

19 JANUARY 2017

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, 19 January 2017

* 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, Portfolio Holder, Finance and Efficiency
Mrs C V Ward

Officers Attending:

R Beere, A Bethune, Mrs R Drummond, A Rogers and Mrs M Sandhu

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs M J Kendal, Mrs A E McEvoy, Mrs A Rostand, and A D O'Sullivan

38 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 27 October, 17 November and 16 December 2016 be confirmed as correct records.

39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

40 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

41 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT - PRESENTATION

The Panel received a presentation on performance and productivity.

Members were provided with a copy of the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan and the Annual Performance and Provisional Outturn Report for 2015/16, which detailed the Council's vision and priorities to 2020, key delivery actions provided an overview of recent performance and achievements.

The presentation detailed:

- The Performance Management Framework (Corporate Plan, Delivery Plan and Resource Plans)
- Service Performance (Service Plans agreed by Executive Heads, Corporate monitoring undertaken by EMT and Business improvement tools used to make improvements and remove wasteful processes)
- Employee Performance (tackling poor performance and ensuring we have good day to day management practices in place)
- Pay and Performance (A direct link between performance and pay in place for senior managers. Pay and Reward review is underway. Where there is no direct link to pay and performance the market pay comparison is the top of the Band. So often we recruit employees within the Band and they progress.)

It was explained that staff performance development forms were completed using an online system, followed by an interview with managers. An outline was given of probationary period procedures for new staff, as well as the capability / performance measures. It is important to ensure that the right support and engagement is in place, which includes the employee support line, the re-introduction of Health checks and the Brand New Forest Card.

Members asked a number of questions to which answers were given.

Members queried whether fees and charges could be reviewed twice per year instead of annually, to take account of cost fluctuations and market conditions. Some functions had statutory annual reviews, but the matter would be reviewed where appropriate.

The Council had 800 Full Time Equivalent staff, 1250 total headcount, which had been steadily reducing over recent years.

Members thanked Mrs Sandhu for a most interesting and informative presentation.

42 ICT STRATEGY - UPDATE

The Panel received an update on the development of the ICT Strategy.

Members had received a presentation on the proposed ICT Strategy at the September meeting, which the Panel supported. The presentation had included modernisation and investment in infrastructure, and a staff reorganisation.

In summary, the report set out details of:

- Measures to protect and maintain front-line services
- Plans for wireless connectivity in major sites
- Improvements in customer interactions and with other organisations
- A proposed staff structure

- The project's portfolio / asset renewal programme
- Operating model
- Members' ICT

The Strategy was intended to cover the next 12-18 months, to stabilise ICT operations and to be a foundation for the long term. The main priority at present was to appoint staff to the new structure.

The Panel were very supportive of the Strategy and asked for an annual update, with brief progress reports mid – year.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet be advised that the Panel support and endorse the ICT Strategy.

43 BUDGET TASK AND FINISH GROUP FINAL REPORT

The Panel received the report of the Budget Task and Finish Group. The work of the Group comprised meetings with Portfolio Holders to provide scrutiny and assurance on behalf of all Members of the Council, looking at resource plans for each Portfolio Holder, budget books and other detailed information. A list of generic questions were asked of each Portfolio Holder as well as detailed questions for each Portfolio.

The Group were pleased that a number of last year's recommendations made by the Group had been adopted and progressed. The Group had been impressed at the clear shift of all Portfolios towards a more business-led approach and a strong theme of business development. The Group noted the substantial changes from corporate re-structuring and service reviews, both of which had delivered significant savings and were ongoing. The Group encouraged the Cabinet to seek further opportunities for provision of services in collaboration with other authorities as well as increasing income generation by offering the Council's services to other organisations, where practicable.

Members expressed particular support for exploring alternatives to Bed and Breakfast accommodation, including Council – run hostels.

It was noted that the Pension scheme was a Hampshire wide scheme, and the last review was in 2014, though the District Council had little influence in its running. Further changes would no doubt ensue. In view of the financial impact of pension costs variations, the Panel requested periodic updates.

The Chairman undertook to liaise with the relevant Portfolio holders regarding recommendations (b) and (f) to action them.

RESOLVED:

That it be a recommendation to Cabinet that :

- (a) All portfolio holders be urged to seek further opportunities for provision of services in collaboration with other authorities and organisations, especially the National Park Authority;

- (b) Representations be made to New Forest MP's on the Right to Buy policy and its detrimental effect on housing provision;
- (c) The Government be made aware of the effect on the public in regard to Universal Credit and the impact on the Citizens' Advice Bureau;
- (d) Consideration be given to increase income generation from offering the Council's services to other organisations, eg payroll, audit, and other services where practicable;
- (e) In view of its financial and community significance, COSP receive a report on the Leisure Review and be given the opportunity to comment before a decision is made.
- (f) A Task and Finish Group be set up to examine alternative options for Bed and Breakfast provision.

44 FINANCIAL UPDATE 2017/18

The Panel received an update on the latest position with regard to the financial assumptions made within the forecast for the medium term, with specific focus on the 2017/18 budget.

There had been a significant change to the settlement figures since the October Medium Term Financial Plan, though the Medium Term Financial Plan report reviewed by the Cabinet in January presented a forecast balanced budget for 2017/18.

The report detailed the latest assumptions for 2017/18 including the additional pressures from increased pension costs and a reduction in the New Homes Bonus Government Grant, breakdown of the use of reserves in 2017/18, Medium Term Financial Plan beyond 2017/18, and the Housing Revenue Account which included the Buy-Back and Development Strategy for 2016/17 to 2018/19. The Council will begin repayment of the HRA re-settlement loan in 2017/18.

Despite the funding variations over the last few months, the Council was still on track to set a balanced budget for 2017/18. The use of reserves was consistent with Council policy. Service reviews and strategy developments were underway in order to close the forecast deficits for 2018/19 and 2019/20, although it was likely that additional savings will need to be identified in order to close the gap fully.

It was noted that central government funding was likely to be withdrawn by the end of the current parliament, and by which time councils were expected to be self – financing.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted.

45 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered its future Work Programme.

The Chairman requested officers to arrange another session with BT Openreach and HCC to review progress with Broadband provision in the District. Members felt that little progress had been made in some parts of the District, despite promises made by BT. It was felt the matter should be given priority by the Panel this year, to underline the importance of fast broadband to all (business & residential) especially with new housing, through the Planning process.

HCC had an initiative running to try to persuade all developers of new properties to wire them, when built, to take fast broadband. This is something which might be considered as part of the Council's new Local Plan detailed policies. Officers would liaise on the timing of this item and consider how the District Council can best influence this.

Action: Manjit Sandhu / Chris Elliott

46 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES

The Portfolio holder mentioned three current projects:

- Commercial Property Investment (Strategy being developed)
- Customer Services Review (Channel shifting / link with ICT strategy)
- ICT Strategy (A significant 'game – changer' for the Council)

CHAIRMAN