



Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Colliton Park, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1XJ on Tuesday, 23 February 2016

Present:

Trevor Jones (Chairman)
Deborah Croney, Lesley Dedman, David Harris and Peter Wharf.

Members Attending

Robin Cook, County Councillor for Minster and Cabinet Member for Corporate Development
Ros Kayes, County Councillor for Bridport

Officer Attending: James Ailward (Service Manager - ICT and Customer Services), Nicola Dench (Policy and Research Manager Corporate Development), Patrick Ellis (Assistant Chief Executive), Michael Hansford (Asset and Performance Team Leader, Highways), Andrew Martin (Head of Highways), Patrick Myers (Head of Corporate Development), Mark Taylor (Group Manager - Corporate Development), Claire Shiels (Commissioning and Procurement Manager, Children's Services) and Helen Whitby (Principal Democratic Services Officer).

(Notes: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on **Tuesday, 22 March 2016.**)

Apologies for Absence

22 Apologies for absence were received from Mike Byatt, Andrew Cattaway and Hilary Cox.

Code of Conduct

23 There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

24 The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2016 were confirmed and signed.

Progress on Matters Raised at Previous Meetings

25 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive which updated members of progress made following discussions at previous meetings.

Noted

Public Participation

Public Speaking

26 There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(2).

Petitions

There were no petitions received at the meeting in accordance with the County Council's Petition Scheme.

Work Programme

27 The Committee considered its work programme for 2016.

The Chairman reported that he had been approached by a couple of people suggesting that due process had not been followed with regard to the recent Cabinet decision on Youth Services. He was to discuss whether the matter should be referred to the Committee with the Director for Children's Services.

With regard to scrutiny of the Dorset Waste Partnership, the need for particular scrutiny to ensure it was operating within budget was highlighted and it was noted that a joint scrutiny committee for the Partnership was in the process of being set up. The Chairman explained that the item had been added to the work programme to ensure that it was not overlooked but he recognised the need to avoid any duplication.

The need for the review of the decision making process for future Local Government arrangements to be undertaken at the appropriate time was highlighted. It was agreed that a decision on timing of this would follow the debate at the special meeting of the County Council scheduled for 10 March 2016.

Noted

Cabinet Forward Plan

28 The Committee considered the Cabinet's draft Forward Plan for the meeting to be held on 3 March 2016 which was published on 16 February 2016.

Noted

Corporate Development and Evidence Informed Decision Making

29 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive on the Council's approach to evidence based decision making, which addressed the key lines of enquiry agreed at the meeting on 15 October 2015.

The Head of Corporate Development explained how his team's roles had been enhanced to better support decision making across the authority and highlighted the need for decisions to comply with the Council's constitution and legislation. The team currently used the commissioning cycle and outcome based accountability to support policy development to ensure that commissioning and de-commissioning decisions were soundly based on evidence.

Attention was drawn to the need to be aware of organisations which might commission services instead of the Council and for them to have access to the necessary support and evidence. It was explained that part of the Corporate Development Team's role was to support other organisations, especially with regard to them bidding for funding the Council could not access.

The Committee noted that work was underway to improve the use of report templates particularly to show evidence used as the basis for recommendations and to improve impact assessments which were necessary to better protect people at risk of inequality. It was hoped that this would encourage officers to explore available data to support decision making and ensure that the evidence basis upon which the recommendations were being made and the impacts that they would have was clearer.

The Policy and Resources Manager explained that her team undertook population and demography modelling to predict areas of future demand and the affect of different interventions. This was particularly helpful with planning for school admissions, Special Educational Needs transport and children and adult social care. Officers now had access to census information, but its use varied across the

organisation and her team was trying to encourage its use in support of decision making. It was suggested that the availability of data be highlighted at a future 150 Group meeting and it would be included in officer training on changes to the committee report template.

The need for consideration to be given to whether decisions had negative impacts on other public services was highlighted.

The Head of Dorset Highways explained how evidence supported decisions taken about spend on highway maintenance, how this would support improved performance which would, in turn, help maintain the current level of Government funding in future years. It also informed the structural maintenance programme so that it focussed on condition, safety and early intervention in order to save and prolong asset life.

The Asset and Performance Team Leader explained how evidence was used to support asset management decisions. He explained the consultation taken with members, Parish and Town Councils, surveys undertaken about road and footway defects and how action plans were devised to target spend where it was most needed and where it would be most effective. Service outcomes were allied with corporate objectives and examples to illustrate this were given. Life cycle planning was undertaken, investment and treatment strategies in place and impact modelling used to support bids for funding. The Head of Highways added that a mixed economy approach was adopted to deliver the programme. This linked to Outcomes Based Accountability and the Corporate Plan and the new performance framework. He would provide copies of the first year's directorate maintenance budget for members and highlighted the improved customer satisfaction rates with Dorset now being at fourth place nationally. Performance was continually reviewed and he highlighted that current performance, which was currently assessed as Band 2, would need to improve to Band 3 if Government funding was to be maintained at the current level. An action plan was in place to help achieve this.

Members discussed the information provided and asked questions about footpath condition, the use of footpaths by mobile scooters and their impact on use by buggies, and flooding on the A35. It was explained that areas were regularly surveyed and County Highways Officers had regular contact with Town and Parish Councils about problems so that areas where a small spend would make a big difference could be identified. The Service used recognised good practice, early treatment and evidence to support decisions taken. It was noted that the Council was helping other local authorities with the development of their Highway Asset Management Plans as without these Government funding would not be forthcoming.

One member asked whether the presentation would be shared with Parish and Town Councils. The Head of Dorset Highways explained that he had been invited to the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Council's annual meeting in September 2016 and that County Highways Officers attended all Parish Council meetings. It was suggested that the Service engage with local members and offer to attend appropriate Town and Parish Councils meetings in their area. Officers agreed to discuss this.

The Manager Strategy, Partnerships and Performance explained how evidence had supported changes to services provided to families with children who had Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). There had been increased demand in these two areas which had posed a particular challenge for agencies across Dorset. The use of evidence had highlighted differences across the County, and the use of national best practice, effective interventions and impact modelling had led to changes to assessments and the introduction of a single framework and multidisciplinary teams which had improved outcomes for families and children. There had been some additional investment to provide two paediatric consultants in hospitals and a case coordinator to make

efficiencies. There would also be a single shared database in future to catch all available information. The changes were implemented in November 2015 and would be reviewed in twelve month's time.

Members agreed that evidence used in support of recommendations should be included in Committee reports along with risks and impacts. They asked to see the outcome of the current work on the report template and for this item to be added to the work programme.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Development commented that evidence was needed to support decision making but reports should not become unwieldy and should be clear and easy to understand by the public.

Resolved

1. That every effort be made to encourage officers from across the Council to use the Research and Information Team to provide evidence to support decision making.
2. That the Committee supported the current review of the Committee Report Template to provide better evidence, identify risk and impacts in order to support future decision making.
3. That officers be encouraged to make better use the Research and Information Team at a 150 Group meeting.
4. That local members be approached to see whether they would like Community Highways Officers to attend appropriate Town and Parish Council meetings in their area.

Smarter Computing

30 The Committee received a presentation from the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update on the implementation of the smarter computing programme, the benefits this provided for staff and a video which illustrated the experience staff had with its introduction. The programme would support the Council in increasing flexible working for staff across Dorset and provided a platform for the delivery of the IT estate in future. The Committee noted that the implementation had been stalled in Children's Services due to an issue with the RAISE system. This had been addressed but the implementation had been delayed further because now was not a convenient time for Children's Services to recommence the roll out.

Members asked about suitability, cost and longevity of available devices, external support for the Project, the need for cultural change to embrace new working, how the Project was monitored and about the staff survey on the SurfacePro3. They suggested that smarter computing be discussed at the next meeting of the Staff Consultative Panel.

With regard to the lack of conference facilities which would help reduce travel times and increase productivity, it was explained that the Council now had the capacity for conferencing and that officers would discuss this with the Democratic Services Manager. Advances in technology with regard to messaging and telephony were explained as these would support greater flexibility for staff working.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Development added that the Project was a major task which would support the Council's transformation. He referred to a number of problems experienced over the last 12 months but action had been taken where and when it was needed to address these. He highlighted that some issues were related to users rather than the technology.

Noted

- 31 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive which outlined progress in enhancing and embedding risk management during 2015, the most significant risks identified within the corporate risk register, highlighted some of the key activities undertaken, positive recognition received, headline areas of work for the Risk Management function for 2016 and presented the draft revised Risk Management Strategy.

The Senior Assurance Manager (Governance, Risk and Special Projects) presented the report in detail highlighting that the Corporate Risk Register was now split into sixteen themes with identified risk owners, that it was to be added to Sharepoint to increase transparency and that the Governance and Due Diligence Checklist had been used and modified to support and reflect on lessons learnt from the establishment of Tricuro.

With regard to whether the risk associated with moving towards a Unitary authority had been included, it was explained that work was underway to identify the key risks with this and other options for the future of local government. These would be identified in time for the County Council meeting on 10 March 2016 and would be appropriately reflected on the Corporate Risk Register.

One member highlighted the risk of items falling through the gaps within the new committee structure. It was explained that it would be the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to oversee the agendas and work programmes of the new Overview and Scrutiny Committees to prevent this happening and to stop duplication. Officers were to meet the following day to look at arrangements for the new structure.

The risk relating to rural public transport was highlighted as it was currently listed as “no high or worsening causes” and yet the Cabinet had recently reduced the budget by £500k. It was explained that this risk had not been updated since that decision and a meeting with the Dorset Travel Team had been scheduled to discuss this.

The need for the impact of risks to be explored was highlighted. Officers referred to the introduction of Outcomes Based Accountability and recognised the importance of members understanding the decisions they were being asked to make and to fully understand any risks and impacts these might have. This linked back to the earlier Committee discussions on evidence based decision making.

Reference was made to the changes brought about following one of the Committee members attending Risk Management Group meetings in the past. The Committee noted that the number of Corporate Working Groups had been reduced and that the Risk Management Group would now form part of the Resilience Group. It was agreed that Councillor Lesley Dedman would observe a future meeting to review its effectiveness and provide feedback to a later meeting.

Noted

Outside Bodies and Member Champions

- 32 No reports had been received from members appointed to Outside Bodies, Joint Committees and consultative Panels or Member Champions which related to the Chief Executive’s Department.

The Council’s representation on the South West Audit Partnership Board would provide an update for the Committee’s next meeting.

Questions from County Councillors

- 33 No questions were asked by councillors under Standing Order 20(2).

Meeting Duration: 10.00 am - 12.45 pm