

SHOPSHIRE COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2014

**2.30 - 4.10 pm in the Shrewsbury Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, SY2 6ND**

Responsible Officer: Jane Palmer
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Present

Councillor Martin Bennett (Chairman)
Councillors David Lloyd (Vice Chairman), Joyce Barrow, Gerald Dakin, Steve Davenport,
Roger Evans and Dave Tremellen

1 Election of Chairman

RESOLVED:

That Councillor M Bennett be elected as Chairman of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

2 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors V Hunt [Sub: Councillor B Williams] and A Mosley.

3 Appointment of Vice Chairman

RESOLVED:

That Councillor D Lloyd be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

4 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

No interests were declared.

5 Minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2014

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the addition to the formal record of the meeting of the written response to Mr Perks' public question, the minutes of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 March 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6 Public Question Time

There were no questions received from members of the public.

7 Member Question Time

There were no questions received from Members.

8 Public Service Network

The Head of Customer Involvement presented the draft terms of reference for scrutiny of the Public Service Network [PSN] and the merits of establishing a Task and Finish Group to undertake this work.

He drew particular attention to the objectives of this work, namely:

- Understanding the national framework requirements
- How the Council is addressing the PSN criteria
- Identifying the effects of the framework requirements on the Council's plans, for example home and mobile working
- Understanding expected future requirements for the framework and any implications for the Council
- Identifying the benefits of accreditation to the framework

Referring to the methods to be used by a Task and Finish Group, a Member requested that the implementation experience of the Council 'and Members' should be tracked. In response to another Member's concern whether work in this area would be of any benefit given the Government's strong lead in this area, the Head of Customer Involvement explained that there would be little latitude in considering how the Council met compliance. He added that there would be benefit in investigating how the changes would impact on the Council, Members and staff and commented that it may also be possible to identify measures to militate against any problems.

The Committee Chairman commented that work in this area may allow the Council to get 'ahead of the game' and stressed that IT was a core method of service redesign and service delivery. He added that the suggested Task and Finish Group would be able to gain an insight into the Council's future development and be able to influence this development.

The Head of Customer Involvement added that the work of the Task and Finish Group could help frame and shape a new IT strategy for the future whilst being mindful of the Council's need to maintain its compliance. Members noted the issues regarding the Council's network set up and the initial lack of clarity from the Government's set criteria had led to some confusion and had taken time to overcome. The Head of Customer Involvement assured the Committee that the majority of Councils had now achieved full compliance and referred to the ongoing liaison between authorities through the SOCITM [Regional IT Managers] network.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the draft terms of reference for scrutiny of the Public Services Network be approved;

- ii) That a Task and Finish Group be established to undertake this work;
- iii) That the Head of Customer Involvement take the role of Lead Officer for this Task and Finish Group; and
- iv) That the Task and Finish Group report its findings to the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee in September 2014.

9 Discretionary Housing Payments [DHP] Task and Finish Group findings

The Chairman of the DHP Task and Finish Group presented its findings to the Committee. He stated that the members of the Group had found the work to be interesting and thanked the Officers involved in supporting the Group.

He drew attention to the fact that although there was a broad framework for the allocation of DHP, every individual case had different circumstances; he added that the Group had been able to consider a number of case studies and this had helped considerably in drawing up its conclusions. He added that the Task and Finish Group had also been made aware of the new processes and procedures that were being developed for the new team of staff whose work area also included the Support and Prevention Fund.

In drawing Members' attention to the Task and Finish Group's recommendations, as detailed on pages 6 and 7 of the report, he drew particular attention to recommendation 6 [relating to the inclusion of Disability Living Allowance DLA within the calculation for DHP] and recommendation 9 which highlighted the shortage of 1 and 2 bedroom properties that prevented people from downsizing to more appropriate accommodation for their needs.

In response to a Member's query, the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group commented that the Group had wished to speak to DHP applicants face to face but, unfortunately the applicants had been too daunted to be interviewed by Councillors and had declined.

In response to another Member's concerns regarding the inclusion of DLA within the calculation for DHP, the Task and Finish Group Chairman commented that the new processes and procedures being used by the new staff team included closer working with support workers and ongoing dialogue rather than being a very paper based assessment. It was further noted that consideration of case studies had shown that some such applicants had excess income over expenditure; DHP should be considered as a short term stop gap whilst steps were taken to come to a longer term solution.

A Member's proposal to exclude DLA from the DHP calculation and to include this aspect as a key part of the recommended 6 month review did not receive sufficient support from the Committee. The majority were supportive of recommendation 6 from the Task and Finish Group that did not exclude DLA from the DHP calculation whilst recognising that this would form a key part of the 6 month review of the Council's revised processes.

Referring to a Member's query whether there was any appeal process, he added that the new process included a Reconsideration Board that provided an opportunity to review and reconsider applications.

The Task and Finish Group Chairman recognised Members' concerns that DHP funding that was unspent was returned to government but gave assurances that the Task and Finish Group had been satisfied that DHP funding was being used for its intended purposes, was being allocated appropriately to support applicants and need was being met. He commented that any additional DHP funding received by the Council would be spent to support the need and he hoped that Members would recognise that in some years the monies would be underspent and in other years there may be more applicants than funding available. An understanding of 'need' was recognised as being an integral part of the application process.

In response to a Member's query on the increase in DHP funding received by the Council, the Welfare Reform and Support Manager explained that some applicants needed their funding awarded for a longer period of time in order to allow them to change their situation and this could take longer to achieve.

RECOMMENDED:

That the following recommendations from the DHP Task and Finish Group be endorsed by the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee and considered by Cabinet:

1. The Group is concerned it is unable to evidence original approval of the scheme and that it may be timely for Council to re-approve the policy with a particular clarification of the Council's objectives for the use of DHPs.
2. Given the impact of Welfare Reform and other pressures the Group acknowledges the importance of DHPs and the support it can provide to tenants at a time of change.
3. The Group believes it is important to ensure the use of Shropshire's allocation is maximised to support the need of Shropshire tenants.
4. The statistics on grant and refusals of awards are provided for the DWP which do not give a full picture of the scheme's operation. The Group feel a local set of indicators would be beneficial in understanding its operation and outcomes.
5. The Group supports the introduction of the revised process from 1st June as a more flexible, simplified approach. It suggests that its impact be reviewed in 6 months' time by the Task & Finish Group.
6. Given the commentary within the report, the Group believes that at the present time DLA should not be excluded from the calculation but this should form a key aspect of the 6 month review referred to in recommendation 5 to ensure the needs of disabled tenants are being met.

7. Whilst most applications are from social housing tenants, the scheme also applies to tenants in the private rented sector. Though engagement has proved difficult, the Group believes that attempts should be made to better support private rented tenants through the use of DHPs.
8. The Group had discussion about tenant's awareness of DHPs. Though obviously Support Workers and others are well versed in DHPs the Group felt there should be a greater awareness by tenants of DHPs and their purpose.
9. It is clear that many applications relate to the impact of the Spare Room Subsidy. Whilst a number of people have been assisted to downsize to more appropriate accommodation, it is clear there is a shortage of such accommodation. Though perhaps outside the scope of our consideration, the Group strongly believe that future development of social rented housing needs to take account of this shortfall and development programmes need to allow for increasing the availability of one and two bedroom properties. Whilst it is possible that the future policy framework could change, the Group feel that this is an area worthy of further consideration by Scrutiny.

10 Quarter 4 Performance Report 2013/14

The Performance Portfolio Holder and his Deputy presented the Quarter 4 performance monitoring information illustrated by the organisational health score card and performance dashboards that had been produced on relevant indicators for each of the Council's priorities. The report summarised the latest performance measures relating to the Council's four priorities, namely:

- Keeping Children Safe
- High Quality Education
- Looking After Vulnerable People
- Economic Growth

The Performance Manager explained that presentation of the dashboards at this meeting afforded Members the opportunity to take a broad overview of the situation and he assured the Committee that the relevant dashboards would feature on the agendas of the remaining Scrutiny Committees as appropriate. He urged the respective Scrutiny Committee Chairs to liaise with relevant Directors and Portfolio Holders to encourage meaningful consideration of the issues highlighted in the dashboards.

The Performance Portfolio Holder added that it would be appropriate for the Organisational Health Scorecard to be presented to each Scrutiny Committee together with the dashboard/s appropriate to the Committee's remit.

RESOLVED

- i) That the Quarter 4 performance report be noted and supported;
- ii) That the Organisational Health Scorecard together with the dashboard/s appropriate to the Committee's remit be presented to each Scrutiny Committee; and
- iii) That the Portfolio holder, his Deputy and a Member Working Group continue to refine the performance reporting mechanism and work with the Scrutiny Committees to ensure that the refinements result in a greater and clearer understanding of the information presented.

11 Work Programme

The Performance Manager presented the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee's draft Work Programme. The Committee Chairman reminded Members of the

need to ensure that scrutiny activity was outcome based and drew attention to the need to complete the scrutiny pro-forma on any issue that Members may wish to raise for potential scrutiny activity.

A Member suggested that consideration should be given to unspent monies within the Local Support and Prevention Fund. The Chairman commented that an Officer briefing paper on this Fund detailing how the monies were being spent together with the reasons for unallocated funding should be sent to all Members in the first instance. The majority agreed that, once this information had been circulated, the Committee would be better placed to make an informed decision on whether or not to add the item to the Work Programme based on outcome based scrutiny activity.

Another Member suggested 'fracking' as a possible issue for future scrutiny work. Again, the Chairman urged Members to raise any issues, ideally items that related to elements of the Council's Business Plan, for potential addition to the Committee's Work Programme in accordance with the scrutiny assessment pro-forma mentioned earlier in the debate.

RESOLVED

- i) That the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee's draft Work Programme [dated 11 June 2014] be approved; and
- ii) That appropriate Officers produce and circulate to all Members a Briefing Paper on the Local Support and Prevention Fund to include reasons for monies spent and unspent; and
- iii) That, in the light of the information received by Members at ii) above, the Committee considers at a future meeting whether any positive outcomes could be derived from scrutiny involvement in this issue.

12 Date/Time of next meeting of the Committee

It was noted that the Committee would next meet at 10.30am on Wednesday 9 July 2014.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: