

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) held
at 10.00 am on Wednesday, 6 January 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor J Mutton (Chair)
Councillor S Bains
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor D Chater
Councillor G Duggins
Councillor R Lakha
Councillor T Sawdon
Councillor D Welsh

Employees:

People: J. Gregg, J. Moore, H. Thornton
Resources: V. Castree, L. Commane, B. Hastie, K. Lees, C. Sinclair, R. Sugars

Apologies: Councillor T Skipper

Public Business

28. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

29. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2015 were signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

30. Update on Customer Journey Programme and Customer Services performance

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director of Resources which provided an update on the progress of the Customer Journey Programme.

The Board had received their last update in July 2015 and since then the objective of consolidating customer reception/face to face services and telephony within the Customer Service Centre in Broadgate House had been achieved. The Customer Service Centre opened with telephony services in September 2015 and was fully opened to the public on 18 November 2015. Based in the city centre, it brought together telephone and face to face service delivery for the first time. To smooth the transition, a meet and greet team were helping customers with their enquiries and supporting use of the new online services and self-service kiosks.

Members of the Board questioned officers on a number of issues including whether there were any aspects of the service delivery changes that had not gone

to plan. Officers reported that the experience had given an opportunity to look at the service in a holistic way. For example, looking at using data more effectively to improve online services and where there were higher levels of complaints in one area (for example missed bin collections), discussions would be held with the relevant directorate to seek to address the issue and therefore reduce the number of complaints.

The Board noted the level of telephone caller abandonment rate remained high and although there was a decrease of abandonment rates for Council tax, the overall figure remained the same therefore suggesting it had increased in other areas. In response, officers reported that until recently, two systems (internal and external) were running concurrently and technical glitches had resulted potentially inaccurate data. They were confident the current data was correct.

The Board expressed concern that a number of residents were still unaware of the change of location to Broadgate House and asked that Officers investigate the possibility of including information about the relocation in with the annual Council Tax notification.

RESOLVED to note the report and for the location of the new Customer Service Centre at Broadgate to be publicised with the Council Tax Bill.

31. **Children's Social Care, Targeted and Early Intervention - Financial Position**

The Board considered a briefing note which detailed the Children's Social Care, Targeted and Early Intervention financial position (net budget and outturn) between 2009/10 and forecast position for 2015/16, based on quarter 2.

There had been significant grant changes with Children's Services in respect of the budget and the Early Intervention Grant between 2009/10 and 2015/16. Amongst other budget changes, the 15/16 budget included £10m of additional budget provide by Council funding and £2m Council reserves, which was largely funding additional children's social care staffing and children's placements costs. Although this additional resource had been allocated on an ongoing basis, it was in the context of a council-wide medium term financial strategy gap. The briefing note detailed the areas supported by the additional budget.

The Board discussed the detail of the grant and budget changes in respect of key indicators that impact financial performance including children in need, children subject to a child protection plan and looked after children (LAC) – which effect staffing levels. In addition, numbers of LAC impact on placement costs. It was reported that high numbers of agency staff continued to be a significant financial pressure for the service. However, there was ongoing work to increase the number of internal foster carers to reduce the financial pressure of external, high cost placements.

Work was also underway on the long term aim of developing an approach that minimised residential placements and, in the short term, all current residential placements were being reviewed in order to identifying savings.

Following discussion, the Board asked that officers check how many LAC had voluntarily put themselves into the care of the City Council. In addition, the Board

requested a briefing note to include further information in respect of the Early Intervention Grant specifically in respect of the levels of reduction and the additional monies transferred from the City Council's budget and details of the outcome of this investment. The Board also asked that further information on foster carer recruitment provision and costs be included in the briefing note.

RESOLVED to note the report and request that a briefing note be circulated to the Board which detailed use of Early Intervention Grant monies and foster carer recruitment as detailed in the paragraph above.

32. **Capital Programme Funding**

The Board considered a briefing note which had been included on the work programme in order to look at how the Capital Programme was funded with specific attention on revenue funding within the programme and the interaction between different funding streams.

The briefing note outlined funding of the Council's 2016/17 approved Capital Programme and a summary of types of funding. The revenue funding of £11m included within the programme incorporated £7m of funding from on-going revenue budgets with a further £2m one-off funding each for the Customer Service Centre and new city centre leisure facility. A breakdown of this was given in the briefing note.

The Board discussed the briefing note, specifically in respect of the distinction/definition of what constitutes "capital" spending and "revenue" spending. Arising from discussion it was agreed that this be brought back to a future meeting in order to look at the process for agreeing areas for revenue budget spending.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and agreed that revenue spending on Capital Programme Funding be scheduled for a future meeting in this municipal year.

33. **Treasury Management**

The Board noted a briefing note detailing the Council's treasure management activity including cash balances and approaches to borrowing.

The briefing note covered in detail the Council's long-term activity for borrowing and short-term activity in respect of investing.

34. **Public Health Ringfenced Grant**

The Board noted a briefing note which set out the background and current information about the Public Health ringfenced grant.

In 2010 a series of White Papers were published regarding the future of Public Health services and proposing the transfer from the NHS to Local Authorities from April 2013. Over the two years prior to the transition a robust national assurance process was implemented and in line with this, a number of financial returns based on expenditure within the NHS were submitted to the Department of Health.

These returns were used to determine the ringfenced budget allocation from April 2013.

PCT budgets were incredibly complex and it was not an easy task to split out all public health expenditure, as some services and elements were embedded within other contract costs and it was therefore difficult to apportion costs. Only PCT expenditure could be accounted for in the returns, therefore, any public health services which were funded via Coventry Health Improvement Programme (CHIP) were excluded e.g Breastfeeding services.

Significant work was undertaken between Public Health and Council finance officers prior to the transfer to ensure that all costs were captured and that there was a robust understanding of public health expenditure and budgets. Prior to transfer, the Council also submitted a return providing assurance of the work that had been undertaken by the NHS and to confirm that they were supportive of the financial information that had been submitted to the Department of Health.

The Board questioned officers about the detail of the funding, seeking and gaining assurance there was no duplication of work streams across the Council. The Board also asked about prioritisation of allocations and noted that that was the remit of the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Board also noted that use of the grant was based on delivering priorities for the City.

35. Outstanding Issues Report

There were no outstanding issues.

36. Work Programme

The work programme was noted.

37. Any other items of Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.45 am)