



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Performance Management Scrutiny Committee
12 February 2014

<u>Item</u>
<b>3</b>
Public

**MINUTES OF THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT 2.30PM WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2013 IN THE SHREWSBURY ROOM, SHIREHALL, SHREWSBURY [and reconvened on Wednesday 4 December 2013]**

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**PRESENT**

**Councillors:**

M. Bennett [Chairman], Mrs. J. Barrow, G Dakin, S. Davenport, R. Evans, V.Hunt, M. Kenny, D. Lloyd [Vice Chairman], A. Mosley and B. Williams.

**5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no apologies for absence.

**6. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

No disclosable pecuniary interests were declared.

**7. MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 14 MARCH AND 16 MAY 2013**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meetings of the former Performance and Strategy Scrutiny Committee held on 14 March and 16 May 2013 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

**8. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

a) The following question was raised by Mr S Mulloy:

The Financial Strategy was reported to Cabinet on the 24th July 2013 and it was agreed that a public consultation would take place over the summer as follows:

“The Council will work with its partners across the public sector to undertake public consultation on the budget for 2014/15 to 2016/17 over the summer months.....

Views will be sought from the public about key priorities, delivering required outcomes in a way that meets customer needs, within the available funding constraints the council must manage with. The development of the Financial Strategy will take account of consultation with residents and businesses.”

The Shropshire Council Draft Business Plan & Financial Strategy 2014 - 2015 was not publicly released until the day before the Cabinet meeting of 13th November 2013 and therefore members of the public were not able to register a question to be raised at Cabinet when this item was discussed.

Surprisingly, there was no ‘statement of consultation’ attached to the report, and it would appear that the summer consultation consisted of the 4 ‘Join the Conversation’ events that took place around the County. These attracted less than 100 members of the public in total!

Page 5 and 6 of the Draft Business Plan & Financial Strategy 2014 - 2017 is a statement on how Shropshire Council will listen to their customers and puts the focus on the “need to redesign everything we do as an organisation..... understanding customer needs as the basis for what we, and others do.... rather than a ‘we know best’ one-size fits all approach.”

It acknowledges that, “Wider than this, effective two way communication is key to building knowledge and understanding...” But unfortunately the 5 methods put forward (Page 6) to achieve this do not encourage this sort of engagement with the public, and in no way can they be considered a ‘redesign’ of the existing process which simply does not work.

The foreword by the Leader of Shropshire Council says “Instead of artificial set piece debates in the council chamber, we want to take this plan forward by involving people every step of the way...” I do not feel that people have been involved every step of the way and the proposed methods of involving people, laid out in this plan, involve doing the same thing over again, and expecting different results.

What I respectfully ask of this Committee, is that you insist on a review of Shropshire Council’s engagement methods, look at a short, medium and long term approach, so that we have an effective process in place that could mark this Council as a ‘beacon’ for other local authorities to follow.

I would be happy to respond with some ideas at the meeting if permitted by the Chairman within my 3 minute allocated slot?

The following response was provided:

‘We are redesigning everything we do and want people across the county and all our partners to be fully involved in this work to reinvent how we deliver services.

We want to hear views on the best ways to meet the needs of our customers and use what we are told to shape and improve the way we work.

The plan is a draft document which has been developed by consulting with the public, our partners, elected members and our staff. We look forward to their continued contribution between now and the end of January 2014, to improve and finalise the plan.

We are always open to ideas and suggestions about how we consult and engage people on all aspects of our services and their delivery. We welcome feedback on how we can ensure we are offering a range of opportunities for people to have their say, in the way that is best for them, and will listen closely to the ideas to be shared at the committee meeting’.

Mr Mulloy made further comments on how the Council should make improvements to its methods of engagement and communication with the public. The Leader responded that he had attended numerous public meetings to encourage feedback from the public and stressed that ‘engagement’ needed to be a two way process. The Committee noted that the results of the recent judicial review confirmed that the Council’s consultation process had been validated by the court system.

**b)** The following question was submitted by Heather Osborne, Chief Executive, Age UK Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin:

The Shropshire Council Business Plan deals with the demographic & financial pressures facing the Council including the rapid growth of those over 65 & 85 and needing care (e.g. dementia). It recognises the value of the Voluntary Sector's ability but the dramatic reduction in support for social care provision risks reducing this ability at a time when it is needed most. How can the Council work better with the VCS to ensure the best care & health service for its older & high need customers?

The following response was provided:

‘The Council is committed to working with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) as one means of providing support to vulnerable and older people living in our local communities. There are opportunities through the redesign of the support and services offered and by learning from the ageing well prototype to develop a range of different support offers targeted to the needs of local communities which will help to support older and vulnerable people to live independently for longer without early reliance on statutory services.

We welcome the continued input from the VCS, individuals and local community groups as to how we can develop and redesign services through using the existing resources that we have both, efficiently and effectively, as well as by working with the sector and individuals to attract other investment and support.

The existing relationships with the VCS, through both the VCS Board and the different Forums of Interest, are valued and provide opportunities for working with the sector in a way that will enable all stakeholders to influence and shape the future of support and services provided’.

**c)** The following questions were submitted by John Dodson – Shropshire Seniors

#### Question 1

The county's pot of potential volunteers is finite and may well decrease if volunteering is seen to be a cheap alternative to paid workers. What incentive provision is being made in the Business Plan to attract this perceived volunteer army?

Response:

The leaders of all of Shropshire's public services recognise the valuable role volunteers play in the delivery of their work and want to see this activity increasingly strengthened and supported. For Shropshire Council this approach is fundamental to many elements of service reinvention and therefore expressed in many areas of the Business Plan. The council is interested to explore how a place based approach to volunteering can be developed that offers rich and meaningful opportunities for people and is flexible enough to accommodate any number of reasons why people want to volunteer.

Shropshire Council and West Mercia Police are at the early stages of a piece of work that will deliver an understanding of how this could be developed in a practical and sustainable way. We plan to fully involve the VCS through the VCSA and will be making contact with the VCSA Support Team in order to facilitate VCSA engagement.

The work has been tentatively given the working name of 'Volunteers in Public Service' (VIPS) and will be led through Locality Commissioning colleagues with the support of the council's graduates. We are looking for as much involvement as possible from both the voluntary and public sectors to ensure a well-rounded co-designed approach. We are at the very start of the process and between now and April will be planning a range of engagement pieces with all of the key stakeholders and will then feedback with everyone who has been involved what we have discovered and learned, and create together a way forward that is practical, realistic, sustainable and most of all offers great opportunities for the people of Shropshire.

The ultimate objective of VIPS in this phase of work is to show, through evidence, how the coordination, recruitment and retention of volunteers within Shropshire's public sector can be done better to enable people to appropriately support activities within communities.

## Question 2

The Council's draft Business Plan proposes that services will mainly be placed in the hands of the Voluntary and Community Sector, Health Providers and Suppliers. What provision is being made in the Business Plan to provide a safety net for a service contracted to a commissioning company if that company goes out of business or chooses to delete a service within its contract because it is subsequently perceived as not commercially viable?

Response:

The proposal in the Business Plan is to work alongside the Voluntary & Community Sector, health providers and suppliers to focus on 'demand-led transformation' and to 'change the relationship between citizens and the Council'. This means that we will work closely with these key partners to have a dialogue with our customers around the nature of the support that they need and the extent to which such needs can be managed by the individuals themselves or with their families and/or community-based resources. We need to focus on determining those things which the council needs to provide, or commission, and those which can be secured in other ways. Increasingly, individuals will be purchasing their own care and support through personal budgets or their own funds which will not directly involve the

council but which will impact on the way that providers need to respond to this developing market.

Where the council does need to commission or contract on behalf of our customers we have robust procedures in place to ensure firstly the financial and operational viability of organisations who are bidding to hold a contract with us, and then to monitor progress and contract delivery regularly once the contract is in place. We expect to have a relationship with providers which allows for open and honest conversation around service delivery issues and will want to work with those providers who are able to commit to such a relationship.

Finally we will provide information for the market, through a 'Market Position Statement' for vulnerable adults, which is a requirement set by ADASS for all councils with a social services responsibility. The Market Position Statement sets out our expectations for the types of services we want to see in future alongside our projections for the level and type of support that our customers will want in the future. This will be a useful planning tool for providers on which to base their business plans so that they can start shaping their activity well in advance of specific procurement activity which may be undertaken.

## **9. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were none.

## **10. SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL'S BUSINESS PLAN AND FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2014/15 TO 2023/24**

The Committee Chairman explained the intention to run the meeting in a Parliamentary Select Committee style and stated that all members of the Council had been asked to submit any questions in advance of the meeting. From this feedback a comprehensive set of questions had been compiled and would be asked by members of the Committee to the relevant Officer. He stated that he did not intend to allow any further questions from the floor and reiterated that this was a new technique that the Committee wished to trial. Replying to comments made by the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, the Chairman gave assurances that the comments he had received from Councillor Barnes had been incorporated into the question list. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group stated that Councillor Barnes should be allowed to ask her own questions in accordance with the existing provisions within the Council's Constitution.

The Leader of the Council applauded the Committee's intentions to try to make something productive out of a challenging piece of work to scrutinise the Council's Business Plan. He explained that the Business Plan provided an overview of where the Council was aiming in the future and stressed that there would be interesting challenges ahead. He invited scrutiny to become involved in the design process and focus its work to find out how services were evolving as the Council transformed and to become involved from the beginning of the process rather than discussing matters after the event. He continued that, by working in different and new ways, Members could get closer to the work on the ground and be able to provide challenge at the time change rather than after the change had happened possibly by working in Task and Finish Group style with the support of the appropriate Director. The Chief Executive agreed that ongoing challenge by scrutiny was the way forward.

The Leader of the Labour Group stated that he would be happy to be involved in preliminary discussions about Task and Finish style working and added that it was incumbent on all parties to develop ideas to support and protect vulnerable members of society. The Leader agreed that areas of concern included adult social care and children and young people and urged scrutiny to assist Cabinet in these areas. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group added that his Group would be willing to join in the conversation and engage in the process.

In considering the new style of working the Committee raised several issues that they wished to see incorporated in any new scrutiny process that may be devised, as follows:

- The need for clear aims, ground rules and objectives
- A process for all parties to influence, inform and criticise, as necessary
- Recognition that the right results are obtained by involving the right people
- Involvement of other parties/organisations where feedback/input could be valuable
- Proper involvement of/consultation with the public
- Recognition of the need to move out of the Shirehall and investigate issues closely on the front line
- Need to roll out good practice as well as trying to improve service areas that could be done better

Responding to a Member's query relating to the scrutiny of the Council's budget, the Leader reassured the Committee that this would follow its normal process within the appropriate timescales and did not form part of the scrutiny of the Business Plan.

In drawing the debate to a close, the Chairman stated that the Committee welcomed the Leader's offer for scrutiny to become actively involved in the redesign of services and was confident that the new style of working would provide more opportunities for scrutiny to challenge and the public and partners to be a part of this process.

## **RESOLVED**

- i) That the scrutiny of the Council's Business Plan be set aside and the offer of an alternative approach be accepted;
- ii) That the meeting be adjourned to compile the new methodology and the areas in which future scrutiny work will be focussed;
- iii) That the meeting be reconvened at 10.30am on Wednesday 4 December 2013.

This part of the meeting closed at 3.20pm

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The meeting reconvened at **10.30am on Wednesday 4 December 2013.**

Apologies for absence were noted from Councillor J Barrow for this part of the meeting.

**10. SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL'S BUSINESS PLAN AND FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2014/15 TO 2023/24 [continued]**

Members received and considered papers on the rapid scrutiny of the Council's change programme together with a list of suggested topics that had been compiled by the Performance Manager in consultation with Directors and the Scrutiny Chairs in accordance with the decision made at the Committee's earlier meeting on 27 November 2013. A copy of this documentation is included with the formal record of this meeting and can be made available to any Member on request.

The Chief Executive explained that the proposed Rapid Action Groups [RAGs] would allow Members to be exposed to specific service areas, improve their knowledge base and allow close working with Officers working on the front line of service delivery. The Committee Chairman added that the RAGs were not traditional Task and Finish Groups but would comprise a small cross-party group of members working on a particular topic with an agreed lead member and would be tasked to go out and 'do the digging' for the information themselves. The Chief Executive added that this style of working should encourage Members to meet customers, work alongside service providers, the VCS, customers and Members would then be better informed when back in the arena of a scrutiny committee.

In answer to a Member's query, the Chief Executive stressed that the onus lay with Members to make this work and to make it happen as there would be no Officer support to facilitate meetings/information gathering. The Committee Vice Chairman commented that this work was a test of Member ingenuity and leadership and stressed the need for the RAGs to report back their findings to the appropriate scrutiny committee. The Chairman commented that work flows would be scrutinised and would allow Members to query the direction of change of any given service area from a more informed position.

The Chief Executive cited the example of the work that had been undertaken in the area of looked after children where a key cost could be avoided if children were not brought into the system in the first place and the whole flow of demand was being investigated. However, once children were 'in the system' it was vital that the best outcomes were achieved for them; the Committee noted that a small scale trial of something new was a sensible way forward and, if successful, could be rolled out on a larger scale. The Chief Executive added that ideas for good practice could sometimes be gleaned from elsewhere and the Council would aim to use 'the best' or, alternatively, innovate itself.

The Leader of the Labour Group stated that he did not support the suggested new way of working and considered that local government was being rapidly reinvented and considered it was too late in the day to start working in this way to scrutinise the Business Plan. He suggested that time would be better spent examining the concept of selling off the Council's services that pervaded the Business Plan. He stated that Members should be looking at the Council's budget and should be able to understand where the cuts were coming from whilst also addressing other issues

such as, massive staff reductions, an update on progress made on commissioning and customer feedback from the recipients of now privatised services.

The Liberal Democrat Group leader voiced concern that the Council's budget needed to be approved by the end of February 2014 and there was little time for Members to understand the budgetary issues facing the Council. Another Member commented that the limited time available should be used to look at the budget and suggested that a lead should be taken from 'Good' Councils. The Chief Executive countered these remarks by drawing attention to the Council's decision to redesign itself, cut out bureaucracy and waste and meet customer needs more quickly and efficiently. Members noted the plans relating to ip&e, the sale of its services to others whilst the Council maintained control.

The Committee Chairman re-iterated that the RAG work would provide Members with an opportunity to get involved in the redesign of services and have direct input into 'change' rather than just reacting to change. The Chief Executive agreed with these sentiments and added that this new method of working was an invitation to scrutiny to get involved in the process of redesign.

Responding to a Member's concerns on the dearth of consultation with the public at large and stakeholders, the Chief Executive commented on the successful Judicial Review case that illustrated that the Council had a robust consultation process although it was recognised that this could still be challenged.

In drawing the debate to a close, the Committee Chairman drew Members' attention to the new approach, a new way of working that had already attracted the attention of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, and urged the Committee to determine whether or not to support the formation of RAGs and the potential, suggested areas for scrutiny.

The majority of Members were in support of the new way of working and suggested some minor amendments to the approach detailed in the tabled document:

- Rapid Action Groups should comprise at least 3 – 4 cross party Members [not just Members involved in scrutiny]
- Opinion of all Members should be canvassed to ascertain in which areas scrutiny should be involved and which RAGs Members may wish to join and the skill/knowledge/interest they could bring to the Group
- The potential list of topics for consideration to be agreed by the Scrutiny Chairs
- The need for a Job Description for the Lead Member and members of RAGs to be compiled [and approved by the Scrutiny Chairs]

In answer to a Member's suggested topics for scrutiny work [the Veolia contract, ip&e, 360 communications], the Committee Chairman reminded all Members that ordinary Task and Finish Group work could still be undertaken and areas of work for the Scrutiny Committees could still be put forward in the first instance for consideration by the Scrutiny Chairs; the RAGs should be considered as an additional 'tool in the box'. The Committee Chairman commented that the RAGs were a new concept and relied heavily on the willingness and ability of Members to do the work for themselves and report back to the Scrutiny Committees. Given the scheduled Scrutiny Chairs' meeting for 11 December 2013, the Committee Chairman suggested that, as a consensus view on topic selection was unlikely at this stage, that this be considered at the forthcoming Scrutiny Chairs' meeting.



## **RESOLVED**

- i) That the tabled scope and approach for Rapid Action Groups [RAGs] be approved subject to the following minor amendments:
  - Rapid Action Groups should comprise at least 3 – 4 cross party Members [not just Members involved in scrutiny] and the Groups be politically balanced
  - A Job Description for the Lead Member and members of RAGs be compiled [for approval by the Scrutiny Chairs]
- ii) That topics for consideration by RAGs be considered and agreed at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs' Group on 11 December 2013.

## **11. DATE/TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE**

It was noted that the Committee was scheduled to next meet at 2.30pm on Wednesday 22 January 2014.

The meeting closed at 11.50am