

## **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PANEL**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 APRIL 2009**

**Councillors:** Peter Argyle (P), Jeff Brooks (P), Hilary Cole (P),  
Carol Jackson-Deorge (AP), Irene Neill (P), David Rendel (AP)

**Substitutes:** Julian Swift-Hook (SP)

**Also present:** Robert O'Reilly (Head of Human Resources), Simon Freeman (Finance Manager), Stephen Chard (Policy Officer)

#### **PART I**

#### **32. APOLOGIES.**

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors David Rendel and Carol Jackson-Deorge. Councillor Julian Swift-Hook substituted for Councillor Rendel.

#### **33. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING.**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2009 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

##### **Casework Management System**

Stephen Chard would ask Karen Reeve to circulate information to all Members on the current arrangements in respect of information sharing and the need to know process.

##### **Care home payments**

The Panel agreed to consider the work required on this issue at the next meeting.

##### **Bulky waste cost pressures**

Simon Freeman informed the Panel that there had been an increase in requests for bulky waste disposal but this pressure had reduced since Month 8. However this pressure would continue to be monitored closely.

##### **Children's Services overspend**

Simon Freeman advised that the capital overspend reported at the last meeting was due, in the main, to the delay to the works required for Adventure Dolphin. The expenditure for this project had been refiled for the 2008/09 closedown of accounts and the majority of spend would take place during 2009/10.

##### **Developers Contributions**

Stephen Chard described the process established for reporting the views of the Panel to the Executive and circulated the response received. This stated that in the view of the Executive the appropriate decisions had been taken which concurred fully with the conclusions and recommendations of the Section 151 Officer.

The Panel noted the response but wished to record their disappointment that a fuller explanation was not given for rejecting the recommendations.

It was further noted that concerns had been raised at meetings of Newbury Town Council in respect of the way interest was used from developers' contributions.

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**34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest received.

**35. EXIT INTERVIEW.**

The Panel considered a verbal update (Agenda Item 4) concerning the exit interview process and Robert O'Reilly made the following points:

- There was unfortunately a poor response rate of only 9% to the exit interview questionnaire sent to employees for completion after they had left the authority. The main reasons given in those responses received were change of career, personal reasons and career progression, with higher salaries given as the fourth main reason.
- The next phase being pursued was for exit interview questionnaires to be e-mailed to employees a fortnight before their leaving date in addition to sit down interviews with line managers. Although it was accepted that employees might not provide a fully honest response while they were still with the Authority. Interviews were not mandatory.
- Informal feedback from Managers after an employee had left was another option being pursued.
- A questionnaire was also being looked into for staff new to the organisation to gain their early perceptions on areas including induction training and whether their duties matched with their job description. Research would be conducted to ascertain the value of conducting these before progressing any further. Consideration would also be given to incorporating this with the 6 month probationary review of new staff that was already held in respect of performance.
- The views of current members of staff would be gained through the Employee Attitude Survey being conducted in June 2009. Feedback from this would be used to inform the Workforce Strategy.
- Anonymous exit interview questionnaires would be complex and costly to run.
- Staff turnover was dropping and interest in job vacancies was increasing.

Members suggested that a useful statistic to collect was the sector an employee was moving to. Robert O'Reilly agreed to look into this.

**RESOLVED** that Robert O'Reilly would return to the Panel in a year's time to present statistics collected from the new initiatives being undertaken. Robert O'Reilly also agreed to circulate any useful findings as an update.

**36. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) 2009/10 – 2011/12.**

The Panel considered a report (Agenda Item 5) concerning the MTFS.

Simon Freeman introduced the item and referred Members to the summary of the financial model that supported the MTFS. Simon Freeman then made the following points:

- Assumptions had to be made on income over the next 3 years.
- Housing developments had declined dramatically from previous years and the impact of this loss of additional Council Tax income was being monitored in conjunction with the Council Tax Team.

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- The savings programme was linked to inherent pressures and was increased in order to balance budgets across the Council.
- The increased demographic pressure was related to population growth. If population growth did not change significantly then the make up of the population would change and would impact on budgets, i.e. ageing population.
- Much of superinflation related to the growing costs associated with energy consumption. Another difficulty was that a significant number of major projects had very specific inflation related issues that the Council was contracted to meet, although this could improve through the year and was being worked on by the Procurement Team.

Members commented that it would be useful to see fees from car parking, planning etc as individual income lines to assess what impact the economic downturn was having on income levels. Simon Freeman advised that this detail was contained in the main budget reports and was not for the MTFS.

The provision of £680K to help cover the adverse impact of the economic downturn was noted and it was questioned why this was not planned to change from year to year. Simon Freeman advised that this was the best current estimate with uncertainty as to whether or not this was a continuing trend.

Members suggested that it would be useful to include real data to compare against the forecast and it was further suggested that there could be a benefit in looking at the actuals for 2008/09 and what was predicted in the MTFS for that year.

**RESOLVED that** the MTFS would be noted.

### **37. VALUE FOR MONEY (VFM).**

The Panel considered the Council's VFM Strategy (Agenda Item 6).

Simon Freeman introduced the item and made the following points:

- Useful comparison data was difficult to obtain in order to assess VFM.
- National benchmarking data held by the Audit Commission was used for the Strategy as being the most consistent data available. This identified variances between West Berkshire and other local authorities.
- The VFM working group, chaired by John Ashworth, used this data as a starting point for work in areas where, compared to others, West Berkshire was shown to be high cost and potentially low performing.
- West Berkshire had joined a number of benchmarking groups and this group was looking to produce consistent and comparable data. Comparisons with this group showed that West Berkshire was around average for VFM.
- Much work remained in order to develop and understand more fully comparisons with other authorities to establish and, if necessary, improve the levels of VFM in West Berkshire.
- Work on VFM linked to MTFS income generation work.
- Once work had been developed it was likely that recommendations would be taken to the Executive and would feature in decisions relating to investment and disinvestment through future MTFS.

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In considering the Strategy Members made the following comments:

- The audience for the Strategy was not seen to be customers and rather was presented for the Audit Commission etc, this needed to be reconsidered to make it more inclusive. Data was too broad and at too high a level. Simon Freeman acknowledged that this was a draw back of using the Audit Commission data.
- Comparisons with peer groups needed to be included further as did detail on levels of investment. Evidence of good VFM was another area needing to be included.
- The cost of some services within the Environment Directorate was noted as being high in comparison to elsewhere and Simon Freeman advised that there was a focus on this Directorate in the VFM Group's work to understand this position more fully.
- High spend did not necessarily mean poor VFM.
- A summary report of the findings and key messages would be useful.

**RESOLVED** that the Strategy would be noted and Simon Freeman would feedback comments made by the Panel to the VFM working group.

**38. 2008/09 MONTH 11 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT.**

The Panel considered the Month 11 revenue report (Agenda Item 7).

Concerns were raised by the Panel regarding the changes to budget forecasts from month to month which was felt to be an ongoing issue across Directorates. The Panel requested that more detail on the reasons for these changes needed to be incorporated into the report.

The Panel also felt that a standard format for Directorate reports was needed to increase consistency of reporting which would aid monitoring.

Simon Freeman was asked to consider the Panel's comments and respond by the next meeting as to whether there was agreement to incorporate these changes.

The increase to levies and interest was discussed and Simon Freeman advised that much of this was interest payments received from external bodies. This had come about as a result of the good work of the Treasury Management Team in negotiating interest rates from investment deals completed early in the financial year. The Panel asked that positive feedback be given to the Team for their good work. Simon Freeman added that this income was used towards the end of the financial year to help manage the cash flow position of the Council when Council Tax income reduced significantly due to the instalments profile.

**RESOLVED that:**

- (1) Simon Freeman would respond to the suggestions made by the Panel by the next meeting as to whether there was agreement to incorporate more detail on the reasons for changes to budget forecasts from month to month and for a standard format for Directorate reports.
- (2) Simon Freeman would pass on positive feedback to the Treasury Management Team on their work to increase levies and interest payments.
- (3) The report would be noted.

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**39. 2008/09 MONTH 11 CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING REPORT.**

The Panel considered the Month 11 capital report (Agenda Item 8).

10% of the capital budget remained to be committed at Month 11 and although this was likely to be reduced still further, there would be some reprofiling into 2009/10.

The budget remaining to be committed in Finance was mostly linked to the acquisition of new premises as part of the Accommodation Strategy.

Members commented that having 90% of the capital budget committed was positive.

**RESOLVED that** the report would be noted.

**40. WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09.**

The Panel considered the Resource Management Panel Work Programme (Agenda Item 9).

It was agreed that an item to discuss the Property contracts and contractors within schools would be useful as separate to the more generic review undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. An understanding of the satisfaction levels of schools would be a useful element to this work.

The item to consider the Asset Management Strategy was scheduled for October 2009.

The Panel discussed whether it should be undertaking financial monitoring for the Partnership and not just the Council, in line with the forthcoming change to the scrutiny structure. There was a monitoring group for the Partnership but it was believed that this concentrated on performance rather than finances. Stephen Chard would check whether finances were part of the monitoring group's remit and if not it was agreed that it should be for the Panel to look at this area.

**RESOLVED that:**

- (1) The Work Programme would be noted and amended to reflect the above points.
- (2) Stephen Chard would check whether finances were part of the West Berkshire Partnership monitoring group's remit.

*(The meeting commenced at 5.30pm and closed at 7.15pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature:** .....

**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SELECT COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON**  
**TUESDAY 12 MAY 2009**

**Councillors:** J.C.G. Brooks (P), Richard Crumly (P), Dave Goff (P), Gordon Lundie (AP), David Rendel (P), Laszlo Zverko (P)

**Substitutes:** Tony Linden, David Holtby (SP), Julian Swift-Hook

**PART I**

**1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN.**

**RESOLVED that** Councillor J.C.G. Brooks, be elected Chairman of the Resource Management Select Committee for the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

**Councillor Jeff Brooks in the Chair.**

**2. APOLOGIES.**

An apology for inability to attend the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Gordon Lundie. Councillor David Holtby substituted for Councillor Lundie.

**3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN.**

**RESOLVED that** Councillor Laszlo Zverko be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Resource Management Select Committee for the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature:** .....