

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2010

Councillors: Jeff Brooks (*Chairman*) (P), Richard Crumly (P), David Goff (P), Gordon Lundie (A), David Rendel (P), Laszlo Zverko (*Vice-Chairman*) (P)

Also present: Teresa Bell (Corporate Director – Community Services), Robert O'Reilly (Head of Human Resources), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Steve Broughton (Head of Property), Sean Tye (Property Development Manager), Amanda Dennis (Asset Strategy Officer), Simon Freeman (Finance Manager), Stephen Chard (Policy Officer)

PART I

44. APOLOGIES.

There were no apologies for absence received.

45. MINUTES.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2009 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest received.

47. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES.

The Committee went through the actions from the previous meeting (Agenda Item 4).

Community Services budget monitoring

Teresa Bell offered to provide further information to explain the work undertaken to renegotiate contracts in addition to the information tabled.

The chart detailing the average death rate was referred to. Teresa Bell explained that having 10 fewer deaths per month amounted to an additional cost of approximately £600 per week per individual continuing costs for this year when compared with the same period last year.

Environment budget monitoring

In relation to the information provided in respect of concessionary fares, it was commented that it was concerning that there had been a reduction of nearly 6,000 residents claiming any travel concession.

It was noted that a joint piece of work was being conducted by the Greener Select Committee and Stronger Communities Select Committee in respect of access to public transport, but the Resource Management Select Committee could still return to the issue if it was not picked up as part of this review.

Month 6 Capital Programme monitoring

Simon Freeman advised that there was a risk to the St Bartholomew's project if the land sale did not go through, the St Bartholomew's Foundation were aware that the funds from this sale would be required to contribute to the overall cost. This was

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being closely monitored by the project group. It was agreed that Simon Freeman would circulate more detail in a Part II report.

(Councillor Richard Crumly joined the meeting at 6.35pm).

Simon Freeman explained that the additional information that was requested to be included in future reports from Housing and Performance, and Highways and Transport was not part of the amended budget report that was provided to the Committee. This was because an alternative summary report had been supplied which had been approved by the Portfolio Holder, but did not contain the fuller detail that was previously provided.

Councillor Brooks asked Nick Carter to comment on the issue of the significantly reduced report. Nick Carter advised that whilst he was not aware of the change he would raise the issue at the earliest opportunity with relevant officers and the Portfolio Holder, as he was of the view that if the Select Committee wanted further detail then they should have it.

The Select Committee agreed that the information requested in respect of progress with work to resolve ditching problems would be forwarded to the Greener Select Committee as part of their review of flooding works in March 2010.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) Teresa Bell would provide further information to explain the work undertaken to renegotiate contracts in addition to the information tabled, at a convenient time.
- (2) Simon Freeman would provide further information on the implications to the St Bartholomew's project if the land sale did not go through as part of a Part II report.
- (3) Nick Carter would raise the issue of the reduced budget reports, being provided to the Select Committee, with relevant officers and the Portfolio Holder at the earliest opportunity.
- (4) Stephen Chard would forward the request in respect of progress with work to resolve ditching problems to the Greener Select Committee.

48. RESULTS OF THE EMPLOYEE SURVEY/ANNUAL EMPLOYMENT REPORT.

The Committee considered the results of the Employee Attitude Survey 2009 and the 2008/09 Annual Employment Report (Agenda Item 5).

Employee Attitude Survey

Nick Carter opened the item by advising that:

- this was an ongoing process;
- it was important to consider what work was needed as a result of the survey and how it would be implemented;
- the majority of the results were positive in comparison to the national average, but there was always room for improvement;
- it might be useful for the Select Committee to monitor, on an ongoing basis, the work to address the concerns raised.

The Local Authority comparison group was discussed. Robert O'Reilly advised that the survey was conducted by ORC International who placed all participating local

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authorities into one group. This meant that some authorities were not similar to West Berkshire Council. Members therefore had concerns that this was not a fair comparison group. However Nick Carter was of the view that the survey was about the quality of management rather than service delivery and the type of local authority involved was therefore irrelevant.

While Members noted that there were some pleasing results, there were some areas of concern.

It was noted that although both Legal and Property scored low on employee engagement (the extent to which an employee felt a sense of attachment to the organisation they worked for, believed in its goals and supported its values) both services had recently undergone a review.

Nick Carter agreed that there were potential reasons why services had lower scores, but regardless there would be a focus on the four lowest scoring services for employee engagement, this also included Finance and Countryside and Environment. An aspect of this could be learning from other service areas.

Nick Carter advised that the only area where there was a common view among some staff was that limited resources were an issue, this view had deteriorated since the 2007 survey. Members queried what could be done to address this and Robert O'Reilly advised that ORC had suggested the formation of staff focus groups. However Nick Carter questioned the benefit of pursuing this and felt that a greater return would be obtained from focusing work with the four service areas mentioned.

Councillor Brooks agreed with this focus, but still felt there would be value with forming staff focus groups as suggested by ORC.

It was questioned whether the scarcity of resources, mentioned in the report, related to the need for staff to work more overtime, particularly in those services with poorer results. Robert O'Reilly agreed that this aspect would be investigated.

Members noted a low response rate across service areas to the question asking whether senior managers were aware of the issues staff faced on a daily basis. Robert O'Reilly advised that whilst this was concerning it was an overall improvement of 2% on the previous survey and 8% higher than the national average.

More specific service area detail was held by each Head of Service and action plans were being put in place that could be presented to the Select Committee in due course. It was agreed that an update would be provided to the Select Committee in the summer of 2010 when work had been undertaken by Human Resources to ascertain progress.

Annual Employment Report

Robert O'Reilly introduced this part of the item by advising that there was a link between aspects of this report and the results of the Employee Attitude Survey and pointed to positive examples of this, as follows:

- Turnover of staff was reducing and as a result employee engagement was improving.
- Improvements to the training and development package, including induction training, had received positive comments.
- Family friendly policies linked to positive views in respect of work life balance.

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Members then referred to reasons for sickness absence and were concerned by the fact that 20% was stress related, this was an increase from 18% in the previous survey. Robert O'Reilly advised that when this was identified as work related stress the individual would be referred to Occupational Health and the number of referrals had increased. Robert O'Reilly felt this was positive as it showed that managers were referring staff in line with Council policy.

Although 20% of stress related illness was higher than the national average, the actual number of individuals concerned was in fact minimal.

Robert O'Reilly agreed to provide detail on the cost of providing childcare vouchers to staff.

The reasons for staff disciplinary action were often not related to sickness absence and were, for example, for inappropriate use of IT. Dismissals without notice, as a result of a disciplinary investigation, would only be for gross misconduct. Otherwise there would be a notice period as would be the case following capability procedures.

Nick Carter advised that there was a corporate training allocation but this was not calculated per head. Members felt that this could be a useful figure to calculate as a way of attracting staff. In addition the positive news from the survey was also an opportunity to attract new staff. Robert O'Reilly advised that these were being explored.

Training for school based staff was charged back to the school with no subsidy on the cost.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) Robert O'Reilly would investigate whether the scarcity of resources, mentioned in the Employee Attitude Survey report, related to the need for staff to work more overtime, particularly in those services with poorer results.
- (2) An update in respect of service area action plans, produced in response to the results of the Employee Attitude Survey, would be provided to the Select Committee meeting scheduled for September 2010.
- (3) Robert O'Reilly would provide detail on the cost of providing childcare vouchers to staff.

49. ESTABLISHMENT REPORT QUARTER 2 2009/10.

The Committee considered the Quarter 2 Establishment Report (Agenda Item 6).

RESOLVED that the report would be noted.

50. COMMUNITY SERVICES BUDGET MONITORING.

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 7) concerning the current position of the Community Services Directorate budget.

Teresa Bell circulated latest figures and made the following points:

- The forecast underspend for the Corporate Director budget of £350k was a sum that could be drawn down from the contingency fund. Setting aside this sum was as agreed a year ago in order to help meet pressures should they arise. £250k of this was budgeted as a deliberate contingency, with the remainder made up of savings from the reablement work and changes to the home care service. This approach was a change from previous years. The contingency had been fully allocated to offset the pressures in Adult Social Care.

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- Work continued to address the Directorate overspend. This included continuing negotiations with the Primary Care Trust to achieve the best possible continuing care settlement beyond the savings already achieved.
- All client commissioning budgets were being closely managed. However support still needed to be provided to residents and the demand for services exceeded previous years.
- Fewer people were coming out of the system, as already mentioned in the meeting. It was queried whether analysis of the average age that people were dying from month to month was undertaken to try and forecast this in future. Teresa Bell advised that, as far as she was aware, this had not been considered and would ask the team responsible to investigate further.
- The projected overspend for the Directorate had increased. The forecast of £801k overspent at month 7 had grown to a latest figure of approximately £1m. This was primarily due to the increased pressure within Older Peoples Services. The savings achieved as a result of work to negotiate contracts had been factored into this figure.
- Capacity of hospital beds was an issue, but there was a well co-ordinated system to manage this between the Council and the Primary Care Trust.
- The critical eligibility criteria was being used to ensure that clients identified as critical received care without a wait. Clients assessed critical but as having non immediate urgent needs might have to wait for a longer period than was normally the case.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) Teresa Bell would ask the team responsible for forecasting client numbers to investigate further analysis in the way suggested.
- (2) The Select Committee would continue to monitor the budget position of the Directorate by requesting latest figures and a more detailed narrative for future meetings.

51. ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN/OFFICE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY.

The Committee considered a report concerning the Asset Management Plan and received a verbal update on progress with the Office Accommodation Strategy (Agenda Item 8).

Asset Management Plan

Steve Broughton advised that the current Asset Management Plan was to be refreshed. This would include the need to undertake an asset challenge for all Council properties and would be an opportunity to fully review the document. The refresh was also being used as an opportunity to improve the layout of the plan.

Amanda Dennis went on to say that those properties that had been asset challenged thus far had all been identified for disposal, however there needed to be corporate commitment to alternative ways forward which was the intention of this work.

The Plan included all corporate properties but did not include highways, which was managed separately and in a different way, or schools. This was primarily because of the specialised knowledge that was required in these areas. Also IT assets were managed by the IT service.

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It was suggested that if the Plan was solely in relation to corporate assets then it should be named as such. Steve Broughton agreed to do this.

Steve Broughton went on to say that there was a significant piece of work ongoing to pull all asset valuations together. This would be completed towards the end of 2010/11.

The fact that there were three separate systems in place was referred to as a concern by a Member. Nick Carter acknowledged that the Property database needed updating, but did not feel there was an advantage in bringing together the different systems, particularly as the Council was not asset rich and the cost of funding a new system was not therefore necessary.

A bid of around £20-£30k for a new web based property related database was being taken to the Capital Strategy Group on the 26th January 2010. If this was approved it would enable appropriate service areas to access and update the database on line. In terms of timeframe it was hoped that the database, if funding was approved, could be in place as early as possible, although it was not expected that it would be fully operational until 2012. Members felt this would be a useful addition if approved and could hopefully be in place within a shorter timeframe.

The consultation on the draft Plan was due for completion at the end of February 2010 and, after being taken through the Executive cycle for approval as part of the Capital Strategy and Programme, would hopefully be in place by the end of May 2010. The Plan would then be reviewed every three years.

Nick Carter gave his view that while it was beneficial to have the approved plan, it was of most importance to commence the work and raise the profile of asset management with service areas.

A concern was raised in respect of the Premise database which was no longer supported. Steve Broughton advised that data remained accessible on this database and if there was a system failure the data could be recovered as part of the IT back up. The external support previously provided was not adequate and was discontinued.

Office Accommodation Strategy

Nick Carter gave a verbal briefing to the Committee and made the following points:

- He did not feel there was a need to refresh the Strategy. It ran from 2006-2011 and much of the implementation was complete. Full implementation was expected by 2011.
- An aspect of the Strategy's completion was the implementation of Timelord. This would assist with another aim of the Strategy to have reduced office space.
- The remaining element was the disposal of the Faraday Road site. Work on this would be included in a feasibility study of the London Road industrial estate which was part of the Newbury Vision. A paper on this would be available in the near future.
- After the completion of the current strategy, Nick Carter was not of the view that a new strategy was needed as there was not an intention to alter the office accommodation significantly in the future.

The move away from having dedicated offices for senior managers was discussed and there was some concern raised by Members in respect of how confidential issues could be managed. Nick Carter advised that the view had been taken by the

Administration that these offices were often wasted space that could instead be used for meetings, while senior managers worked in the open plan of the main office. This was already in place at Turnhams Green and West Street House. There were dedicated meeting rooms for Corporate Directors and Heads of Service at West Street House where issues of a confidential nature could be discussed. Meeting rooms would be available at Market Street in a similar way, for example Nick Carter would have first call on his current office.

Timelord was enabling staff to work more flexibly if they wished. Some issues being highlighted by staff at Turnhams Green was one of a loss of team working and remoteness, with more staff working from home. This needed to be managed. There was also a need for a change of management style with staff more often away from the office.

There was a request that these changes be kept under review. Nick Carter agreed that this would be the case and plans could be adapted over time, but there would not be a return to the current practice of offices for senior managers.

RESOLVED that the Asset Management Plan would be renamed to make it clear that it was in relation to corporate properties only.

52. CHIEF EXECUTIVE BUDGET MONITORING.

The Committee considered the current position of the Chief Executive Directorate budget (Agenda Item 9).

Nick Carter advised that there had been a positive change between month 7 and month 9. A year end underspend was being forecast across the Directorate of between £130-£140k, which was a result of some budget tightening. This could potentially rise to £150k but not further.

An overspend was being predicted in Legal Services of around £60k. Some of this was due to unexpected redundancy payments needing to be made following the service review, but more of an issue was a reduction in income from land charges.

There was also an overspend being forecast in Property of around £20k. This was again as a result of redundancy payments needing to be made following their service review.

It was noted that the Chief Executive Directorate budget was reduced in year on a yearly basis and it was queried whether this should be addressed as part of the budget setting process. Nick Carter explained that the budgets in his Directorate were not demand led and were therefore the easiest to reduce. Any savings could be used to help with pressures being felt elsewhere across the Council. Many savings were found from staff vacancies which was separate to the managed vacancy factor of 3%.

The lag of time between the end of a budget period and when the report was received by the Select Committee was highlighted and it was queried whether more up to date figures, even if draft only, could be provided. Nick Carter was of the view that if the Administration had first had the opportunity to approve the figures then it should be possible. Nick Carter agreed to investigate this option along with the request to again receive the more detailed reports.

RESOLVED that Nick Carter would investigate with the Administration and Finance officers whether a process could be agreed whereby the Select Committee could receive more current figures, alongside the request to again receive the more detailed reports, and would report this back.

53. 2009/10 MONTH 7 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING.

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 10) concerning the month 7 revenue budget.

RESOLVED that the information would be noted.

54. 2009/10 MONTH 7 CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING.

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 11) concerning the month 7 capital programme budget.

Simon Freeman advised that the position was largely unchanged from month 6. 18% of the budget remained to be spent at month 7, this was a vast improvement to the corresponding period of a year ago when this was closer to 50%. This was as a result of closer working with relevant service areas.

RESOLVED that the month 7 position would be noted.

55. S106 CONTRIBUTIONS.

The Committee received a verbal update on the work of the S106 Task Group (Agenda Item 12).

Councillor Zverko, Chairman of the Task Group, advised that two meetings had been held and a draft list of recommendations had been compiled. A further meeting was to be held on 4 February to finalise the recommendations before they were brought back to the Select Committee for approval.

RESOLVED that a special meeting of the Select Committee would be arranged to consider the report of the S106 Task Group.

56. WORK PROGRAMME.

The Committee considered the Resource Management Select Committee Work Programme (Agenda Item 13).

The items intended for the next scheduled meeting on the 27 April 2010 were noted.

Members were asked to begin giving consideration to items for the 2010/11 Work Programme.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) The items intended for the next scheduled meeting on the 27 April 2010 would be noted.
- (2) Members would give consideration to items to be added to the Work Programme for 2010/11.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.55pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature: