



Committee/Date

Performance Management
Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 27 November 2013

Item

3

Public

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PERFORMANCE AND STRATEGY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT 2.30PM ON THURSDAY 14 MARCH 2013 IN THE SHREWSBURY ROOM, SHIREHALL

Responsible Officer: Jane Palmer

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PRESENT

Committee Members:

T Barker [Chairman], M Bennett, G Dakin, S Davenport, R Evans, V Hunt, H Kidd, D Lloyd, A Mosley and B Williams

68. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Barrow [substitute M Bennett] and N Hartin [substitute R Evans].

69. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Members were reminded not to participate in the discussion if they had a disclosable Pecuniary Interest and to leave the room prior to the debate.

70. MINUTES – 25 FEBRUARY 2013

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Strategy Scrutiny Committee held on 25 February 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman:

71. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was agreed that the public question raised by Mr Dodson be considered as part of the agenda item on the final recommendations from the Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Group.

72. MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

There were no questions raised by Members.

73. PROPOSED TRAFFIC LIGHTS AT UPPER ROAD/ROMAN ROAD, SHREWSBURY

The Highways Engineer presented a report in response to an e-petition to Shropshire Council seeking the installation of a mini roundabout/traffic lights to aid traffic at the entrance/exit to Meole village at the junction between Upper Road and Roman Road. He explained that after carrying out turning count surveys and initial traffic models on a signalised junction, Officers had concluded in principal a three-arm traffic signal controlled junction could be provided without causing undue delays to traffic travelling on the B4380 Roman Road. This model showed that traffic signals would offer more reliable and in many cases, reduced waiting times for vehicles exiting Upper Road west.

A local Member, Councillor Owen, acknowledged that this was a difficult issue to resolve and thanked the Highways Engineer for his efforts in trying to find a solution. The other local Member, Councillor Williams, stressed the need for adequate consultation with local people particularly the residents of Upper Road, Hereford Road and Alms Court that would be particularly affected. He stated that the issue needed careful management in order to mitigate any unintended consequences e.g. some drivers may divert directly through Meole village as a result of changes to the junction.

The Highways Engineer confirmed that designs would be drawn up and an exhibition would be held at the local Scout Hut in order to allow local people to view the proposals. It was noted that the scheme scored highly for inclusion in the Local Transport Plan, funded by the Department of Transport, but the Committee did not have any authority to grant approval for its inclusion.

RESOLVED

- i) That the provision of a three-arm traffic signal controlled junction (with pedestrian/cycle crossings) at Upper Road west and B4380 Roman Road be approved in principal.
- ii) That, should the project be approved, it be added to the Local Transport Plan capital programme and a detailed engineering investigation and consultation be carried out in 2013/14, with a view to constructing the scheme when funds become available.
- iii) Given that the layout will require the junction with Upper Road east and B4380 Roman Road to be closed, a study be carried out on the Upper Road and Hereford Road junction with a view to upgrading the existing layout.
- iv) That it be noted that a full consultation exercise will be carried out on the production of the designs.

74. THE IMPACT OF FUNDING REDUCTIONS ACROSS THE VOLUNTARY COMMUNITY CENTRE [VCS]

In the absence of the Chairman of the VCS Assembly, the Committee received a presentation on the impact of funding reductions across the VCS by the Council's Head of Strategy, Research and Performance. A copy of the presentation slides is included with the formal record of the meeting.

Given the percentage of respondents to the survey, a Member questioned the weight that could be given to the survey results. Another Member added that the evidence resulting from the survey could only be considered as mediocre and a snapshot of the full picture. He suggested that if large organisations were suffering as a result of funding reductions then it could be assumed that the smaller ones would be too. The reduction in funding could have a huge impact on the viability of some organisations at a time when there may well be a greater need for the services they provided.

The Committee Chairman reiterated concerns on the low response rate to the survey and stressed that any future reports needed to be based on more robust information from a greater percentage of VCS organisations.

The Director of Operations stated that local commissioning provided a great opportunity to understand what the VCS organisations could do and to fund the appropriate organisations to get on and do the job that they were well able to do. Members noted that commissioning would be replacing grant funding and this was being developed. The Director of Operations cited the specific example of the Church Stretton pilot commissioning project.

In answer to a Member's concerns, the Head of Strategy, Research and Performance explained that there was no continuing budget to the VCS [previous funding had resulted in the establishment of the Shropshire Providers Consortium, the development of forums of interest and support of the relationship between the VCS and the local business sector]. However, it was noted that the VCS was an independent organisation that had won its own contract.

In answer to a further question, the Head of Strategy, Research and Performance suggested that it would be more beneficial to Members' understanding of the issues, to invite the Chairman of the VCS Assembly to attend a future meeting of the Committee to answer questions and to explain how resources were being used for the benefit of local people. This was supported.

The suggestion was made for a county-wide review to be undertaken to establish the gaps resulting as a consequence of the budget cuts, the impact on vulnerable people and the difficulties experienced by the VCS in the current climate. However, another Member commented on the time needed for a county wide review and the difficulties of any cross border funding of services and suggested that the results of the Church Stretton commissioning project would provide a better steer for the future. On being put to the vote, the proposal for a report to be presented to the Committee on the impact of

vulnerable people resulting from funding cuts to the VCS did not receive sufficient support and was lost 3 votes for, 3 votes against with the Chairman using his casting vote against.

RESOLVED

That the Director of Operations and the Chairman of the VCS Assembly deliver a joint presentation to a future meeting of the Committee to include:

- The results of the Church Stretton commissioning project
- The VCS use of its resources to benefit local people, to include examples of what has been happening at grass roots level
- Any gaps arising as a consequence of budget cuts and how these may be addressed

75. SCRUTINY REVIEW TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Group presented the Group's final recommendations to the Committee. The Director of Adult Services stated that a recent peer review of the Council's Adult Social Care function recommended that its scrutiny needed further development. Although pleased that the Task and Finish Group recognised this need he queried the agenda capacity of a single Committee to include Adult Social Care and Health. The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group agreed with this view that Adult Social Care and Health should fall under two separate Committee remits. The Chairman of the Healthy Communities Scrutiny Committee added that health had links with other issues and there was always the possibility of holding joint Committee meetings or joint Task and Finish Group meetings.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services suggested that the Task and Finish Group's recommendations could be initially presented to Council on 18 April 2013 with further work to bring the recommendations to fruition being undertaken by key Officers and scrutiny Members and presented to Council as soon as practicable following the elections in May 2013.

The Committee considered the public question raised by Mr J Dodson, as follows:

'The phrase 'outward facing' on page 3 highlighted paragraph 3 is basically the same phrase used by the former Council Chief Executive and used in Association letters and our Scrutiny reconfiguration observation document.

This phrase was a clear reference to the need for non-voting co-opted Scrutiny Panel members drawn from Associations and bodies such as ours to sit on one or more appropriate Scrutiny Committees. However there does not appear to be any direct reference to this perceived need to ensure an 'outward facing' or 'outward looking' approach.

Therefore is the Council going to continue with the same or similar approach to scrutiny which in the opinion of many will be an 'inward looking' and self

scrutinising structure?

The Chairman's suggested response was supported, as follows:

'The interpretation of the meaning of the words 'outward facing' imputed in the second paragraph of your question is not what is inferred by the members of the Task and Finish Group examining the future role, ways of working and structures of scrutiny within Shropshire Council.

Rather it means that scrutiny members should be considering outcomes and impacts for and upon the population and towns served by Shropshire Council rather than concentrating overly upon the processes and operations of the Council and its partners.

There is a strong case for increased involvement of expert co-optees in the work of Task and Finish Groups as well as for representatives of 'outside bodies' to be called to give evidence when 'Select Committee' style investigations are held. This way of working will continue to be encouraged and promoted'.

A Member voiced his support for external co-optees to sit on Task and Finish Groups however, the Committee Chairman suggested that this issue should be considered as part of the future deliberations on and development work on the Task and Finish Group's recommendations. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services commented that Task and Finish Group meetings being held in private allowed Members to 'think the unthinkable'. The Committee Chairman agreed that many Members may feel constrained by meeting in public and may prefer to hold open discussions without fear of issues appearing in the local press at an early stage of development. Another considered that cross party questioning in Task and Finish Group meetings should be held in private.

Another Member commented that it should be left to the individual Committee to consider whether it wished to invite individual co-optees to attend its meetings. Another added that co-optees needed to have an interest and/or knowledge in the subject matter and should only attend by invitation of the Committee.

In answer to a Member's drive for regular Chairmen's briefings to include the organisation of questions for the public meeting, the Committee Chairman did not believe that the process should be enshrined as a formal process. Another Member added that Committee Chairmen should conduct their respective committee meetings as they considered appropriate, it was a matter of 'chairmanship'.

RESOLVED

- i) That the recommendations detailed in the final report from the Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Group be initially presented to Council on 18 April 2013;

- ii) That the Head of Strategy, Research and Performance together with appropriate key scrutiny Members give further consideration to the implementation of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations and present their findings to Council as soon as is reasonably practicable following the May 2013 elections.

76. BUSINESS RATES COLLECTION AND PROCEDURES

The Revenues and Customer Contact Manager presented information on the procedures for collection and enforcement of business rates and the current performance levels.

The Audit Committee Chairman requested business rates monitoring information to be reported on a quarterly basis to the Committee and accepted that this information would be included within the finance monitoring report in future.

RESOLVED

That the information relating to business rates collection and procedures be accepted.

77. CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

The Head of Customer Care and Support Services presented the report on the current service provision and performance of the Customer Service Centre [CSC]. She stated that gradual progress was being made to deliver a more robust service and that data migration had largely been completed and new services added. Referring to earlier problems experienced with data transfer, she assured the Committee that future contracting would demand the same level of software as the Council, or the one below, so that problems would be minimal. She added that service users were pleased to deal directly with a person on the telephone as automated processes were kept to a minimum.

A Member suggested that the level of service satisfaction detailed in the report did not reflect the feedback that he received whilst working in his ward area. Complaints related mainly to the speed of call answering and the current use of a child's voice seeking fostering being played whilst waiting for a call to be answered.

Another Member commented on the danger of presenting customer feedback information as he did not consider it to be representative of the overall picture given that people generally tended to register dissatisfaction and those that were satisfied tended not to make their view known. The Head of Customer Care and Support Services commented that 'complaints' encompassed both service complaints and complaints about the actual customer service advisors themselves and this distinction was not made in the information as currently presented.

She added that the CSC now had a stable workforce and a six week training programme had now been withdrawn. New starters had a two week initial training and dealt with general enquiries and those with more experience dealt with other issues. She acknowledged that there was room for improvement and she anticipated that this would be evident in future performance monitoring of the CSC. The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Tina Woodward, acknowledged that there had been back office problems that had now been addressed and Members should pride themselves on the personal touch offered by the CSC for the users of the service.

RESOLVED

- i) That the current service provision and performance of the customer service centre be noted; and
- ii) That an update be provided to the successor Committee in six months' time.

78. REQUEST TO SCRUTINY FROM THE STRATEGIC LICENSING COMMITTEE

Members considered the request from the Council's Strategic Licensing Committee to consider the suggested terms of reference for a future scrutiny review of the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy, taking into account recent changes to the Licensing Act 2003, and its impact on the night time economy in Shropshire's market towns.

RESOLVED

That a scrutiny review of the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy be added to the Committee's Work Programme.

79. WORK PROGRAMME 2013

RESOLVED

That the content of the Committee's Work Programme be noted and approved.

80. DATE/TIME OF NEXT MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting of the Committee be held at 2.30pm on Wednesday 5 June 2013.

The meeting closed at 17.10 hours

CHAIRMANDATE