

Minutes of the Corporate Review Committee Meeting held on 21 October 2013

Present: Philip Jones (Chairman)

Tim Corbett
Carol Dean
Brian Edwards
John Francis
Kath Perry

Derrick Huckfield
Kevin Jackson
Brian Jenkins
John Taylor

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

Apologies: Frank Chapman, Susan Woodward and Mike Worthington

PART ONE

15. Declarations of Interest

It was resolved – That there were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

16. Minutes of the meeting held on 17th September 2013

It was resolved – That the minutes be approved and signed by the Chairman.

17. Corporate Complaints Annual Report and Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review

The Deputy Leader presented an annual report on the authority's complaints and the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review.

Questions were invited from members of the committee:

- The report states that two complaints were denied use of the complaints procedure. Why was this?

Some complaints are received by Staffordshire County Council when they actually relate to a different organisation or another local authority. In these cases, their complaint is forwarded to the correct location.

- The report states that complaints help to improve service delivery and prevent repeat complaints. How many improvements have been made as a result of complaints?

Information can be sought after the meeting and provided. An example of how Staffordshire County Council has changed its procedures as a result of a complaint was given.

- When complaints are received and passed on to a third, more relevant, party what happens to them?

Detailed information can be provided after the meeting if required.

- With more commissioning of services, what will happen to complaints in the future?

Staffordshire County Council will carry out audits of other organisations in order to monitor the quality of services. The responsibility for delivery of a quality service rests with Staffordshire County Council.

- It would be useful to separate out the figures in the report to show which complaints were settled and when in order to give a truer picture.

This will be looked into in order to improve the report next year.

- If the authority is learning from its complaints why does the level of complaints remain at the same level?

The authority does learn from complaints but can't always implement changes due to the costs involved.

- How will the complaints procedure be adapted to handle the authority working in joint venture with third parties?

The authority already works in a joint venture with Capita (Entrust) and both organisations work together with regard to complaints. Entrust have the opportunity to consider a complaint in the first instance and then Staffordshire County Council decide how best to handle it.

- Would it be possible to see what complaints are currently received regarding Staffordshire County Council's day services and then monitor them to see how the new joint venture is performing?

Staffordshire County Council wants to know if complaints that get sent to other organisations are resolved and needs to look at systems that could capture that information.

It was resolved - That the Customer Feedback & Complaints Team will continue to monitor more closely timescale adherence to identify any concerns or trends, whilst still providing updates to complainants and sending reminders to those investigating. The team will also liaise more closely with service areas on a case by case basis to agree when interim responses should be sent.

18. Update on the Transformation Support Unit Programme

The Deputy Leader presented a progress report on the Transformation Programme. He explained the purpose of the Transformation Programme and the need for more resources to tackle high risk issues. He then summarised the main TSU projects. He

also stated that the authority had a record of making savings but that finding savings would become more difficult in future. He explained the Challenge Sessions that have been set up with the People and Place Directorates in order to identify what resources are needed to achieve their objectives.

The Director of Finance and Resources gave a presentation on the authority's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and described some of the issues that the council will face over the next four years such as:

- Unknown central government funding from 2015/16.
- Increased pressure due to significant recent reductions in central government funding.
- A potential £20million deficit next year.

He explained that spending will be focused on delivering priority outcomes and working in partnership with other organisations in order to deliver services whilst continuing to make savings.

The Deputy Leader stressed that the problems are not specific to Staffordshire but are being experienced across the country and gave an example of partnership working in order to improve finances.

The following questions were posed by members:

- There are a lot of acronyms in the document. In future could these be either explained or avoided in reports?

This will be considered for future reports.

- Is the funding allocated to Families First going to continue next year?

A robust plan is being delivered to change how things are done, however nothing will be changed or removed until something can be put in its place.

- What assumptions have been made about the funding from central government?

It is difficult to predict the final figures from the Treasury but an increase of 0% has been assumed.

- Feedback from some constituents has given cause for concern about the increase in mental health problems. How does the authority ensure that the savings it looks for don't negatively affect people with mental health issues?

The demand for mental health services has increased and the authority is putting effort into collaboration with companies where employees are at high risk of stress related issues and with the police who often have to deal with people who have mental health problems. It needs a more joined up approach.

- Is becoming a unitary authority suggested as a solution?

No, but collaboration is.

- Does the authority use cost-benefit analysis and how can the members get access to the mathematics used in order to better understand the figures?

A detailed explanation of how the figures are arrived at can be given outside of the meeting. A mixture of cost-benefit analysis, application of synergies and personal judgement is used. You can't use just one tool, a mix of expertise and judgement is needed. Scrutiny is key to ensuring that decisions are robust.

- Has the authority given up on local authority schools?

More and more schools are choosing alternative models of working. If a school is found to be failing then conversion to academy status is an option. No schools are being forced into becoming academies but are supported by the authority in whichever direction they choose to travel.

- All members of the Corporate Review Committee should be aware of the financial risks of all projects.

MTFS scrutiny working group sessions should do this.

- Staffordshire County Council is leading the way by creating partnerships to improve services and not simply spending more money. Are smaller, volunteer organisations being looked at for collaborative opportunities?

Different types of organisations are being considered for different projects.

- Staffordshire County Council has already spent a lot of money on the creation of integrated services. With the new Integrated Transformation Fund will there be an opportunity to claw back some of those costs?

Clawing back previous spend would not be allowed. One year's notice will be given of the 2015/16 amount so plans can be made on how it will be best spent next year.

It was resolved – That the report be received.

19. Work Programme

The draft work programme was presented to members.

It was commented that the chairs of Health Staffordshire, Prosperous Staffordshire and Safe and Strong Communities should look at how services for Vulnerable Adults can be jointly scrutinised.

It was resolved – That the work programme be approved.

Chairman