

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1b, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 26 July 2012 at 11.15 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ian Armstrong, Bill Cowie, Richard Davies, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Colin Hughes (Chair), Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Peter Owen, Arwel Roberts and Gareth Sandilands

Observers: Councillors Joan Butterfield, Gwyneth Kensler and David Simmons

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill (Lead Member for Finance and Assets), Chief Accountant (RW), Corporate Improvement Team Manager (TW), Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

1 APOLOGIES

Councillors Meirick Davies and Allan Pennington

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ian Armstrong declared a personal interest in the Foryd Harbour Development (included in the Capital Plan at agenda item no. 8) as he was Chair of the Harbour Forum.

3 URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 28 June 2012 were submitted.

Accuracy – the following amendments were agreed –

- to include Councillor Meirick Davies in the members present section
- to rectify typographical errors replacing 'Sandilandsands' with 'Sandilands' in the members present section and to replace 'Councillor C.L. Hughes' with 'Councillor C. Hughes' as the committee's representative on the Housing & Community Development Service Challenge Group (page 13, item no. 10)

Matters Arising – the Chair drew members' attention to the updated list of scrutiny committee representatives on the Service Challenge Groups detailed within the

briefing papers (previously circulated). It was noted that the Regeneration Service (represented by Councillor Gareth Sandilands) would form part of the Housing & Community Development Service in future. Councillor Sandilands requested that he be invited to future Service Challenge meetings of the new Housing and Community Development Service because of his keen interest in the regeneration aspect. The Scrutiny Coordinator explained the change to scrutiny representation for the Highways & Infrastructure Service and Councillor Peter Owen reiterated his interest in highway matters. It was agreed that Councillor Owen would continue to attend that service challenge in addition to being scrutiny's representative for Children & Family Services. The Corporate Improvement Team Manager advised that the next round of service challenges would likely take place in October/November and he agreed to circulate the meeting dates as soon as they became available.

The Scrutiny Coordinator drew members' attention to the update on resolutions arising from the minutes which had been included as an appendix to the Scrutiny Work Programme report for consideration later on the agenda.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2012 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 FINANCE REPORT 2012/13

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill, Lead Member for Finance and Assets (LM:F&A) submitted a report (previously circulated) detailing the Council's performance against its budget strategy for 2012/13. The detail had been contained within the finance report presented to Cabinet on 17 July which had been included as an appendix and showed the budgetary position as at the end of June 2012 and savings achieved.

The LM:F&A provided a summary of the Council's financial position as follows –

- the latest revenue budget forecast showed a balanced position across all services, including schools and corporate budgets
- £1.312m (38%) of the agreed savings had been achieved with £2.131m (62%) currently being progressed
- highlighted key variances from budgets and savings targets relating to individual services
- a general update on the Capital Plan and Housing Revenue Account, and
- confirmed Cabinet's approval, of the Strategic Investment Group's recommendation, of the scheme to relocate Prestatyn Library.

During a review of the financial information the committee discussed a number of issues with the LM:F&A which focused on the following matters –

- concerns regarding the financial implications for the authority following completion of the housing stock condition survey which would likely identify a significant programme of works. The LM:F&A advised that the council was on track to achieve Welsh Housing Quality Standard by the end of the financial year. Once the outcome of the condition survey was known

consideration could then be given to the financial implications of future capital investment

- the valuable service provided by Integrated Children's Centres (ICCs) was highlighted together with the loss of Cymorth funding and concerns were raised regarding the £40k budget pressure identified for Rhyl's Oaktree Centre which was described as integral to early intervention for families in the area. Members stressed the importance of securing funding for the long term viability of both centres in Rhyl and Denbigh. The possibility of a new consortia bid with Home start for grant funding was mentioned and the Chair asked for an update on progress at the committee's next meeting. Members were advised that there had been a lengthy discussion on ICCs at the service challenge meeting with a number of funding models being explored
- Councillor Joan Butterfield referred to the Rhyl Town Centre Regeneration Project and sought clarification regarding the project specification, timescales and costing. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Coordinator look into the matter and report back thereon. Members highlighted the importance of monitoring such schemes to ensure that they were carried out in accordance with the required specification, in an appropriate timeframe and within budget
- progress made with the former North Wales Hospital, Denbigh was considered and members were advised of the latest position. Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts highlighted the lack of communication on this issue which prompted a debate during which members described communication as a widespread problem within the authority with councillors not always being made aware of issues affecting their wards and the wider community. It was agreed that the matter be referred to the Corporate Governance Committee to consider how communication with councillors could be improved
- clarification was sought on the reasoning behind the decision to relocate Prestatyn Library and the impact of that decision on service users and other library services in the county. Councillor Gareth Sandilands advised that Prestatyn Town Council had raised issues over car parking and health and safety and had suggested a pedestrian crossing be located at the new site. The LM:F&A provided further background information on the scheme which had been considered the best option for Prestatyn having taken all factors into account. A pay and display car park was situated across the road from the new location. Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts reported upon steps to modernise the county's library services ensuring no libraries were neglected and that appropriate funding schemes were secured. Councillor Butterfield highlighted the shortage of start up business units and suggested that the vacated library site could be used for that purpose.

The LM:F&A also clarified specific issues in response to members' questions and comments regarding various aspects of the report. He replied to questions regarding particular service areas and advised that those services identified as being able to achieve savings following service challenges had been detailed in Appendix 2 to the report. Bodelwyddan Castle and ECTARC were operated by

Arms Length Companies (both had council representation on their boards) and the grants provided by the authority would be reduced.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *the latest financial position in the delivery of the Council's budget strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan be noted;*
- (b) *an update on progress made to address the budget pressure identified for the Rhyl Integrated Children's Oaktree Centre be provided to the next meeting of the committee;*
- (c) *the Scrutiny Coordinator make enquiries regarding the Rhyl Town Centre Regeneration Project and report back thereon, and*
- (d) *the committee's concerns regarding the lack of consistent communication and engagement with councillors by officers to ensure they are kept fully informed of issues within the county be referred to the Corporate Governance Committee with a view to improving communication.*

6 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A report by the Scrutiny Coordinator was submitted (previously circulated) seeking members' review of the committee's future work programme and providing an update on relevant issues. Various appendices had also been attached to the report requiring members' consideration.

The Scrutiny Coordinator reported upon the development of the draft work programme and members discussed potential amendments in light of the business to be considered to ensure a manageable workload for future meetings. Nominations were also considered for scrutiny representatives to serve on the Schools Standards Monitoring Group and the Corporate Equalities Group.

After consideration members agreed that –

- the items listed for September meeting be confirmed
- the Review of Licensing Matters report be deferred to November (members also requested clarification on the collaborative arrangements with Conwy County Borough Council for this service by their next meeting)
- the reports on the Corporate Complaints Policy and Your Voice Complaints Performance (Q1) scheduled for October be amalgamated
- the Draft Tenancy Agreement and Handbook scheduled for November be referred to either Communities or Partnership Scrutiny Committee dependent upon whether there was any involvement with other housing associations (the Scrutiny Coordinator agreed to report back on the level of collaboration, if any, with Registered Social Landlords on this work)
- the suggested dates for receiving monitoring reports on the Corporate Plan and Your Voice Complaints be confirmed, and

- the submission of future financial monitoring reports to the Corporate Governance Committee as determined by the Scrutiny Chairs & Vice Chairs Group be supported.

The committee referred to the Review of Faith Based Education Provision which was subject to a future report to Cabinet and raised concerns over rumours circulating regarding the review. Members felt that all councillors needed to be made aware of the current position and requested a position statement be circulated.

Finally reference was made to the information report contained in the committee's briefing papers on the CSSIW Inspection of Audit Social Services and the Chair asked members to feedback any questions or comments to him outside of the meeting. Any performance issues requiring attention would be added to the committee's work programme.

RESOLVED that –

- subject to the amendments and agreements referred to above, the forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved;*
- clarification on the collaborative arrangements for Licensing and services within Planning and Regulatory Services be provided by the committee's next meeting;*
- the Scrutiny Coordinator report back to the committee on the level of collaboration, if any, with Registered Social Landlords in formulating the Draft Tenancy Agreement and Handbook;*
- a position statement be requested regarding the Review of Faith Based Education Provision (subject of a future Cabinet report) for circulation to all councillors and education co-opted members on scrutiny committees;*
- Councillor Arwel Roberts be appointed the committee's representative on the Schools Standards Monitoring Group and Councillor Richard Davies be appointed as substitute member, and*
- the Chair, Councillor Colin Hughes be appointed the committee's representative on the Corporate Equalities Group and Councillor Geriant Lloyd-Williams be appointed as substitute member.*

7 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair referred to his attendance at recent Service Challenge meetings and expressed his disappointment that savings had not been identified during that first round of meetings. He stressed the importance of scrutiny representatives attending during the next round of service challenges in October/November when savings would be discussed together with how services would be delivered. The Corporate Improvement Team Manager confirmed that invitations to Service

Challenge meetings would only be sent to those councillors whose attendance was required.

RESOLVED that the verbal report from the Chair regarding his attendance at recent Service Challenge meetings be noted.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

8 MONITORING THE CAPITAL PLAN

[Councillor Ian Armstrong declared a personal interest in the Foryd Harbour Development as he was Chair of the Harbour Forum.]

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill, Lead Member for Finance and Assets (LM:F&A) submitted a confidential report (previously circulated) providing an update on the Capital Plan outturn position for 2011/12 and the latest position for the period 2013/14 and 2014/15. Those projects approved by Council on 28 February 2012 had also been included within the report.

The LM:F&A advised of the latest position in terms of the major projects, property acquisitions/demolitions and highway programme works contained within the capital plan, clarifying issues in response to questions on specific projects and timescales including the funding provision for the Ruthin Leisure Centre development.

The following issues were also raised by members –

- serious concerns regarding the delay in demolishing the Honey Club in Rhyl in view of the building's condition and safety fears and the need to progress with the redevelopment of the site at the earliest opportunity
- clarification of particular aspects of the West Rhyl Housing Project together with assurances regarding delivery of the project within reasonable timescales
- the need to include timescales for major projects to assist in monitoring the progress and delivery of individual projects.

The LM&F&A responded to the issues raised by members as follows –

- confirmed that once consent had been granted demolition of the Honey Club would commence. If required on health and safety grounds the building would be demolished sooner. Both the Council and the developer were keen to proceed with the redevelopment as soon as possible
- elaborated upon the proposals for the West Rhyl Housing Project and advised that a detailed report would be submitted to County Council in the autumn. The Scrutiny Coordinator added that an open invitation would be extended to all scrutiny members to attend the next meeting of the

Communities Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 13 September in Rhyl to discuss the Rhyl Going Forward Programme which would include a tour of key strategic sites

- referred to the difficulties of including meaningful timescales for particular projects where various elements were dependent upon outside influences and not within the Council's control.

Members also discussed the WORKsmart flexible working project and subsequent implications of particular initiatives including the lack of car parking which had generated much debate and concern. The need to ensure that the authority was demonstrating value for money through WORKsmart initiatives was also highlighted. Councillor Joan Butterfield reported upon the benefits of SMART working introduced at Rhyl Town Council which was working well.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) the outturn position on the Capital Plan for 2011/12 and the latest position for the period 2012/13 to 2014/15 be noted, and*
- (b) the Lead Member for Finance and Assets be asked to take forward members' concerns regarding the safety of the Honey Club building and the need to resolve the matter as soon as possible.*

The meeting concluded at 1.30 p.m.