

SHOPSHIRE COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2017

**9.30 - 10.55 am in the Ludlow Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, SY2 6ND**

Responsible Officer: Julie Fildes

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Present

Councillor Claire Wild (Chair)

Councillors Gwilym Butler (Vice-Chair), Karen Calder, Roger Evans, Alan Mosley, Peggy Mullock, Dave Tremellen, Leslie Winwood, Ed Potter (Substitute) (substitute for Cecilia Motley) and David Vasmer (substitute for Hannah Fraser)

45 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cecilia Motley (Substitute Councillor Edward Potter) and Hannah Fraser (Substitute Councillor David Vasmer).

46 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None were disclosed.

47 Minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2017

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2017 were confirmed as a correct record.

48 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

49 Member Question Time

There were no questions from Members.

50 Council Tax Support Scheme

The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager gave a presentation on the proposed changes to Shropshire Council's Council Tax Support Scheme containing the information requested by Members at their meeting on 8th November 2017 [copy attached to the signed minutes].

Members consider five examples of how the proposed changes would affect different residents. Members noted that in some of the examples the shortfall being made up through Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Grants. The Head of Finance, Governance and Assurance explained that this was a fund which provided additional finance to assist Local Authorities support those most affected by some of the key

changes in housing benefit. It was not paid automatically and was seen as a transitional benefit. He continued that there was £351,000 in unallocated funds which if it was not claimed would be returned to the Government. He continued that the fund had strict eligibility criteria which not all applicants could meet. In response to a Member's question regarding the bureaucracy of applying for the grant, the Revenue and Benefits Service Manager confirmed that they were looking to simplify the application process.

The Head of Finance, Governance and Assurance observed that central Government had not indicated how long this fund would continue to be offered and it may be reduced with the introduction of Universal Credit. In response to a Member's query he confirmed that all eligible benefit claimants and partner organisations had been advised about the fund.

The Revenue and Benefits Service Manager confirmed that the Council had to make the payment of DHP to the applicant and could not credit the amount against their Council Tax liability. Members requested that the Chief Executive raise this with the County's Members of Parliament.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group moved that due to large amount of information being presented that the meeting be adjourned and the item be continued at the next meeting of the Group. A Member commented that this was the additional information requested at the previous meeting of the Committee and the underlying principles had already been explored. On being put to the vote this movement was lost.

Members considered the collection rates in neighbouring councils where a charge had been levied. The Head of Finance, Governance and Assurance observed that changes in collection rates were also impacted by other factors and so the changes in levels could not be seen as entirely due to changes in Council Tax Support Schemes. He continued that the Financial Strategy had assumed a reduced collection rate following the proposed implementation the Council Tax Support changes.

Members requested further information regarding the assistance that would be give to vulnerable people who would be expected to make a contribution to Council Tax following the change to the Council Tax Support Scheme. The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager stated that his department would continue to actively engage with residents experiencing difficulties and would continue to work closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau and other partner organisations to mitigate the impact of the changes.

The Leader of the Liberal Democratic Group read out a letter received from a resident [copy attached to the signed minutes] expressing concern over the proposed changes. The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager requested further details so he could investigate the issues raised. Officers explained that this element of DHP administration was administered by the Welfare Support Team.

The Revenue and Benefits Service Manager advised Members about the consultation survey. He explained that all affected claimants, support groups and

partner organisations had been written to and asked to complete the survey. Seven thousand five hundred letters had been sent and one hundred responses had been received. He agreed to circulate the responses to Members.

In response to the recommendation that the Committee supported Option 4 of the report, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group moved that Option 1 should be adopted with a review in 12 months time following the introduction of Universal Credit. This movement was lost.

Agreed:

that Option 4 of the report be endorsed with the amendment that the Welfare Task and Finish Group would consider the use of DHP to support claimants adversely affected by the changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme and a review to be undertaken 12 months after the introduction of Universal Credit.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group sought advice from the Solicitor on the submission of a Minority Report. The Solicitor advised that a Minority Report would not be appropriate as Cabinet had not specifically requested the Scrutiny Committee to examine the issue, but had included Scrutiny as part of a wider consultation process. Also, as the Chairman of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee would be giving a verbal report to Cabinet later that day, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group could also give a verbal report to Cabinet.

51 Digital Transformation Programme Update

The Head of Human Resources and Development gave a presentation on the Digital Transformation Programme [copy attached to the signed minutes]. Members noted that a staff information session entitled 'Art of the Possible' was being held on Friday 15th December 2017 and this would concentrate on the Customer Contact element of the Transformation Programme, as it was the first area to be introduced. In answer to a Members concern about communication the Head of Human Resources and Development confirmed that with the new system information could be shared in a way not possible under the old system and flags about contact methods could be incorporated. She continued that where appropriate information could be shared with partner organisation.

In answer to a Member's question, the Head of Human Resources and Development confirmed that Call Centre software would be introduced in January/February 2018, CRM in April 2018 and the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Social Care Software following in mid to late 2018. She added that it would take time to transfer all the necessary information to the new systems and it would be an on-going process to develop Single Customer View (SCV) across the organisation.

Members discussed the 'My Shropshire' part of the new website, which gave users an individual account and could provide specially tailored information for each user. It also gave Council Members the ability to update their individual pages under the My Community Tab.

The Head of Human Resources and Development explained that with the new interactive system when a Member of the Public made a request for a service, a

ticket was created which was updated as the item progressed and this could be viewed by the resident under the Tickets tab.

Residents could also book additional paid for services under the My Extra Services tab. It was anticipated that this page would also contain information relating to the voluntary sector and to appropriate local businesses. The Head of Human Resources and Development agreed to demonstrate the new website to Members once she was in a position to do so and when the system was launched there would be a series of Road Shows to promote and explain it.

The Head of Human Resources and Development agreed to consider how residents would set up a My Shropshire user account, how it could be accessed and whether it would be age restricted.

52 Welfare Reform Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference

Members considered the terms of reference for the proposed Welfare Reform Task and Finish Group. It was agreed that an additional item would be added to its aims, that it would review the use of the Discretionary Housing Payment Grant in relation to the implementation of Universal Credit. The group would review the situation again 12 months after the implementation of the new system.

Agreed:

That the Welfare Reform Task and Finish Group be established, with the additional aim of reviewing the Discretionary Housing Payment Grant in relation to Universal Credit.

53 Date/Time of next meeting of the Committee

It was noted that the Committee would next meet at 2.00pm on Monday 11th December 2017.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: