

22 SEPTEMBER 2016

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel held in Committee Room 1, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Thursday, 22 September 2016

* Cllr M R Harris (Chairman)

* Cllr Mrs A M Rostand (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* A R Alvey
* W G Andrews
M J Kendal
* Mrs A E McEvoy

Councillors:

* A D O'Sullivan
* M A Steele
* D B Tipp
* C A Wise

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

J D Heron

Councillors:

Officers Attending:

R Beere, A Climpson, Mrs R Drummond, C Elliott, Miss G O'Rourke and Mrs M Sandhu

Apologies:

Cllr Kendal

10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by any members in connection with any agenda item.

12 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

13 CUSTOMER SERVICES REVIEW

The Panel considered a project brief for a review of the Council's Customer Services, to transform the management of demand through digital customer services and engagement.

Membership of the Task and Finish Group for this project had already been established. The Group would receive regular progress reports and would help inform the strategic direction of the Customer Services Centre.

A key objective of the review was the reduction of avoidable demand and increased efficiency of processes, including digital delivery.

Whilst the emphasis was on efficiencies from improved digital delivery, it was acknowledged that not all customers were yet 'IT literate', and traditional service channels would continue to be provided for as long as required.

Members asked whether the review would tie in with the introduction of Universal Credit. It was explained that the project would not affect the Tax and Benefits Service, though the manager of the Service would be involved in the review.

Members also commented on the need for the website to be more user friendly, and it was confirmed that this was one of the project aims.

The Chairman pointed out that 20% of households in the New Forest had no reliable broadband provision, and this should be borne in mind.

RESOLVED:

That the project brief at Appendix 1 of the report and the role of members in the review be agreed.

14 DRAFT ICT STRATEGY - PRESENTATION

The Panel received a presentation on the proposed ICT Strategy. Mr Rob Beere, ICT Services Manager, had undertaken a review involving stakeholders, technology, people and processes.

A number of projects were planned over the next three years to improve provision and make the Council 'devolution proof'. This involved a reorganisation of ICT, which would rejuvenate the team and develop staff by increasing training in leadership and management, and introducing junior staff and undergraduates to solve business problems.

It was noted that some software products were due for renewal as they were no longer supported by providers. There would be greater capital investment in technology to bring systems up to date, with improved project planning and control, whilst making overall savings through a restructure and a review of practices. The restructure would shortly be subject to formal staff consultation.

Wi-fi improvements were planned around the building, and improvements in incident management and improved communication on major incidents was intended.

The review had commenced in July this year and would end around the end of November 2016. In general terms, it was intended to strike a balance between compliance with regulation, and pragmatism in maintaining efficiency and agility.

Mr Beere wished to consult elected members on their ICT needs, and would undertake a survey amongst councillors.

Members supported the approach outlined in the presentation.

15 MARINE AND ENGINEERING SECTOR (VERBAL UPDATE)

Mr Climpson explained that, due to organisational changes and staffing issues, this project had not yet been started, but would be picked up later in the year.

16 HOSPITALITY SECTOR - UPDATE

The Panel received an update on a programme of work in collaboration with the hospitality sector, through the New Forest Tourism Association and Hotel Group, Brockenhurst College and Bournemouth University.

As well as a general lack of work readiness in young people, there appeared to be a negative perception of the hospitality sector and a lack of recognition of the excellent opportunities it offered.

It was noted that the launch of the Young People in Hospitality Action Plan would now take place at the Salon Culinare event at Brockenhurst College in May 2017, instead of the "Chef's Demo" event on 6 November.

17 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered its future Work Programme.

Officers gave updates on various parts of the Work Programme as some items had been superseded by events and would need to be re-programmed or dealt with in a different way.

It was explained that some of the items relating to business and tourism would be re-visited after a review of that service had been completed later in the year.

Members agreed that a report on performance management measures be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

It was agreed that copies of the scoping document as well as the final report on the review of Health and Leisure be shared with COSP Members as they become available.

Members requested quarterly financial monitoring reports with a larger annual report. The report should include savings and income achieved, together with reviews undertaken.

Members requested regular updates on the impact of Universal Credit.

It was agreed that a review of the scrutiny function would be dealt with at a later date.

Members discussed the process by which grants to voluntary organisations were agreed and felt that the process should be as transparent as possible. It was acknowledged that this was the subject of a Task and Finish Group under the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel, though this Panel had responsibility for scrutinising grants to the Citizens' Advice Bureau and Community First.

It was agreed that, in the light of Members' comments, officers would review the Work Programme and bring a revised version to the Panel in November.

18 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES

Cllr Heron explained that the Medium Term Financial Plan to Cabinet looked at current shortfalls which would mean either reductions in services, or innovative ways of delivering in a more cost-effective way. Cllr Heron was asked whether there were any proposals to look at delivering services in partnership with other bodies and he replied that, aside from devolution, a number of other discussions were under way, and in the future, there might be scope to work with a number of our partners, including the National Park Authority and other bodies, including Bournemouth and Poole Councils. Much would depend on the Central Government announcement on devolution.

19 MEETING DATES FOR THE 2017/18 MUNICIPAL YEAR

RESOLVED:

That the following dates for meetings in 2017 be agreed (Thursdays at 9.30am).

25 May 2017

21 September 2017

16 November 2017

18 January 2018

15 March 2018

CHAIRMAN