

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 29 June 2015.

PRESENT

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

Mrs. J. A. Dickinson CC
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC
Dr. S. Hill CC
Mr. Max Hunt CC
Mr. D. Jennings CC

Mr. K. W. P. Lynch CC
Mrs. C. M. Radford CC
Mrs. J. Richards CC
Mr. R. Sharp CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

15. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2015 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

16. Question Time.

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

17. Questions asked by Members.

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

18. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

19. 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.

No declarations were made.

20. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

21. Presentation of Petitions.

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

22. 2014/15 Provisional Revenue and Capital Outturn.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning the 2014/15 Provisional Revenue and Capital Outturn which had been considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 16 June. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 8", is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Director noted the somewhat disappointing performance with regard to 80% achievement of the Capital Programme, below the target of 95%, which had resulted in an underspend of just under £13 million, most of which was as a result of the delay in the building of the bridge over the M1 for the "New Lubbethorpe" development.

The uncommitted County Fund balance of £14.8 million would enable the Council to respond to significant areas of risk, such as the implementation of the Care Act and the non-achievement of savings targets going forward.

Arising from questions, the following points were noted:

Revenue

- Concerns were expressed in regard to the Council's policy for grass cutting. Some members felt that a blanket policy on this issue was not appropriate as, the grass could become overgrown more quickly than in other areas and represent a safety issue. It was noted that the Council had an agreed budget for grass cutting and the Director of Environment and Transport was required to work within that budget. It was also noted that the issue of grass cutting had been regarded by the public as a low priority when the Council had conducted its pre-budget consultation process;
- The Council's Transformation Programme in regard to Home Care had predominantly been based around demand management and the integration of a commissioning strategy. The recommendations of a Scrutiny Review Panel on Home Care had been accepted by the Cabinet and it was therefore hoped that this would enable improvements for service users.

Children and Families Service

- Transformation work to increase the number of foster care placements had continued, though the Council was reliant on people coming into the foster care market. This remained a national issue, though recruitment campaigns held locally had raised interest. It was noted that the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee had already requested an update on this issue at a future meeting;
- There was a net underspend in the Children and Families budget of £2.7 million, largely as a result of the high contingency held for the funding changes implemented by Government two years ago which had continued to impact expenditure;
- The Council held balances for maintained schools (ie. not academies, which took their balances with them from the date of conversion except in instances where the conversion was sponsored. In these circumstances the Council was required to

meet the cost of any deficit in their budgets);

Adults and Communities Department

- The overspend in Adults and Communities of £1.5 million was lower than forecasted in November 2014 (£3 million);
- A new System for financial management in Adult Social Care had resulted in some initial teething problems, though it was hoped that the System would enable a smoother process for the service users going forward.

Other

- The improvements in the procurement of the Public Health service could give rise to opportunities for some joint-working with Health partners to improve their procurement processes. It was felt that similar opportunities existed around the procurement of buildings;
- The Council's approach to Treasury Management had resulted in a reduction in borrowing of around £90 million over the last five years. This had yielded a saving of £16 million thus far.

County Fund and Earmarked Reserves

- An earmarked fund had been set aside for Better Care Fund projects and the commitments therein which were regarded as very challenging. A contingency fund of £3 million had been identified to mitigate this.

Capital Programme

- There were some areas where "slippage" (or a delay) in capital projects had occurred and which had resulted in neither an underspend nor an overspend. It was suggested in future years that greater detail be included in future reports to make clear why the slippage had occurred in each case and its effect;
- There were predominantly two reasons for the slippage in the Children and Families' Capital Programme: the high capital costs for sponsored academy conversions and the unexpected award of a grant for improvement to school kitchen facilities. A view was expressed that tighter project management could have resulted in reduced slippage. It was felt that this was an issue that could be looked at in further detail via the service Overview and Scrutiny Committees and their ongoing monitoring of capital projects;
- The importance was stressed of the Council's role in achieving sufficient S106 funds to ensure the adequate provision of good quality school facilities with a reduced emphasis on mobile classrooms.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the Scrutiny Commissioners be asked to consider further the impact of the Council's policy for grass cutting.

23. Date of next meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 2 September at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 3.10 pm
29 June 2015

CHAIRMAN