

STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 21 July 2011 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.00 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Nick Carter – in the Chair

Councillor A.M. Lovatt (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Jean Fooks
Councillor Norman Bolster
Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE
Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles
Councillor Dr Peter Skolar
Councillor Tony Crabbe
Councillor Ian Hudspeth
Councillor L Sanders

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Jim Couchman, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property

Councillor David Robertson, Deputy Leader

By Invitation: Councillor Charles Mathew

Officers:

Whole of meeting Guy Swindle (Head of Strategy and Communications)
Claire Phillips (Chief Executive's Office)

Part of meeting Sue Scane (Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer)

Agenda Item

Officer Attending

6,7 Lorna Baxter, Acting Head of Corporate Finance
7 Tim Chapple, Financial Manager
8 Graham Shaw, Head of ICT Business Delivery

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting [, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting/the following additional documents:] and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports [agenda, reports and schedule/additional documents] are attached to the signed Minutes.

32/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE
(Agenda No. 1)

33/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS
(Agenda No. 2)

Apologies were received from Councillor Hallchurch (Councillor Hudspeth substituting), Councillor Sherwood (Councillor L Sanders substituting), Councillor Wilmshurst (Councillor Crabbe substituting).

34/11 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2011 were approved and signed subject to corrections to officers in attendance and accuracy of declarations of interest.

35/11 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 4)

None

36/11 DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

(Agenda No. 5)

The Assistant Chief Executive & Chief Finance Officer gave an update on key work areas of the directorate. The following points were noted;

- Judicial review of the waste contract has been a significant work area for Law and Governance. Judgement has now been received.
- Human Resources has recently managed the council's successful reaccreditation of Investors in People. The organisation met all 39 areas of the assessment.
- Finance has been managing the final outturn and accounts have been sent to audit.
- The local government resource review has been launched and detailed technical papers are awaited. This will have a significant impact on how local government is financed from 2013.
- It was **AGREED** that scrutiny should have an item at a future meeting about the local government resource review.
- Repatriations of service personnel to RAF Brize Norton. A flag handover ceremony with RAF Lyneham is planned for 1 September. The county council is acting as facilitator to the repatriation issue given its responsibility for the Coroners service. The approach has been to work sensitively with media to ensure that military protocol is managed and the grief of families is respected.

Guy Swindle, head of Strategy and Communications gave an introduction to his role after two months in post. Guy outlined the key functions of the Strategy and Communications service area

1. Performance

How services across the organisation are performing and how the business strategy is being delivered

Managing the service and resource planning process with Finance

Promoting a data and evidence led approach to service design

A team approach looking at delivery in the round

2. Policy and Strategy

SYP3

Role in looking ahead to provide advice, support, guidance and analysis to the council and its services.

Other key work areas for this part of the team include Big Society, Locality working, Equalities, Partnerships and the voluntary sector.

3. Communications and Engagement

This work area includes our work with the media, internal communications and briefing for staff.

The approach is to develop more face to face communication and dialogue including listening to staff at points of change.

Work is currently underway to refresh the public website and improve its functionality.

Guy Swindle outlined that the service is currently being consulted on restructure proposals designed to make the service more flexible and customer focused.

37/11 SUMMARY OF 2010/11 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN REPORT

(Agenda No. 6)

The 2010/11 outturn report was noted.

It was requested that future reports identify internal and externally generated income in relation to ICT.

38/11 LONG TERM DEBT POLICY

(Agenda No. 7)

The Chairman invited Councillor Mathew to come to the table and participate in the discussion.

Tim Chapple, Financial Manager introduced the paper on the council's long term debt policy. He outlined the three elements to the policy: current debts; interest payments and debt management; and the accumulation of further debt.

It was noted that we receive government grant for majority of interest payments due on borrowing and that local taxpayers only contribute to the minimum revenue contribution of principal repayments. Each year we are paying off the minimum required level of capital and interest. Councillors expressed concern that debts were therefore effectively never cleared, as new borrowing was undertaken to fund the Capital Programme.

Total level of debt had risen from £308M in 2009 to £434M in 2011. Committee members expressed concern at this increase which was attributed to the borrowing required to fund the capital programme.

It was noted that in future prudential borrowing will be the only borrowing available to us.

Councillor Brighthouse asked a question about the impact of handing over assets to communities through the Big Society and what effect this would have on our ability to borrow and make repayments.

SYP3

In response it was noted that these transfers are currently small in value and that debt charges are not linked to individual assets but to the whole asset portfolio.

Councillors suggested that it would be more prudent to look at our potential to borrow each year and agree the programme from this.

The committee acknowledged that the Treasury Management Policy is reviewed on an annual basis and that the local government funding model is not the same as private business and is very transparent.

Councillors commented on the requirement to transfer schools to trusts where they become academies and that this has a further impact in reducing the council's asset portfolio.

Councillor Mathew suggested that the policy should be revisited, reviewed and represented.

It was **AGREED** that a seminar for councillors should be organised to discuss the policy further.

39/11 BUSINESS STRATEGY

(Agenda No. 8)

A. Business Strategy Programme

Guy Swindle introduced the Business Strategy and the eight key work strands as set out in the overview paper. It was also noted that each directorate has a business strategy to drive delivery. Each directorate sets out in scorecard progress in delivering against these priorities.

It was **AGREED** that progress reports to the Business Strategy Programme sponsor will be brought to scrutiny in future enabling scrutiny to focus on a key work strand each meeting.

B. Big Society Fund

It was noted that Cabinet allocated funding in the first round of the Fund on 19 July and that this round had largely reflected youth projects in response to changes in council service provision.

It was noted that applications for library related projects are not currently being accepted. This will be reviewed in light of the outcome of the Future Library Service consultation.

The committee **AGREED** to recommend to Cabinet that the Big Society Fund is continued in the next financial year.

The committee noted that the criteria for the Fund are fixed for this year but would like the opportunity to review the criteria for future years.

C. ICT Strategy Update

Graham Shaw introduced the item and gave an update on progress of the ICT strategy.

It was noted that in 2010/11 ICT was in budget and targets are expected to be met in 2011/12.

Delivery of the strategy is focussed in three areas

1. Finance and better value for money
 - Pressing suppliers robustly on price
 - Recycling equipment and software
 - Prioritising projects appropriately

2. Governance
 - ICT strategy board meets fortnightly to manage the work programme
 - Directorate representatives involved in programme and
 - Clear link to Business Strategy Group

3. Programme of work
 - Roll out of projects corporately including Windows 7 and Office 10. These are scheduled to roll out in one year and will be dependent on strong communications and training plan.

It was requested that acronyms in reports are explained in full or a glossary provided at the end of the report.

Partnerships with Hampshire County Council was discussed including the many similarities between authorities in terms of our use of technology. It was noted the opportunities to work together, share resources and develop pooling arrangements.

40/11 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 9)

It was noted that an overview of the 2011/12 Service and Resource Planning Process would be welcome and an item will be brought to the next meeting about Partnerships.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing