



Minutes of a meeting of the **RESOURCES SCRUTINY PANEL** held in the Council Chamber, Catmose, Oakham, at 7.00 pm on Thursday, 4 September 2014.

Present: Mr J M Lammie - Chairman (in the Chair)
Mr G Conde (for Mr Parsons)
Mr D C Hollis
Mr J R Munton
Mrs C L Vernon
Miss G Waller
Mr A S Walters

In attendance: Mr T C King Portfolio Holder for Places (Development) and Finance
Mr M D A Pocock Portfolio Holder for Places (Environment and Transport) and Resources

Officers present: Mr S Della Rocca Assistant Director for Resources – Finance
Mrs D Baker Head of Corporate Governance
Mrs A Grinney Revenue and Benefits Manager
Mrs N Brown Corporate Support Coordinator

Apologies: Mr W J Cross
Mr C A Parsons
Mr D L Richardson

266 RECORD OF MEETING

The Record of the Meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Panel held on 3 July 2014, copies of which had been previously circulated, was confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

267 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr J Lammie declared a Pecuniary Interest in Report 185/2014 and announced that he would leave the meeting during discussion of this item, at which time nominations would be taken for a substitute Chairman.

Mr J R Munton declared a personal Interest in Report 185/2014.

268 PETITIONS, DEPUTATIONS AND QUESTIONS

No petitions, Deputations or Questions had been received from Members of the public.

269 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS

No Questions had been received from Members.

270 NOTICES OF MOTION FROM MEMBERS

No Notices of Motion had been received from Members.

271 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.

272 QUARTER 1 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT 2014/15

Report No. 173/2014 from the Director for Resources was received the purpose of which was to report on how the Council was performing against its revenue and capital budgets and report a forecast year end outturn position as at the 30 June 2014.

The Chairman, Mr J Lammie, invited the Portfolio Holder for Places (Development) and Finance, Mr T C King, to introduce the report.

During the discussion the following points were noted:

- i. Quarter 1 can be volatile and particularly at present with the changes due to merging with Health, but overall the report reflected that the budgetary position is on the right track.
- ii. Savings were being planned as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- iii. The work that had been done at Oakham Enterprise Park and the positive results should be commended.
- iv. There would be some additional expenses as a result of costs incurred from by-elections, not all of which can be recouped from Parishes.
- v. The variance in finance expenditure was attributable to some vacancies being temporarily held during the outcome of the Finance review..

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Concerns were raised regarding the comments on pg.14 of Appendix 1 regarding resource pressures in IT and also regarding the levels of service delivery. Cllr Pocock confirmed that the Interim Head of Service had been directed to work towards getting the budgetary position back on track and that a review of the Team and service provision is ongoing.
- ii. The recruitment exercise for the Business Manager post had not resulted in a successful appointment and this post is unlikely to be part of the new structure as it was intended that those officers now being recruited as a result of the changes to the People's Directorate Structure would be equipped to manage and monitor the expenditure and budgetary demands of the directorate. Cllr King commented that

the Business Manager position would be kept under review. Further discussion would take part at Full Council on 8 September 2014 when the Peoples First report was taken.

AGREED:

- i. The Panel noted the contents of Report 173/2014.

273 QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT 2014/15

Report No. 186/2014 from the Chief Executive was received the purpose of which was to report on the Council's Performance for the first quarter of 2014/15.

During the discussion the following points were noted:

- i. There had been an improvement in waiting times for calls answered by Customer Services.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- i. There were still some problems with waiting times for answering calls and queuing times in Customer Services during busier periods.
- ii. Analysis has been carried out in the past to ensure that levels of staff were adjusted to take account of peak times. A review would be done to ensure peak times are still being covered appropriately.

AGREED:

- i. The panel noted the contents of Report 186/2014.

274 COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Report no. 153/2014 from the Director of Resources was received the purpose of which was to present the proposed Compliment, Comment and Complaints Policy which has been developed as a result of a recent review of the Council's Complaints Procedure.

The Chairman, Mr J Lammie, invited the Portfolio Holder for Places (Environment and Transport) and Resources, Mr M Pocock, to introduce the report.

During the discussion the following points were noted:

- i. The practice of recording and dealing with complaints and compliments equally reflect a good culture.
- ii. At present there is no current procedure for centrally recording complaints and compliments.

- iii. A recruitment of a Governance Coordinator was currently underway, this post would be responsible for monitoring the process and ensuring adherence to the policy.
- iv. Feedback could also be provided via feedback websites e.g. Trip advisor.
- v. It would be helpful to have further information regarding the procedures that would be put in place to ensure adherence with the policy.
- vi. The policy would provide a mechanism for measuring and recording complaints and compliments and lessons learnt.
- vii. The protocol for dealing with vexatious complainants at Appendix A was welcomed by Members.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- i. There was concern that complaints were being given a higher priority than compliments and the opportunity to learn from positive comments could be lost.
- ii. There could be a risk that complaints received by departments as detailed in section 1.3 could not be subject to the correct process as officers may not recognise it as a complaint, or may forward it incorrectly. Confirmation was given that an awareness and training programme would be incorporated into the implementation of the policy.
- iii. Members discussed the one day response time set out in section 3.4 and questioned whether this would be achievable in all circumstances, particularly where an officer receives a complaint, but is on leave or absent due to sickness there may be a delay. It was explained that any absence would be covered by out of office emails/other colleagues therefore this should not arise. Also if a complaint is sent direct to a Ward Member who is not able to access emails regularly. Direction of emails through the “Let us Know” email only would avoid this. The one day response could be reviewed after a period of time. However, it was emphasised that this timeframe accords with Corporate Standards.
- iv. Section 3 does not detail the process that will be followed should a complaint be made against a Director. It was agreed that this would be incorporated into the next version of the Policy.
- v. The “Let us Know” form should be available in large print format.
- vi. Section 4.4 should detail which officer is responsible for changes in working practices, systems, staff training, procedure or policy. It was confirmed that this would be the Governance Coordinator.
- vii. There should be a method for capturing complaints that cannot be dealt with under this process as detailed in Section 4.5. It was agreed that these would still be recorded and allocated a unique reference number and then referred to the appropriate officer for action under the relevant process.
- viii. Members discussed the use of Twitter as a medium for making and responding to complaints particularly regarding the use of private and sensitive information and the use and availability of any responses given. Some Members felt that the reference to using Twitter should be removed completely, whilst others felt that it would be appropriate

to have a standard response informing that the complaint/compliment will be redirected to the "Let us Know" email address. It was agreed that further work should be done on Section 1.3 on how Tweets would be received and responded to.

- ix. Clarification was requested by Members regarding the sharing of information under Section 4.6. The Head of Corporate Governance confirmed that further detail could be incorporated and guidance from the Information Commissioner would be provided to Members.

AGREED:

The panel supported the policy, subject to the amendments and comments noted above being incorporated followed by a paper outlining the changes being referred to the Panel prior to being presented to Cabinet in October.

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Mrs D Baker left the meeting after this item.

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275 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT REVIEW 2014/15

Report no. 185/2014 from the Director of Resources was received the purpose of which was to present the Scrutiny Panel with a review of the current local council tax support scheme and Discretionary Fund and to consider the options for the scheme for 2015/16 onwards with regard to the latest information available.

The Chairman, Mr J Lammie, invited the Portfolio Holder for Places (Development) and Finance, Mr T C King, to introduce the report.

During the discussion the following points were noted:

- i. The scheme had been put in place in order to help those who were most in need and expenditure in 2013/14 was less than was allocated – which could be seen as good news.
- ii. The recommendation to Council would be to look at reducing the level of funding for the discretionary fund, but to note that the impact of financial pressures may yet to be seen and up to date information regarding demand will need to be provided by officers.
- iii. Low unemployment figures, along with adaptation to the changes could have impacted on the demand for the council tax support scheme and discretionary fund.
- iv. It was confirmed that the table at section 2.3 detailing spending from the discretionary fund showed increased applications at periods where promotional work was carried out by officers.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- i. It was confirmed that processing applications can be time consuming and represent a significant demand on officer time to collate

information and advice applicants. It was felt that the discretionary element was advantageous as it provided a level of flexibility for the Council to support those in financial hardship. Members agreed that the discretionary element was important to ensure that applicants receive the correct level of support and appropriate sign-posting, for example to the Citizens Advice Bureau. Hard and fast rules could exempt those in need.

AGREED:

The panel supported the recommendations in Report 185/2014.

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Mr Lammie left the meeting.

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Nominations for substitute Chairperson were taken.
Councillor Vernon nominated Councillor Waller, seconded by Councillor Munton.

No further nominations were received.

Councillor Waller took the Chair.

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276 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED

- i. That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during any discussion of exempt information in the following item of business in accordance with Procedure Rule 239 (Exclusion of Access by the Public and Press).
- ii. That any elected Members present who were not members of the scrutiny panel be allowed to remain during consideration of the following exempt business in accordance to the access to information provisions of Procedure Rule 239.

277 NON-DOMESTIC DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

Report no. 185/2014 from the Director of Resources was received. The purpose of this report was to seek approval for an updated Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Relief Policy.

The Chairman, Miss G Waller invited the Portfolio Holder for Places (Development) and Finance, Mr T C King, to introduce the report.

During the discussion the following points were noted:

- i. The Task and Finish Group had not been able to consult with interested parties due to the withdrawal of Councillor Lammie, leaving only Councillor Waller on the group.

- ii. Councillor King had been involved with some consultation with the Hotel and Leisure sector and read a statement from the Tourism Committee.
- iii. Members discussed the criteria of whether an establishment which had a licensed bar should be eligible for discretionary relief given that they may be able to generate additional funds. It was highlighted that in some areas Social Clubs were busier than local pubs and such profits should be considered along with any relevant exceptions, in order for the system to be fair and equitable.
- iv. The intention would be to have a mechanism for appeal.

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The Meeting Moved into Exempt Session

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A summary of the points raised during the discussion are below:

- i. The question was raised regarding comparisons with provision in other authorities and whether those authorities had the same number of elderly residents as Rutland.
- ii. The old policy used turnover and profitability to ascertain eligibility, however the new policy uses Rateable Value as a proxy for financial capacity. This would mean that some businesses that would have previously been eligible would now fall outside the criteria for additional support.
- iii. It was confirmed that some of the businesses that would be affected had had some advance warning of the changes and the impact on funding.
- iv. Changes would not now come into effect until 2016.
- v. Members agreed that a review of the impact of the policy should be carried out after one year.

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The meeting continued in public.

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AGREED:

The Panel noted the comments of report 185/2014 and the majority of members supported the recommendations.

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Mr Lammie re-joined the meeting and returned to the Chair.

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278 REVIEW OF FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was received to consider issues to scrutinise.

The Chairman, Mr J Lammie, asked for comments and questions.

Members discussed the Commissioning Strategy Report which might be pushed back and would be discussed with the Director for People, needed to take into account that the Contracts Team would be moving into the Resources Directorate.

279 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

280 DATE AND PREVIEW OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 16 October 2014

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Chairman closed the meeting at 21.20pm

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