

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES

12 JUNE 2014

Present: Councillors Webb (Chair), Howard (Vice-Chair), Batsford, Sinden, Atkins, Beaver and Roberts

Lead Members in attendance: Councillors Birch and Cartwright

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following councillors declared an interest in the minutes as indicated:

<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Minute</u>	<u>Interest</u>
Webb	3	Personal – he is a trustee of the 7 Streets project

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 FEBRUARY 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2014 be approved as a true record.

3. FINAL REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CHANGES TO THE WELFARE SYSTEM

This item was moved up the agenda, with the agreement of the Chair.

Councillor Davies, as Chair of the Scrutiny review, presented the review team's findings to the committee.

The purpose of the review had been to monitor the impact of the recent welfare reforms on vulnerable residents in the town. The review had also considered the capacity of the Council and its partner organisations to respond to the changes.

The review team had also considered methodology to measure the fairness of the changes. The methodology included a fairness square, which set out four key principles of equitable decision making. Members considered appending a worked example, to illustrate the application of the fairness square, to the report. The terms of reference for the review were also amended to list Councillor Howard as a member of the review team.

As part of the review, Members had invited representatives of key agencies to attend an evidence gathering meeting to discuss the impact of the changes in more detail.

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Members had also considered the potential impact of further planned changes to the welfare system.

Councillor Batsford proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Howard, to the recommendation contained in paragraph 63 of the report, as follows “to work to relieve the effects of poverty by supporting sustainable approaches by partners that help tackle the root causes of poverty”. The proposed amendment was agreed by 6 votes to 0, with 1 abstention.

Councillor Beaver proposed an amendment to the recommendation contained within paragraph 60 of the report, seconded by Councillor Webb, as follows “that the council actively works with other agencies, such as the credit union, to reduce and in time eradicate the need for residents to have to go to loan sharks and pay day lenders charging exorbitant interest rates”. The proposed amendment was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED – (unanimously) - that:

1) the key recommendations from the review, set out in paragraph 54 to 64, are approved, subject to the Head of Housing and Planning Services making the above amendments. The recommendations will be submitted to Cabinet for an executive management response.

4. CORPORATE PLAN PART III - YEAR END PERFORMANCE INFORMATION AND TARGET SETTING 2014-15

The Head of Corporate Services presented a report to advise members of the year end-actual performance by the staff in the Corporate Resources Directorate against the targets and milestones set out in Part II of the Corporate Plan for 2013/14. Member’s comments were sought on the proposed performance indicator targets for 2014/15.

Councillor Howard took the Chair for the duration of the discussion.

Members noted some slippage in the target to deliver the annual audit plan. The Head of Finance advised that the delays had been caused by difficulties completing the Housing Benefit Grant Subsidy Claim. The annual audit plan had now been completed and the outcomes would be reported to Audit Committee. It was not anticipated that the delays would re-occur in 2014/15.

The committee were pleased to note that the restoration works to 6, 7 and 8 Pelham Arcade was nearing completion, and it was hoped that the café area of St Mary in the Castle could be brought back into use shortly.

Members acknowledged that the collection rate for council tax and non-domestic rates had exceeded the target for 2013/14. The Head of Finance commented that the council would continue to monitor changes in legislation, particularly regarding the business rate relief granted to small business, which may impact on collection rates for council tax and business rates in future years.

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The committee congratulated the Electoral Services team on the arrangements for the recent Local Government and European Parliamentary election.

Members also wished to thank all those involved in the delivery of the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for 2013/14.

Discussion took place regarding the switched on Hastings campaign, which took place as part of the big community switch. Over 1000 households had registered their interest in the scheme, 15% of which switched upon receipt of their offer. A further campaign would be held later in the year, ahead of an auction in October 2014. Members highlighted the importance of engaging with households who may be at risk of fuel poverty, particularly those using pre-pay gas and electricity meters. The Head of Corporate Services added that the council would continue to work in partnership with other agencies to raise awareness of the scheme.

Members noted that the proportion of work days / shifts lost due to sickness absence was 7.01, against a target of 6.25. The Head of Corporate Services suggested that, in future, the statistics for long and short term sickness should be separated, which was supported by the committee.

The committee noted that a report would be submitted to the Cabinet meeting in July regarding the planned refurbishment of Aquila House. The Head of Corporate Services advised that there would be significant disruption to staff while the works were ongoing. However, once complete, it was hoped the refurbishment of Aquila House would improve working conditions for staff and provide increased opportunities for flexible working.

RESOLVED – (unanimously) - that:

- 1) Members have considered the information that will form Part III of the Corporate Plan, and;**
- 2) The comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposed performance indicator targets for 2014/15 be referred to the Cabinet meeting on 7 July 2014, and;**
- 3) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee thank staff for their hard work in achieving the targets set out in the Corporate Plan.**

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at 6.55pm)