

Minutes of the Corporate Review Committee Meeting held on 13 January 2014

Present: Philip Jones (Chairman)

Frank Chapman (Vice-Chairman)	Derrick Huckfield
Tim Corbett	Kevin Jackson
Carol Dean	Brian Jenkins
Brian Edwards	John Taylor
John Francis	Mike Worthington
Kath Perry	

Also in attendance: Ian Parry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Transformation)

PART ONE

25. Declarations of Interest

There were none on this occasion.

26. Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2013

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2013 be confirmed and signed by the chairman.

27. Leading for a Connected Staffordshire - Staffordshire County Council Draft Strategic Plan 2014 to 2018

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Transformation which introduced the draft of the Strategic Plan 2014-2018, which was attached as an appendix to the report, for review and comment.

The report highlighted the fact that the Strategic Plan set out the vision and priorities of the County Council and that its high level delivery would be supported by a business plan, which would be presented to the Committee in March 2014. A timetable for consideration of the Strategic Plan and Business Plan by Cabinet and Council was set out as an appendix to the report. Detail was also given of customer insight used to develop the report, including details of the national policy context around public perception of public services and levels of public trust in local government. It was highlighted that locally there were higher than national levels of trust in local services and satisfaction with the local area. The Strategic Plan set out the vision to achieve the Council's key priorities whilst maintaining these high levels of trust, this would also be underpinning through a revised Community Engagement Strategy.

Following a previous request from the Committee, a copy of the outcomes of the Local Government Association Peer Challenge was appended to the report. This outlined the approach taken by the peer challenge team, as well as the key issues identified for investigation which included strategic commissioning, working in partnership and engaging with communities. The peer challenge report highlighted a number of areas of achievement, particularly when using partnership approaches such as health and social care integration, the i54 development and the establishment of Entrust. Key future challenges, including embedding commissioning frameworks across the authority and

involving all members in commissioning processes and public engagement were also highlighted.

During the discussion, the following key points were raised:-

- Members queried the level of genuine public understanding of the context local government was operating in, particularly in terms of moving away from universally delivered services to a more targeted approach. The Deputy Leader commented on the role that the Council could play in driving societal change through both incentivising and penalising relevant behaviours.
- In response to a question about the insight used, the Head of Insight confirmed that engagement work was carried out in partnership with other organisations though the County Engagement group.
- Members commented on the impact of work not only from the County Council but from other partners on achieving the priority aims. The Deputy Leader recognised this as a key challenge for the public sector in the immediate future, highlighting the Council's commitment to working collaboratively with partners. In response to a further query, he commented that this approach required innovative approaches based on addressing long term issues and collaborative approaches helped to share risks.
- A number of comments were made based on the Peer Challenge report, with Members asking how the Council would evaluate the impact of commissioning on achieving outcomes. The Deputy Leader reiterated that the Council's approach to commissioning referred to embedding a mindset across the Council and was not an end in itself and evaluation would reflect this. In response to comments around performance management he advised that this would be covered in the Council's business plan.
- Queries were raised about the impact and performance management of existing joint working, including the integrated health and social care arrangements and Entrust. The Deputy Leader referred to the ongoing internal commercial scrutiny through organisations such as Entrust and the Director of Law, Democracy and Transformation highlighted the formal accountability arrangements through the contract. He also commented on the increased performance management of a number of areas since they had been transferred to Entrust.
- Reference was made to increasing Member understanding of the commissioning process. The Deputy Leader referred to recent Member Development events focussed on outlining the commissioning process for Members and made it clear that this would continue to be a key element of how the Council worked going forward. Members reiterated the need to refresh overall understanding of the process and begin to evaluate the impact of commissioning on outcomes.
- Members also commented on the references in the Peer Challenge to the involvement of non-Executive Members in the commissioning process, highlighting examples such as the Strategic Property Partnership with Staffordshire Police where early involvement could help to allay Member concerns about policy decisions. The Deputy Leader briefly commented specifically on the property partnership, highlighting that it was still in the early stages of development and commenting on areas of commercial sensitivity that defined appropriate involvement.
- The Director of Law, Democracy and Transformation highlighted the opportunities available to Members through the Forward Plan and the updates on the Transformation Programme to challenge and become involved in the commissioning process. Members noted these opportunities and the need to take advantage of them through the Select Committee process.

- In response to questions about the recommendations in the report about contact with the Centre for Public Scrutiny, the Democracy Manager Scrutiny and Governance referred to ongoing work over a number of years with the Centre. He also highlighted areas where the County Council's scrutiny function had been cited as national best practice. Following the Peer review, contact had been made, however the potential cost of bespoke development work had proved prohibitive.

RESOLVED – That the Committee's comments on the draft Strategic Plan be considered by Cabinet as it continues to be developed.

28. Customer Service and Insight

The Committee considered a presentation from the Head of Customer Services which set out improvements in resident contact.

The presentation gave details of the operation of the Council's customer contact centre, including the opening hours and the range of services delivered. The Head of Customer Services also highlighted work to improve the visibility of and access to services in response to customer feedback. This included work to increase the levels of transactional services available on the website and to improve access for services using mobile devices. In addition, proactive steps had been taken to highlight services for customers, including the use of social media to disseminate key messages, including frequently asked questions. The presentation also highlighted recent investment in technology, including a Customer Relationship Management system procured jointly with partners and an online appointment system for registration services. Further opportunities to work with partners were actively being pursued and the impact of this work was being demonstrated through proactive gathering of customer feedback.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members noted that the opening hours for the customer service centre were different on a Friday to the rest of the week and asked whether there was a danger of this causing confusion. The Head of Customer Services advised that the opening hours were reviewed based on call volumes in the interest of efficiency but confirmed that this could be reviewed going forward.
- In response to a query about the 'Tell us Once Service' relating to death notifications, the Head of Customer Services confirmed that the service had rolled out across the County and briefly outlined that this gave customers the option to allow the registration service to contact a range of agencies on their behalf to inform them of a person's death. This not only reduced individual contact, but reduced the number of copy death certificates required.
- The Head of Customer Services agreed to supply Members with details of trends in the number of bus pass applications in response to a query whether data reflected the growth in the ageing population.
- Members commented on the importance of maintaining access to services for residents who were unable to use IT based services. The Head of Customer Service acknowledged this issue and highlighted work to provide information in appropriate locations such as Doctors surgeries and village notice boards. In response to comments about alternative access technology such as publicly accessible electronic information kiosks, she highlighted that changing technology particularly mobile technology, minimised the value of such work.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

29. Transformation Programme Progress Report

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Democracy, Law and Transformation, which set out progress with the Council's Transformation Programme.

The Report gave details of progress across the Transformation Support Unit's (TSU) basket of projects. This emphasised how transformational activity focussed on the key priorities in the strategic plan and gave details of how the transformation programme had contributed to financial savings achieved through the medium term financial strategy. Details were also given of scrutiny work on individual items across the transformation programme. The report also highlighted a number of projects where the involvement of the Transformation Support Unit had ceased and returned to 'business as usual' within the relevant service area.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members asked whether an assessment of the impact of the TSU's involvement with the projects returned to business as usual in terms of finance and other previously defined success measures had been made. The Deputy Leader advised that this information would be provided in the next update report for the projects identified.
- In response to questions about the levels of savings identified through the transformation programme across each Cabinet portfolio, the Deputy Leader highlighted that not all financial savings were delivered through the transformation programme.
- Members commented that it would be helpful to have the relevant Select Committee listed against the projects.
- The Deputy Leader reiterated the Council's commitment to the involvement of third sector organisations in delivery where appropriate across the transformation programme. In response to specific queries relating to a service currently provided commercially, he highlighted the fact that commissioning decisions would focus on achieving outcomes and that services provided on behalf of the third sector would be at a cost basis.

RESOLVED – That

- 1) Details of the impact of the Transformation Support Unit involvement in the projects returned to business as usual be incorporated into the next quarterly Transformation progress report.
- 2) The report be noted.

30. Work Programme

The Committee considered its work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. It was noted that the additional meeting to consider the recommendations from the Medium Term Financial Strategy Working Group would be held on 28 January 2014.

RESOLVED – That the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year be approved.

Chairman