



Rutland County Council

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Minutes of a meeting of the **RESOURCES SCRUTINY PANEL** held in the Council Chamber, Catmose, Oakham, at 7.00 pm Thursday, 11 April 2013

PRESENT: Mr B W Roper - Chairman (in the Chair)
Mr W J Cross
Mr D C Hollis
Mr J M Lammie
Mr J R Munton
Mr D L Richardson
Mrs C L Vernon
Miss G Waller
Mr A S Walters

In attendance: Mr T C King Portfolio Holder for Finance and Places Asset Management

Officers present: Mr S Della Rocca Strategic Director - Resources
Mr S Desor Interim Head of Finance
Mrs K S Dunleavy Democratic Services, Peterborough City Council
Mrs A Hawkins Accountant

Apologies: Mr B A Montgomery and Mr M D A Pocock

879 RECORD OF MEETING

The Record of the Meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Panel held on 7 February 2013, copies of which had been previously circulated, was confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

880 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made in respect of the items on the agenda for this meeting.

881 PETITIONS, DEPUTATIONS AND QUESTIONS

No petitions, deputations or questions had been received from members of the public.

882 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS

No questions had been received from members.

883 NOTICES OF MOTION FROM MEMBERS

No Notices of Motion had been received from members.

884 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE PANEL FOR A DECISION IN RELATION TO A CALL IN OF A DECISION

No matter was referred to the Panel for a decision in relation to call in of a decision in accordance with Procedure Rule 206.

SCRUTINY

885 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN BRIEFING

Report No. 84/2013 from the Strategic Director for Resources was received.

The Strategic Director for Resources, Mr Della Rocca, introduced the report, the purpose of which was to brief Members on some of the detail behind the Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget following questions raised at Resources Scrutiny Panel on 17 January 2013 and further updates provided in paper 45/2013 at Resources Scrutiny Panel on 7 February 2013.

The following points were noted during the discussion:

- i) That the Council's directorate budgets included an allowance for general inflation, pay inflation and service pressures;
- ii) The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Places Asset Management, Mr King, advised that the main budget pressures were due to service demands such as an increase in the provision of elderly homes and community services in the future;
- iii) That the Council aimed to save £1.5m in 2013/14 but further savings would be required over the period of the plan;
- iv) The Council was investing £100,000 in its discretionary fund to help those experiencing difficulties following the introduction of the local council tax benefit scheme;
- v) Investments were being monitored on an ongoing basis in order to maximise the Council's investment return but existing returns were below 1%;
- vi) Specific grants were provided by the Government for a variety of areas. The funding allocation does not always equate to the amount the council may need to spend in discharging its functions. The Social Fund was given as an example;;
- vii) The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Places Asset Management, Mr King, advised that some grants were set using historic data and included assumptions that did not always reflect local circumstances;
- viii) The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Places Asset Management, Mr King, advised that the New Homes Bonus funding was dependent on the growth of the housing economy in a local authority area and that Rutland was predicted to be in a strong position;
- ix) The New Homes Bonus would be monitored carefully for Rutland to ensure that budgets were not put at risk;
- x) There was to be a reduction in Revenue Support Grant. However, Rutland was in a better position than other authorities whose dependency on this grant was greater;
- xi) The Council will effectively retain 49% of business rates it collects but pay a tariff to Government to support those Councils who collect less;
- xii) Local authorities were now to charge council tax to those who may have previously received benefits due to the introduction of the local council tax benefit scheme;
- xiii) Capital expenditure is financed from a number of sources including revenue, grants, capital receipts, and borrowing.

AGREED

1) The Panel noted the contents of Report No. 84/2013.

886 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

Report No. 95/2013 from the Strategic Director of Resources was received.

The Strategic Director for Resources, Mr Della Rocca, introduced the report, the purpose of which was to update the Resources Scrutiny Panel on the current status of the Risk Register.

The following points were noted during the discussion:

- i) The Strategic Director for Resources, Mr Della Rocca, confirmed to Members that the risks highlighted in amber were to be treated as business as usual risks;
- ii) The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Places Asset Management, Mr King, confirmed that
- iii) new housing growth would be monitored quarterly; growth for new housing had been forecasted at 60% of planning approvals which had been included in the Council's financial model and forward plan; and housing figures included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy was on target;
- iv) Members asked about contingency arrangements for communications and how social media was being used. Members commented that the risk of losing the Communications Manager should be recognised clearly on the risk register and that a strategy should be in place to tackle the challenges Resource pressures identified for media services was being proactively tackled by utilising facilities such as social media sites in order to communicate important messages;
- v) Members raised concerns over their training provision for Committees and Scrutiny Panels including:
 - a) There had been poor attendance at some Member training sessions; and
 - b) Members with responsibility for the Licensing Act should ensure they attended updates on the legislative changes in relation to the Act.
- vi) In response to concerns raised regarding Members training, officers confirmed that:
 - a) Training courses provided by East Midlands Councils and Melton Borough Council were well communicated to Members;
 - b) There were varied levels and difficulties in providing a balanced training programme;
 - c) An Audit and Risk Committee recommendation identified that there should be a focus on robust training programmes for subjects such as Internal Audit and Risk management;
 - d) The Council would struggle to make training compulsory for subjects other than Planning and Licensing;
 - e) The Monitoring Officer was in the process of producing a training booklet for all Members;
 - f) New auditing standards were being introduced which Members would need to keep up to date about;
 - g) A presentation on a Member training proposal was due to be provided

- vii) The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Places Asset Management, Mr King, advised that the monitoring process for contractors was conducted monthly in order to safeguard vulnerable services such as Social Services.

AGREED

The Resources Scrutiny Panel noted the contents of the risk register and the actions underway to address the risks.

In addition the Resources Scrutiny Panel agreed that:

- i) The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Places Asset Management would:
 - a) feedback Members' comments and concerns regarding the media risk and the loss of resources to the Chief Executive and raise the option of the possibility of entering into a partner arrangement; and
 - b) Feedback comments to the Monitoring Officer over Members training and their responsibilities.
- ii) The Strategic Director for Resources would arrange for:
 - a) The loss of the Communications Manager and provision of the Press Strategy to be referred for discussion at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Commission;
 - b) Consideration to be given to revising the regularity of monthly checks for key contractors and whether a quarterly approach would be more appropriate;
 - c) An update on the review detailing the progress of the introduction of the new local council tax scheme in order to gain an understanding of the impact on Rutland residents;
 - d) Invite a representative from the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide an update on the progress of Welfare Reform and its impact on Rutland residents;
 - e) For an email to be sent to advise Members of the proposed Members training programme.

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8.26pm Mr Cross left the meeting and did not return

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PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND TOPICS

887 REVIEW OF FORWARD PLAN

The following items were noted as being of interest for future Panels:

- i) NNDR Discretionary Relief Policy.

In addition the following items that were not on the forward Plan but were identified as interest for future Panels included:

- i) Customer services review;
- ii) Press Strategy;

- iii) Council tax - an overview of the impact of the new council tax measures and the discretionary fund; and
- iv) A presentation from CAB on the impact of Social Welfare Reform.

888 REVIEW OF RISK REGISTER

Members held no discussion on this item, due to the Strategic Risk Register presentation earlier in the meeting.

889 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There was no other urgent business.

890 DATE AND PREVIEW OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 30 May 2013 at 7.00 pm

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The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.40pm

Chairman