

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 6 November 2013.

PRESENT

Mr. S. J. Galton CC (in the Chair)

Mrs. R. Camamile CC
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC
Mr. S. J. Hampson CC
Dr. S. Hill CC
Mr. Max Hunt CC

Mr. A. M. Kershaw CC
Mr. P. G. Lewis CC
Mr. K. W. P. Lynch CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC
Mr. L. Spence CC

In Attendance:

Mr. J. T. Orson JP CC, Chairman of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Police and Crime Panel (For Minute 43).

36. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2013 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

37. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 35.

38. Questions asked by members.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

39. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

40. Declarations of Interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

The following members each declared a personal interest in respect of items 9 and 14 as members of District/Borough Councils (Minutes 44 and 49 respectively refer):

Mrs. R. Camamile CC
Mr. S. Galton CC
Dr. S. Hill CC

Mr. M. J. Hunt CC
Mr. K. W. P. Lynch CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC
Mr. L. Spence CC

41. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

42. Presentation of Petitions.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

43. Police and Crime Panel - Update.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr. J. T. Orson JP CC, Chairman of the Police and Crime Panel (PCP), to report on the first year in operation of the PCP and to enable members to ask questions of him and put forward any suggestions for issues which the PCP might wish to consider in the future.

Mr. Orson delivered a brief introduction, which included the following points:

- The role of the PCP was to “support and challenge” the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). It was recognised that this remit presented its own challenge and it was important that the PCP was dynamic but not destructive in how it carried out this role. The PCP was working well as a team;
- The PCP was geographically and politically balanced with one member from the County Council, Rutland Council and each of the seven District Councils. Due to its large population, the City Council was afforded three extra members to serve on the PCP. Two independent members also served on the PCP;
- The PCP had needed to learn and adapt to its role at the same time as the PCC himself. The relationship between the PCP and the PCC was professional and constructive. The PCC had welcomed the PCP’s input, particularly in relation to the Police and Crime Plan, which he had amended significantly to recognise the contribution made by effective partnership working;
- The PCC had expressed a desire to keep the Police and Crime Plan under constant review. It would be the PCP’s job to ensure he was delivering against his Key Strategic Priorities;
- A Confirmation Hearing had been held for the post of Chief Finance Officer. The PCP had supported the PCC’s proposed appointment of Helen King, though it was noted that even if the PCP had not done so, the PCC would still have been able to continue to appoint should he have been minded to do so;
- As with other public services, the Police were experiencing significant budgetary pressures. The PCP would scrutinise the PCC’s budget proposals at meetings in December and January.

Arising from questions from members, the following points were noted:

- It was recognised that the County Council would continue to play an important role in regard to Community Safety work. Reductions in budgets were expected to place increasing pressure on this service;
- The PCP was working well, but had limited powers. Though more power would be welcomed, it was unclear how this would work in practice;
- With regard to the PCC's budget and precept, the PCP had limited powers to effect any significant change, other than request that the PCC raise or lower the precept;
- Though the Chief Constable, Simon Cole had now returned to work after a long period of sickness absence, the PCP had questioned the PCC to seek assurances that, at that time, robust management arrangements were in place whilst he had been absent.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. J. T. Orson JP CC, Chairman of the Police and Crime Panel, be thanked for providing an update on the first year in operation of the Police and Crime Panel.

44. 2013/14 Medium Term Financial Strategy Monitoring (Period 6).

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning an update on the 2013/14 revenue budget and capital programme monitoring position. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were noted:

- (i) The overspend in respect of the Adults and Communities Department was a matter for concern and had been caused by the achievement of only 50% of a specific efficiency target. A more up-to-date picture would be presented to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (ii) The invest to save earmarked fund was available to meet the cost of the expected significant reduction in staffing numbers going forward. This would avoid the Council having to make cuts in services to fund redundancy and early retirement settlements;
- (iii) The Local Authority Mortgage Scheme might need to cease due to the anticipated launch by the Government of the Help to Buy scheme in early 2014, which offered many of the same benefits as the local scheme, but with the option of a higher loan amount. More would be known on the status of the local scheme in the next few weeks;
- (iv) The projected net underspend was £8.2 million. The significant areas of underspend were:
 - (Paragraph 10) The underspend of £3.7 million on Dedicated Schools Grant was primarily due to the release of contingency relating to new responsibilities for high needs SEN pupils;

- (Paragraph 22) Some of the £1.2 million contingency for council tax collection deficits was likely to be released;
- (Paragraph 28) The underspend in relation to Discretionary Discount Funds following changes made under the Localisation of Council Tax Support reforms was likely to increase.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That an explanation of the current position in respect of the Local Services Support Grant (paragraph 27 of the report) be circulated to members of the Commission.

45. Medium Term Financial Strategy Consultation.

The Commission reflected on a presentation delivered on Tuesday to which all members of the Council had been invited on the responses to the County Council's extensive budget consultation exercise.

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that the slides from the presentation delivered at the all member briefing held on Tuesday 5 November would be circulated to members via the Members' News in Brief Service.

46. Review of Earmarked Funds, Balances and Contingencies.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning the findings of a detailed review of revenue earmarked funds. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

The following updates on the report were provided:

- (Paragraph 18) The £2 million contribution to the Charnwood Special School was no longer required and had been released;
- (Paragraph 19) The £3.2 million Early Intervention Grant Transition would feed into next year's budget;
- (Paragraph 22) The £8.8 million earmarked fund for Health and Social Care required an agreement with the Health Service. These discussions were still ongoing;
- (Paragraph 28) The £7.1 million earmarked fund for Public Health had been released. £1 million per year would be allocated for the next four years. The detail of the investment proposals would be provided in the next Medium Term Financial Strategy;

Reserves were projected to fall by around £23 million by next year, but this was only a projection, based on the intelligence that was currently available. This reduction was expected to be spread across all budgets. The suggestion to release reserves to offset revenue reductions in budget was not viewed as sustainable as it was only possible to spend this money once.

It was suggested that it would be helpful to include in future reports year-on-year movements in earmarked funds together with an explanation for such changes.

RESOLVED:

That the findings of the Review of Earmarked Funds, Balances and Contingencies as now reported be noted.

47. Traded Services.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning the performance of Commercial Services within the County Council and the threats and challenges that existed within the changing corporate environment. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were noted:

- It was felt that the County Council was able to offer a range of services with a "public" ethos that therefore had added-value. It would not always be possible to offer the cheapest services;
- As many services had traditionally been provided by the Council to schools, it was felt that there was a genuine opportunity to retain and build on this business. Customer loyalty and trust would be essential to thriving in the open market. The Council would need to build up this trust from scratch with the new leadership of schools and academies.
- The School Food Support Service had a £10 million turnover and also provided a range of services, such as tackling childhood obesity. The responsibility for the rollout of free school meals would fall to schools themselves, though the Council might be requested to contribute towards the purchase of additional kitchen equipment;
- Given the significance of the income from traded services, members were keen to explore further the opportunities and risk associated were the Council to become more proactive in its trading activities.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress being made to implement a strategy for the provision of County Council services on a more corporate basis to both maintain and encourage new business be commended;
- (b) That the Scrutiny Commissioners be asked to explore the suggestion for a member panel to be established to consider the Council's approach to trading;
- (c) That an update be provided to a future meeting of the Commission on the work of the School Food Support Service.

48. Corporate Asset Management Plan.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning the Corporate Asset Management Plan (CAMP) 2013/14. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 13', is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Asset Management Plan 2013/14 be endorsed for consideration by the Cabinet at its meeting on 20 November.

49. Leicestershire County Council and Leicestershire Together Annual Performance Report 2013.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the draft Leicestershire County Council and Leicestershire Together Annual Performance Report 2013. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 14', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were noted:

- Crime generally had reduced, though first time youth offending had seen a rise in the County. It was hoped that this would be addressed through early intervention work via the Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme, the Youth Service and the Youth Offending Service;
- Admissions of older people into residential care had increased. Such a trend was also apparent at the majority of other shire authorities;
- It was seen as a significant achievement that those Leicestershire schools rated as "outstanding" had risen from 74% to 83% over the past year;
- Some concern was expressed in the Annual Report appeared to underplay some of the areas of concern. One example given was around the drop in library visits and the number of books and other items issued. It was important that such areas of poor performance were highlighted so that a dialogue could be had with departmental managers to work to improve performance;
- It would be helpful to include in the Annual Report more explanation of the details that lay behind the percentages in the performance data dashboards. Where numbers were low, slight variations could lead to large percentage changes and significant changes in the comparative performance position.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Performance Report 2013 be endorsed for consideration by the Cabinet and full County Council, subject to amendment in light of the comments now made.

50. Date of next meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 29 January 2013 at 2.00pm.