

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Scrutiny Management Panel held on Friday, 7 February 2014 at 2.00 pm at the Conference Room B - Civic Offices

Present

Councillor Michael Andrewes (Chair)
Councillor Peter Eddis
Councillor Ken Ellcome
Councillor Mike Park
Councillor Jim Patey
Councillor Matthew Winnington
Councillor Phil Smith (In place of Councillor Will Purvis)

Officers Present

Chris Ward, Head of Finance and S151 Officer
Stewart Agland, Local Democracy Manager
Paddy May, Corporate Strategy Manager
Jane Tume, Highways PFI Manager

1. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Robert New and from Councillor Will Purvis for whom Councillor Phil Smith deputised.

It was noted that there was one vacant position on the membership of the committee following Councillor Stockdale being appointed as the Cabinet Member for Environment & Community Safety.

2. Declarations of Members' interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Meetings held on 5 and 7 November 2013 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 5 and 7 November 2013 be confirmed and signed by the chair as a correct record.

4. Update by Head of Finance and S151 Officer on the Budget 2014/15 (AI 4)

(TAKE IN HANDOUT ON BUDGET SCRUTINY COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2014/15 AND MEDIUM TERM BUDGET FORECAST 2014/15 TO 2017/18)

Chris Ward, Head of Finance & Section 151 Officer gave the presentation to members. The summary and conclusions were set out on page 8 of the presentation.

In response to queries the following matters were clarified:

- Council's role is to agree the budget in terms of the value of the savings - not the detail of them.
- In terms of the business rates, many appeals had been received that had been successful and consequently the money received may well be less than expected in terms of the value originally set by the valuation office.
- The reason for creating a park and ride reserve was that the expectation was that it would take three years to break even.
- In response to a query about whether the 1% pay increase reserve mentioned would be enough to enable the authority to compete with the private sector given that the economy was improving, Mr Ward said that this could be addressed by targeting market supplements where this was a particular problem.
- With regard to the issue of NHS pay rates being generally higher than local authority pay rates, Mr Ward said that these would not be equalised other than through turnover of staff.
- Mr Ward confirmed that an increase in the number of houses meant that more council tax would be received which could compensate for losses in income elsewhere.
- The new rules around portfolios being able to carry forward underspends and overspends had been designed to encourage responsible spending and guard against the "use it or lose it" scenario.

Members commented that they believe that portfolio spending should be much more accurate. However Chris Ward said that given the overall size of the budget, the amount by which the actual spend was adrift was good in comparative terms.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

5. Consideration of notice of motion referral from Full Council concerning Transparency and Openness (Filming of meetings) (AI 5)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The Local Democracy Manager introduced the report which provided information to the panel following the notice of motion referral from the council meeting held on 10 December 2013. He said that since the report was written the Local Audit and Accountability Bill had received royal assent on 30 January 2014. He said that this was complicated by secondary legislation that was necessary to implement exactly how to bring in and regulate the provisions.

The chair of the panel, Councillor Michael Andrewes circulated revised recommendations to council for discussion by members. During discussion the following matters were considered:

- Members did not want any associated costs to fall upon the council to fund.

- Members were generally in agreement that a working group specifically to look at the recommendations that Councillor Andrewes had circulated.
- Members wanted chairs of committees and panels to adopt a light touch approach to the matters raised in the notice of motion until such time as members make a formal decision on exactly what provisions would be brought in.

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Andrewes and seconded by Councillor Winnington that the original recommendation in the report be replaced by recommendations (1) and (2) as circulated at the meeting today and this was agreed.

RESOLVED that the Panel recommends to Council that

(1) the Scrutiny Management Panel welcomes the news that the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 received royal assent on 30 January 2014 and this will give rise to secondary legislation on specific details of how councils should allow the filming, recording and reporting of council meetings. It therefore asks that a working group of four councillors is established in approximate proportion to the groups, nominated by their groups to prepare a report on how the practicalities of this can be implemented as soon as possible by Portsmouth City Council, how the council's standing orders should be changed, consider any changes that need to be made to meeting rooms etc, any budget implications and anything else required;

(2) Scrutiny Management Panel notes that technology and the internet has moved very rapidly since the standing orders were last revised and asks that the working group considers how standing orders should be revised to take account of this. In the meantime it encourages chairs of meetings to allow the use of text communication devices to enable tweeting, blogging and texting etc by councillors and members of the public so long as it does not interfere with proceedings, while noting that such use under the current standing orders is at the chair's total discretion.

6. Winter Maintenance Operations Plan 2013 - 2014 (INFORMATION ONLY ITEM) (AI 6)

(TAKE IN THE PRESENTATION WINTER MAINTENANCE OPERATIONAL PLAN 2014)

Ms Jane Tume, Highways PFI Manager, gave the presentation. She explained that the overall aim is to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable that safe passage along the highway is not endangered by snow or ice. She said this equally applied to flooding. She explained the different roles of PCC and Colas. Basically PCC co-ordinates and ensures that the policy is adhered to and Colas delivers what is in the maintenance plan and reports to PCC.

During discussion the following matters were clarified:

- With regard to where the salt bins are situated, Ms Tume said that she was open to feedback. Sometimes the logical place for the salt bins cannot be used for various reasons such as the pavement is too narrow or where residents did not wish to have a salt bin outside their house. Initially 50 salt bins were available but this had now risen to 80. Ms Tume agreed to look at two specific roads where members felt that salt bins should be placed - Holbrook Road and Kent Road.
- Where PCC staff could not get into work to do their ordinary day job, they had been asked to do other duties for example snow clearing, but this was subject to staff capabilities being assessed. It was suggested that these assessments should take place before the incident and Ms Tume said that she would report back this comment to see if it could be implemented.
- Ms Tume said that the biggest lesson learned from snow events was that co-ordination needed to be much more joined up and as a result of this the snow desk had been set up.
- It was confirmed that advice on snow did appear on the website.

The chair thanked Ms Tume for her presentation and noted that this was an information only report.

7. Corporate Peer Challenge (INFORMATION ONLY ITEM) (AI 7)

(TAKE IN INFORMATION REPORT TO SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL)

Paddy May introduced the report and said that it provided information about who the review team was, the information that was sent to the team about the authority, and details of how long they were on site, how many people they spoke to and their general programme whilst they were here. Mr May said that the full report was attached at Appendix 1.

Overall they reported that many positive things were happening but they also highlighted some issues. He said that the authority has taken the recommendations seriously and that Appendix 2 is a summary of actions in response to the recommendations. Many of the issues have been reflected in the annual governance statement for the authority and as such are being tracked through of the Governance & Audit & Standards Committee.

During discussion the following matters were raised:

- Councillor Andrewes felt that in view of the comments on liaison with the voluntary and community sector not being as good as it could be, it might useful to get some representatives to attend a future Scrutiny Management Panel meeting. Councillor Winnington said that the community ownership review carried out by the EDCL Scrutiny Panel had produced a wide ranging report which had led to progress being made on this issue. He felt that the matter could be taken forward through the EDCL Scrutiny Panel and that he would be happy to report back to Scrutiny Management Panel about progress.

- Members felt that there should be a more systematic approach to training for members. He said that the matter had been raised at Governance & Audit & Standards Committee recently and members had been advised that there was no budget as such for training and also member engagement is difficult.
- It was confirmed that e-learning and DVDs were available.
- Members raised the issue of the impact of service changes made in one part of the organisation on other services in the organisation and whether there was any evidence that this is being taken into account. Paddy May said that Financial Services are aware of this issue and there is a desire to look at the knock-on effects at an earlier stage. He said that he would talk to Chris Ward about this.
- With regard to the recommendation in the report that the council should plan as a whole ie Cabinet and strategic directors, Paddy May said that he would arrange for a note to be circulated to members about this.
- With regard to the actual people chosen to be interviewed during the CPC team's visit, members felt that it might have been more representative to get backbenchers' views. Paddy May said that the CPC team had supplied a list of those they wished to speak with during their visit. They particularly wanted to speak with new councillors, cabinet members, group leaders, scrutiny chairs and scrutiny vice-chairs. Paddy May said he would find out exactly who the members were who were consulted during the visit of the CPC team and this could be circulated outside the meeting.

The panel noted the information report and wanted two matters particularly to be highlighted:

- PCC's relationship with the voluntary and community sector and
- More systematic and tailored political development and training for councillors.

8. Date of Next Meeting (AI 8)

The next meeting is scheduled for 20 March 2014 but this was subject to change depending on members' availability.

The meeting concluded at 3.30pm.

Councillor Michael Andrewes
Chair