

**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) held**  
**at 10.00 am on Monday, 15 December 2014**

Present:

Members:                   Councillor R Sandy (Chair)  
                                  Councillor R Brown  
                                  Councillor D Galliers  
                                  Councillor L Harvard  
                                  Councillor R Lakha  
                                  Councillor J Mutton  
                                  Councillor T Sawdon

Employees:

L Commane, Resources Directorate  
T Savill, Resources Directorate  
C Storey, Resources Directorate  
B Strain, Resources Directorate  
M Vickery, Place Directorate  
A West, Resources Directorate

Apologies:                Councillor M Hammon and L Kelly

## **Public Business**

### **22.     Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **23.     Minutes**

- (a) The minutes of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014 were signed as a true record.
- (b) Matters Arising – Further to Minute 16/14, the Scrutiny Board received information on the Council's underspend and level of reserves over the past four years. Members requested that political groups be informed of the level of the Council's reserves as part of the budgeting process.

### **24.     Customer Services Centre**

The Scrutiny Board received a briefing note of the Executive Director, Resources, which provided an update on the progress with the Customer Services Centre (CSC), which was part of the wider Customer Journey programme.

The Scrutiny Board noted that in June 2013, approval was given to kick start the Friargate business district to transform the Council and deliver savings. The cost of delivering the CSC was estimated to be £1m, which was included in the one off capital cost of £59m for the overall programme. However, following design

development with architects and cost consultants and engagement with all key stakeholders, had provided a fuller picture of the scale of the required works. This figure is now estimated to be £3m.

The Scrutiny Board raised serious concerns that the associated works which included structural alterations and removal of asbestos were not included in the £1m business case set aside for the scheme. Members noted that due to the “live” office environment, these surveys and investigations were unable to be carried out. The Scrutiny Board discussed the different types of asbestos testing that should have been done before the £1m estimated costs were submitted for approval.

The Scrutiny Board were also concerned that the original business case did not include provision for creating a new entrance to the CSC. Members noted that it was assumed that the Broadgate Square Ramp could provide a compliant route in to the building, but following a number of surveys and investigations it was deemed inappropriate. A feasibility report had proposed that, as a solution, the provision of a new lift and stair access from Unit 3, The Precinct to the first and second floors of Broadgate House, would be appropriate.

The Scrutiny Board robustly questioned Officers on where the additional £2m would come from to deliver the scheme. Members noted that the additional capital investment would be funded from any underspend in this year’s revenue and capital investment and if necessary, contribution from reserves.

Despite the additional investment required for the scheme, Members noted that the Council could still achieve the £0.5m per year savings target within the abc programme and further proposed savings of £5m per year associated with the Kickstart programme.

Members discussed the risk register and questioned Officers on the details contained within it and how it related to the initial project plan. Members raised concern that the same underestimation could happen to the other buildings which are scheduled for development.

The Scrutiny Board sought reassurances that the issues raised at the meeting would not be repeated in any future development proposals and requested that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources be invited to attend a future meeting early in 2015 to discuss reducing the level of risk on the next phase of property development.

**RESOLVED, that the Scrutiny Board –**

- 1. Noted the content of the briefing note.**
- 2. Request that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources be invited to a future meeting to discuss reducing the level of risk on the next phase of property development.**

## 25. **Council Appointed Enforcement Agents and Vulnerable People**

The Scrutiny Board received a briefing note of the Executive Director, Resources with an update on the guidelines for Council appointed Enforcement Agents when dealing with vulnerable people. Paul Sharpe, from Equita, also attended the meeting and addressed the Scrutiny Board.

The Council collected more than £140m in Council Tax and £125m in business rates each year. The vast majority of people pay these taxes without the need for the Council to take additional measures. In some cases it was necessary for the Council to make use of enforcement powers to maximise the recovery of monies owed to the Council.

The Scrutiny Board considered the barriers faced with data sharing, when dealing with vulnerable people. They welcomed the report and raised the following issues:

- Whether the policy to determine if a person was vulnerable had formal Cabinet/Cabinet Member approval.
- Communication methods between the City Council, Citizens Advice Bureau and Enforcement Agents, which needed to be well maintained.
- Information sharing between the different agencies being vital to determine potentially vulnerable people, and the Data Protection barriers currently faced by agencies.

The Scrutiny Board also discussed the process for obtaining a Liability Order and the process for determining whether a person was vulnerable. The Scrutiny Board questioned Officers on the process for appointing Enforcement Agents and testing their robustness in determining potentially vulnerable people.

There were currently approximately 10,500 Council Tax accounts with Enforcement Agents with a total debt of £4.4m. The Scrutiny Board noted that the amount of debt being sent to Enforcement Agents had increased by up to 28% and requested that further information on these statistics be sent to Members of the Board.

**RESOLVED, that the Scrutiny Board:**

- 1. Noted the content of the briefing note.**
- 2. Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources, explore avenues for data sharing with Council held debt.**
- 3. Requested further information on the monitoring statistics, dating back from the previous two years, be sent to Members of the Board.**

## 26. **Work Programme 2014-15**

The Scrutiny Board considered the work programme and the items of business scheduled for the meeting in February 2015.

27. **Meeting Evaluation**

The Scrutiny Board evaluated the meeting and their comments would be used to ensure the continued efficiency and effectiveness of future meetings.

28. **Any other items of Public Business**

There were no additional items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.30 pm)