

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 19 July 2017.

PRESENT

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

Mr. D. C. Bill MBE CC
Mr. S. L. Bray CC
Mr. L. Breckon JP CC
Dr. T. Eynon CC
Mr. D. Jennings CC

Mrs. R. Page CC
Mr. T. J. Richardson CC
Mrs H. L. Richardson CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mr. D. Slater CC

14. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2017 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

15. Question Time.

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

16. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

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

17. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

18. 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.

Members of the Commission who were also District Councillors declared a personal interest in the 2016/17 Provisional Revenue and Capital Outturn (minute 21 refers).

19. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

20. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

21. 2016/17 Provisional Revenue and Capital Outturn

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which set out the provisional revenue and capital outturn for 2016/17. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

- (i) The Government had recently announced that it was reconsidering proposals for education funding, which could affect the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. This funding supported pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); growth in this area was expected to increase at a greater rate than the general population. Previous funding allocations had not been favourable to Leicestershire and details of the latest proposals were not yet available. The County Council was therefore continuing to focus on reducing the average cost of placements and, where appropriate, supporting pupils with SEN to be educated in mainstream schools.
- (ii) The Children and Families Departmental Management Budget overspends related to the number of interim posts. Permanent Assistant Directors had now been appointed and further restructuring was in progress.
- (iii) The £10.9 million underspend in adult social care reflected the difficulties in forecasting demand accurately. It was confirmed that the cost of care had largely remained static, compared to the previous year. However, members were advised that, although there were some fluctuations, the trend remained one of increasing demand due to the ageing population.
- (iv) The planning and long term financial forecasting associated with setting the Medium Term Financial Strategy had put the County Council in a strong financial position compared to other local authorities. However, public finances as a whole were in a challenging position. This was reflected in a recent article in the Financial Times which would be circulated to members.
- (v) In response to a query, the Director agreed that a more commercial approach to the management of County Council assets was needed. To that end, the Cabinet would be considering an Asset Investment Fund Strategy at its meeting in September. This would set out the yield expected from assets, noting that lower risk assets would likely result in a lower yield.
- (vi) Concern was expressed that the reduction in the highways maintenance budget would result in a deterioration in condition which would require significant investment in the future. The Commission was advised that £5 million of underspend had been allocated for investment in highways maintenance during the year, details of which would be circulated to members. The Department took an asset management approach to highways maintenance which aimed to balance preventative works with reactive maintenance.

- (vii) The Coroner's Service has overspent due to increased pressures on the Leicester City and South Leicestershire Coroner's Service. Although this was run by the City Council it also covered the south area of the County. Costs were shared between the City and County Councils based on the broad population that the service applied to.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the provisional revenue and capital outturn for 2016/17 be noted;
- (b) That the following additional information be circulated to members of the Committee:-
- (i) The cause of the overspend on the M1 Junction 22 scheme;
 - (ii) The Financial Times article on the risks facing public finances;
 - (iii) The reason for planning delays regarding the Coalville Workspace Project;
 - (iv) Details of the highways maintenance schemes that the £5 million identified from underspends was used for.

22. Strategic Plan and Single Outcomes Framework.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which provided details of the revised Strategic Plan and sought views on the strategic outcomes that the Council had identified as its priorities for Leicestershire. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

- (i) Concern was expressed that the Strategic Plan and Single Outcomes Framework was a high-level document which lacked detail. The Commission was advised that this was deliberate, as the Plan would form a mechanism for identifying priorities and ensuring that the focus was on delivering outcomes for the residents of Leicestershire, within available resources. A performance framework would be developed to enable the Council to monitor delivery of the outcomes.
- (ii) The Commission supported the outcomes but suggested that they would be defined better as aspirations. This view was acknowledged, but members were assured that the Strategic Plan would create an updated framework for more detailed plans and strategies, such as the Enabling Growth Plan, to deliver the outcomes. These would be reviewed in the light of the Strategic Plan to ensure alignment with the new strategic priorities. Where this was not the case, services could be decommissioned. More detail on delivery arrangements would be included in the next report to the Scrutiny Commission.
- (iii) The Commission emphasised the importance of alignment with the strategic plans of partner organisations. The engagement exercise that was currently being undertaken asked partners to confirm this; the outcomes had also been informed by existing partnership work and strategies. Although the Strategic Plan would be owned by the County Council, partnership working would be essential to its delivery.
- (iv) The report submitted to the Cabinet in June included a high level list of the stakeholders that were being consulted on the Strategic Plan and Single Outcomes Framework. This included key partners, district councils and MPs. The Commission was disappointed that it had not received details of stakeholders; it

was agreed that this would be included in the report to the next meeting. Some concern was also expressed that the questionnaire being sent to stakeholders contained leading questions. However, officers assured the Commission that any respondent had the opportunity to suggest changes as part of the process.

- (v) In response to concerns about the timing of further consideration of the Strategic Plan and Single Outcomes Framework, it was acknowledged that there would only be a short amount of time between the Scrutiny Commission commenting on the final draft and it being considered by the Cabinet. The Commission was nonetheless assured that any comments it made would be reported to the Cabinet.
- (vi) The priority of quality and affordable housing highlighted the benefits of an outcomes based approach as housing was a significant determinant for overall quality of life. There were a number of ways in which the County Council could influence this outcome, for example by accessing infrastructure funding through the Local Enterprise Partnership for roads to support housing developments. The County Council also had a role in terms of the links between social care and housing. Some concern was expressed that the County Council's influence over the type of housing that developers would build in Leicestershire was limited. However, the Council had been involved in the producing the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment for Leicestershire which provided details of the level of affordable homes required and would inform the preparation of statutory local plans by individual local planning authorities. Officers undertook to confirm whether this specified the future need for larger and smaller homes.
- (vii) Members were assured that environmental issues were a cross cutting theme within the Strategic Plan and Single Outcomes Framework. Different environmental issues were referenced in support of each of the five outcomes. This recognised the importance of the environment in improving people's quality of life.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Chief Executive be requested to take the comments and concerns now raised into account when finalising the Strategic Plan and Single Outcomes Framework;
- (b) That a further report on the Strategic Plan and Single Outcomes Framework be submitted to the Commission in September and that the Leader of the Council be invited to attend the meeting and answer questions on that item.

23. Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2016-17.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which presented the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report, covering the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

- (i) The report was welcomed, particularly the focus on managing expectations and learning lessons from complaints. It was suggested that it could be useful for members to advised of emerging themes of complains so that they could also help

to manage the expectations of residents. Officers undertook to consider how this could be done.

- (ii) Complaints were broadly defined as an expression of dissatisfaction. From a pragmatic point of view, the formal complaints process was only used where officers had already had an opportunity to respond to the issue or where it had not been possible to achieve a resolution within 24 hours. It was suggested that future reports should include details of the number of complaints resolved at the first point of contact, usually through the Customer Service Centre.
- (iii) It was acknowledged that not all compliments received by the County Council were captured in the annual report. Communications with staff regarding the findings of the report were being planned; these would highlight the compliments received and remind staff of the importance of recording compliments formally.
- (iv) Departmental Management Teams received quarterly complaints report. It had been noted that drainage had become the main theme of complaints to the Environment and Transport Department and as a result a programme of improvement work had been commissioned.
- (v) Guidance for managers dealing with complaints recommended that, where fault was found, immediate redress should be provided in line with good practice. Managers should then identify the reason for the fault and whether changes to practice needed to be made. Managers were also advised to keep the complaints team informed of any work being undertaken in response to complaints.
- (vi) The Customer Service Centre received real time updates from highways inspectors. There were still improvements needed to the process but it was generally successful in preventing complaints from escalating.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report be noted.

24. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 13 September 2017 at 10.30am.

10.30 am - 12.40 pm
19 July 2017

CHAIRMAN