. The Director for Corporate Resources explained that this report was in production and rather than tie up Committee time she suggested that this be emailed to members shortly after the meeting. Members welcomed this approach.

Progress on Matters Raised at Previous Meetings

41.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Corporate Resources which updated members of progress made following discussions at previous meetings.

Roundabout Sponsorship

41.2 The Chairman reported that he had attended the first meeting of the Policy Development Panel (PDP) on Roundabout and other Asset Sponsorship and he provided a summary of issues raised at the meeting for members of the Committee. Members of the PDP had indicated that the lessons learned from the Roundabout Sponsorship project would be borne in mind when further sponsorship was being considered.

41.3 One member commented that although he was aware that although some planning applications for roundabout signs had not been approved at district level, the sponsorship signs remained in situ and the distance between the signs and the road had not changed. He asked for an update on the current situation. The Director for Corporate Resources confirmed that further discussions with the District Councils were ongoing and the refused planning applications would be appealed.

41.4 Since the PDP meeting the Chairman had forwarded his summary of the issues to the Director for Environment but had not received any response to this to date.

Asset Management and Capital Programme

41.5 Members asked that in future acronyms not be used as this could lead to some confusion where there were multiple uses of the same acronym.

41.6 An update on the Centre for Independent Living in Weymouth was provided as too was information about the involvement of local members in the Principal Town Review. Information was still awaited on increasing risk with regard to Risks EN07 and EN08, which meant that they were less likely to be achieved.

Staff Profile of Children's Social Work Teams

41.7 Information on the number of sickness absences and the kinds of absence was still awaited.

Dorset Road Safety Partnership

41.8 Members discussed the information provided within the report. Some remained concerned that the NHS still refused to contribute to the Campaign. The number of accidents had increased recently although this was not unexpected following the initial reaction to the introduction of the Campaign. Having discussed the matter, members concluded that the NHS was unlikely contribute to the Campaign given their current financial situation.

41.9 In response to a question, officers confirmed that accident costs were recovered where possible and agreed to provide more information for members.

41.10 Members remained unhappy with the current funding situation, recognised that they were unable to influence matters further and would review the situation if this was appropriate at a future date.

Noted

Meeting Future Challenges – Progress Report

42.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive which set out progress of the Meeting Future Challenges Programme and its aim to deliver savings of £39M over the years 2012/13 to 2014/15.

42.2 The Head of ICT and Business Transformation reminded the Committee that the Meeting Future Challenges (MFC) programme was to deliver savings of £15M for 2013/14 and provided an overview of the current programme, including information about projects which were unlikely to achieve the savings forecast. These areas were being monitored closely by the MFC Board. The report also included information about redundancy costs and the Committee were reminded that the Chief Executive had emailed elected members on 7 February 2013 about redundancy costs following an article appearing in the Dorset Echo.

42.3 The Committee were reminded that Challenge Groups had been set up to identify major new proposals for the second phase of the MFC programme and of steps taken by the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Resources Directorate to identify savings during 2012/13.

42.3 With regard to the number of voluntary redundancies, members noted that they were not agreed if such a decision would adversely affect future service delivery and that the Personnel Appeals Committee would only agree voluntary redundancies when costs would be recovered within a twelve to eighteen month period. The Director for Corporate Resources informed the Committee that one of the Trade Unions had asked at the County Council meeting on 14 February 2013 that no compulsory redundancies be made and the Staffing Committee had been assessing the approach to redundancies. However, it was clarified that the employer and manager needed to remain in control of the service needs and a balance of voluntary and compulsory redundancies had been achieved. The Director recognised that finding volunteers for redundancy in future years would become increasingly difficult.

Noted

Freedom of Information Statistics: January 2005 to December 2012

43.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Corporate Resources on the number of requests received since the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2005.

43.2 The Records Management and Data Protection Officer presented the report. Although there had been a slight fall in the number of requests during 2012, there had been a sharp increase in the number of requests received over the last four weeks. The Member Champion for Freedom of Information was unable to attend the meeting but had asked for information to be reported on whether any complaints had been received for failure to deal with a request within 20 days and whether the County Council was still free of adverse comment from the Information Commissioner. The Records Management and Data Protection Officer confirmed that only one case had been supported by the Information Commissioner, where the 20 day target had been exceeded this had been due to the lateness of responses from the relevant service areas. He thought the reduction in the number of requests in 2012 might be due to the fact that information was increasingly published on Dorsetforyou.com.

43.3 With regard to whether it was taking longer to respond requests due to them being more focussed, the Records Management and Data Protection Officer confirmed that this was the case but that very often requests had multiple elements to them. Part of the delay in responding was caused by the lack of resources in certain areas to undertake this work. He confirmed that most requests were received by email, that there were a number of people who regularly requested information and a record of requests was kept.

Noted

Corporate Performance Monitoring Report – Third Quarter

44.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive which set out the results of the monitoring of the County Council's Budget and Corporate Plan for the third quarter of 2012/13.

44.2 The Policy and Performance Manager introduced the report and updated members on the overall performance across the County Council. The Committee noted that the performance indicators in the Budget and Corporate Plan remained at an "amber" rating but that the percentage of indicators meeting their targets had fallen from 61% in quarter 2 to

56% in quarter 3. 73% of actions were on course or completed. The projected year-end overspend was now £651K having reduced from £2.3M and service pressures remained for children in care, learning disabilities and SEN transport.

44.3 Some explanation was given of the five red performance indicators for Aim 1 (Help to build strong communities for all) although it was noted that these were primarily the responsibility of the Adult and Community Services Overview Committee. Attention was also drawn to the red areas on spend within Aims 1-3, ie specialist adult services, adult learning, children in care and SEN transport. Within Aim 4, it was noted that overspends occurred in areas with small budgets and that due to snow and floods more damage was being caused to road surfaces.

44.4 Particular attention was drawn to Aim 5 (Provide innovative and value for money services) which was the responsibility of the Committee, the balanced scorecard which show areas of high risk, the fact the Asset Management target of sold or committed to being sold properties had been met and that initial and core assessments for children were still below target due to staffing issues.

44.5 One member questioned whether the County Council was maximising the use of ICT and reported on difficulties he had recently experienced in trying to contact the out of hours service. He suggested this illustrated poor use of technology and showed that the system was not working efficiently. He thought operatives could use a GPS mapping system to accurately record road defects whilst they were out at locations. The Head of ICT and Business Transformation expressed his concern about these comments and agreed to pursue the reported difficulties about the out of hours service. He agreed that better use could be made of mobile devices to record faults on the highway and informed the Committee that this would be helped by the current highway maintenance system being replaced.

44.6 With regard to the low number of Personal Development Reviews (PDR) completed (44%), the Director for Corporate Resources acknowledged this and informed the Committee that steps were being taken to ensure that every manager understood the importance of their people management role. She explained how the PDR system worked at the various levels, that this involved a meeting with individual members of staff and then inputting information onto the DES system so that reliable information about PDR completion could be gained. However, completion had been patchy and a review of the system had been undertaken. This was nearing completion and changes to the system would be introduced from April 2013 with a further 12 month period for refinement.

44.7 The Committee were reminded that a number of pressure points within the Corporate Plan were the responsibility of the relevant Overview Committee and that their attention should be brought to these. It was suggested that the Policy and Performance Manager who attended all Overview Committee meetings would be able to do this.

44.8 One member drew attention to the fact that areas of consistent overspend were areas set for further budget reductions. The Policy and Performance Manager explained that the Meeting Future Challenges (MFC) Programme had been put in place to find savings to provide a balanced budget for the County Council. The budgets referred to were the biggest demand led budgets and continued to be a challenge.

44.9 The current main service pressures were referred to and questions were asked as to whether these would remain the main pressures in future. It was explained that these related to demand led budgets where demand outstripped the County Council's ability to provide services. The MFC Programme would be looking at how services could meet the demand without overspending budgets. The Head of Corporate Finance added that budgets

took account of demographic pressures for increases. Some savings had not been made as quickly as had been hoped and so overspends in the shorter term were accepted.

44.10 The Committee remained concerned about the fact that the number of child assessments being carried did not meet the target and would involve increased risk.

44.11 Members remained concerned about the low level of PDR completion rates and asked how Investors in People accreditation took account of this. The Director for Corporate Resources explained that at the time of the last re-accreditation the DES system had not been the source for information on PDR completions. Work was progressing on the next accreditation which would follow a review of the Corporate Plan and priorities following the elections in May 2013. The information provided by DES would be relevant to this process.

44.12 Attention was drawn to EN9 on page 7 of the report whereby the outcome was shown as complete when the indicators and spend were shown as amber. The Policy and Performance Manager agreed to investigate this outcome with the Dorset Waste Partnership.

44.13 The Director for Corporate Resources was complimented on performance under Aim 5. She attributed this achievement to the hard work of her staff.

44.14 The Policy and Performance Manager referred to the draft Budget and Corporate Plan 2013-14 set out in Appendix 5 of the report and drew attention to the fact that the final document would include information about Public Health targets and budgets. This would be considered by the Cabinet on 6 March 2013. He would provide the finalised draft for consideration at the Committee's March 2013 meeting. One member asked that the layout be changed so that risks highlighted under Aim 5 be listed at the end of the action plan as the current layout gave the wrong impression. This was agreed.

Resolved

45.1 That the finalised draft Budget and Corporate Plan be provided for consideration at the Committee's meeting on 21 March 2013.

45.2 That the Policy and Performance Manager draw attention to pressure points within the Corporate Plan to the appropriate Overview Committees.

ICT Incident on 14 September 2012 – Progress Report

46.1 The Committee considered a joint report by the Acting Director for Adult and Community Services and the Director for Corporate Resources which provided an overview of the ICT incident on 14 September 2012, when a shutdown of the air conditioning system caused overheating of the County Council's data centre, the lessons learned and the Action Plan with progress updates.

46.2 The Head of ICT and Business Transformation presented the report in detail and drew attention to the lessons learned from the incident and the Action Plan which had been put in place and monitored by the Corporate Business Continuity Group. He explained communication problems which had been experienced at the time, that the plant had been reviewed and a risk assessment had been undertaken. This had identified forty risk areas, the most serious of which were being addressed.

46.3 The Committee noted that the disaster recovery arrangements with Hampshire County Council would only be used if there was a severe outage of several days length. Hampshire County Council had additional capacity which meant they could provide

this service for Dorset and Dorset were putting in additional capacity in order to be able to reciprocate. When this was completed then charging arrangements would be considered.

46.4 One member referred to the recent fire at Lytchett Minster School when the fire alarm system had failed and because there had been no secondary system in place the fire had remained undetected. He asked whether a review of the County Council's systems had been undertaken where high tech equipment was involved. The Head of ICT and Business Transformation explained that monitoring of the system had previously been done by Fire HQ and when they moved out of County Hall, this arrangement had not continued. A new system was now in place.

46.5 With regard to whether any other IT service users had been adversely affected, it was explained that there had been no interruption for schools but the Fire Service's financial systems had been affected. No information was available about the total cost of the outage for the County Council. Consideration was being given to whether investment should be made in replacing plant when this was within tolerances.

46.6 One member asked about resilience and whether an alternative source should be found further a field. It was explained that it was a case of balancing risk to the authority against cost. It was more likely that an outage would be local and for a short time rather than a regional problem of longer duration.

46.7 In view of the communications problems experienced and whether steps identified in the Action Plan were sufficient to overcome these in future, the Head of ICT and Business Transformation explained that each Directorate now had a planning liaison officer, who had a defined role and who would receive training.

46.8 The Chairman asked whether a review of the current arrangements by an independent person had been carried out to ensure that nothing had been missed and that the current arrangements were robust. It was suggested that the possibility of Hampshire County Council undertaking a review of current arrangements be explored and a reciprocal arrangement undertaken for them. The Committee asked for an update report to be provided in May or June 2013 when most actions would have been completed.

Resolved

47.1 That an update report be provided for consideration by the Committee at their June 2013 meeting.

47.2 That officers explore the possibility of a reciprocal arrangement with Hampshire County Council to test the current ICT resilience arrangements.

The Government's Requirements for Data Transparency

48.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Corporate Resources which set out the costs of publishing data in line with the Government's transparency requirements and information about the benefits the public were gaining from this. The report had been produced at the request of the Chairman of the Committee.

48.2 The Head of Corporate Finance explained that the report set out transparency requirements, the current position and action needed for the County Council to meet these requirements where they did not already do so. There were two areas of non-compliance which would require significant development if compliance were to be achieved. These were the publication of information about the location of public land, building assets and key attributable information, and the provision of an organisational chart including salary bands and details of vacant posts. Particular attention was drawn to the small number of "hits" that the information published on the Dorsetforyou.com website pages had received.

48.3 One member asked whether non-compliance would result in a local authority being penalised. The Head of Corporate Finance explained that the Department for Communities and Local Government said it would work with authorities to achieve compliance. Rather than penalties it was more likely that those not complying would be made public.

48.4 The Committee noted that it was possible for an organisational chart to be provided through the DES system but this would need to be developed in order to comply with the requirements, particularly the identification of vacancies. However, keeping it current would be difficult given the amount of organisational change the Authority was undergoing. Some surprise was expressed that organisational information was not already available for members of the public and one member questioned the need for the public to know about individual salaries or staff vacancies and considered the publication of this information to be a waste of resources given the low number of hits this information received.

48.5 Members remarked that senior staff working in Public Health, which would become the responsibility of the local authority from April 2013, earned salaries substantially higher than those of local government officers. They felt that steps should be taken to explain this to the public.

48.6 Members were concerned about levels of compliance with the transparency requirements and asked officers to liaise with other Dorset authorities to establish what information they were currently publishing.

Resolved

49. That officers liaise with other Dorset authorities to establish what information they are currently publishing.

Work Programme

50. The Committee considered its updated work programme and items were added as specified in minutes.45.1 and 49.1.

Forward Plan of Key Decisions

51. The Committee received the County Council's Cabinet Forward Plan published on 5 February 2013.

Farewell

52.1 The Chairman thanked the Director for Corporate Resources for her support of the Committee and wished her well for a long and happy retirement.

52.2 The Director for Corporate Resources thanked the Committee for their support during her time with the County Council. She thought the role of the Committee had served the County Council well during this time and that the Committee had approached the scrutiny work thoroughly.

Questions

53. No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 20(2).