

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (PERFORMANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)**

**MEETING HELD AT THE BOOTLE AND NETHERTON COMMUNITY FIRE STATION, FLEETWOODS LANE, NETHERTON L29 1YB ON TUESDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER, 2013**

**PRESENT:** Councillor McGinnity (in the Chair)  
Councillors Byrom, Ashton, Dawson, M. Dowd, Kermode, P. Maguire and Robinson

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Hardy, Cabinet Member – Communities and Environment

**6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Booth and Shaw.

**7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

**8. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

**9. YOUTH OFFENDING TEAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PRESENTATION**

Further to Minute No. 4 (4) of 11 June 2013 the Committee received a presentation from Colin Pettigrew, Director of Young People and Families and Mark McCausland, Head of Service, Youth Offending Team (YOT), on the YOT Improvement Plan.

Mr. Pettigrew detailed that the YOT Inspection Framework was a risk based model to provide assurance and promote improvement; and evidenced that young people involved with YOT had access to mainstream and specialist services. Mr. Pettigrew also provided information on the key findings of the YOT Inspection relating to work to reduce re-offending; work to protect the public; work to protect children and young people and make them safer; work to ensure the sentence was served and governance arrangements.

Mr. McCausland then identified the seven recommendations contained in the Inspection Improvement Plan; the next steps contained in the Post Inspection Improvement Plan; and concluded by detailing how performance would be reviewed, namely:-

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (PERFORMANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)- TUESDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER, 2013

- Review role and function of the Management Board - new chair, new membership, new terms of reference, establishment of strategic sub-groups to provide outcome focus and operational steer (ETE, Health, Safeguarding)
- Practice Assurance - management oversight – quality assurance – improvements in safeguarding and risk management
- Case work - re-structure to strengthen front-line practice
- Training & Development - comprehensive training plan for managers and front-line staff
- Database Problems - improve the capability of e-case management system to evidence practice improvement

The Youth Justice Board would review the Leadership and Governance and Practice aspects of the Improvement Plan at quarterly intervals during 2013/14.

### RESOLVED:

That Mr. Pettigrew and Mr. McCausland be thanked for their informative presentation.

### **10. MONITORING OF BUDGET AND ACHIEVEMENT OF SAVINGS AND ANTICIPATED FURTHER BUDGET CUTS TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN 2014/15 - PRESENTATION**

Further to Minute No. 5 (4) (a) and (b) of 11 June 2013 the Committee received a presentation from Margaret Rawding, Head of Corporate Finance and ICT on:-

- (a) the monitoring of the budget and the achievement of savings; and
- (b) the anticipated further budget cuts to local authorities by Government in 2014/15.

Mrs. Rawding indicated that budget savings of £50 million, phased over two years, had been agreed by Council and that medium and long term action plans were required to achieve complex service changes; that monthly budget monitoring was undertaken to ensure the savings targets were being met and detailed the actions being taken to achieve the savings; detailed the risk based monitoring of the savings to identify equality impacts and the risks to the Council of deliverability; the monthly reporting mechanisms in place to the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and the Leader/Cabinet; and that as at 31 July 2013, £16.7m savings had already been achieved, satisfactory progress had been made on £5.1m of savings, that there was a £2.7m risk of savings not being fully achieved and that there was a known shortfall or significant risk associated with £0.6m of savings.

Mrs. Rawding also detailed the overall Council budget position relating to the monthly monitoring of expenditure and income relating to all operational and capital project budgets, the forecasts to year end to understand any changes in phasing over the year and comparisons with

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (PERFORMANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)- TUESDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER, 2013

previous month's forecast outturns to identify changes of significance or concern; that from April 2013, the Council would be liable for the risks relating to changes in households claiming reduction in Council Tax, changes in valuation of business properties and collection rates of business rates (NNDR); and changes in government funding which resulted in anticipated further savings being required of £1.4m and a shortfall in Business rates of £1m.

Mrs. Rawding concluded that with regard to 2015/16 onwards, changes were expected associated with the New Homes Bonus being transferred to Local Enterprise Partnerships and relating to funding for adult social care; but that many aspects of funding were unknown such as Council tax referendum rules and levels, the national distribution of 10% cut in government funding of Local government services, the number of Council Tax Reduction Scheme claimants, the level of business rates and the level of social care required. The best guess at this stage was that the Council would need to identify a £25m further reduction in net budget and that the SLT were already considering the most appropriate process for identifying how to allocate fewer resources for 2015/16 onwards.

RESOLVED:

That Mrs. Rawding be thanked for her informative presentation.

### **11. WELFARE REFORM**

#### **11.1 The Bedroom Tax in Merseyside**

The Committee considered a report produced by the National Housing Federation entitled "The Bedroom Tax in Merseyside – 100 Days On". The introduction to the report indicated that in April 2013 the Government began reducing the housing benefit of people living in social housing who it believed had one or more unused rooms and gave them a choice: find the extra money to pay the rent, or move to a smaller property. Known as the 'bedroom tax', the Government believed this measure would cut the amount spent on housing benefit and, in the process, tackle overcrowding and free up social housing. The report showed however that in Merseyside the bedroom tax was not achieving what the Government hoped; and that based on figures collected by 18 social landlords that owned 91% of all housing association homes in Merseyside, it detailed the negative impact the new policy had had on local communities.

The Committee then received a presentation from Rachel Mills, Operations Director of One Vision Housing (OVH), on the impact of the Bedroom Tax in terms of income for OVH. Ms. Mills indicated that between 2007/2008 and 2012/2013, OVH tenant debt had steadily reduced year on year; that 21,000 OVH tenants were affected by the Bedroom Tax and that over 1000 tenants had moved into rent arrears in the first month, arrears had increased to £170k in April 2013 due to the Bedroom Tax, only 15% of those affected paid the shortfall in full - 55% made no payment at all and

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (PERFORMANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)- TUESDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER, 2013

rent collection had dropped to 94.4% against the end of year figure of 99.3%.

Ms. Mills continued by detailing OVH's response which included a restructure of the Income Management Team, the creation of 4 new posts which formed a new Welfare Reform Team, a targeted approach to non-payers, working with partners to assist tenants and taking a sensitive approach to arrears collection. Ms. Mills then provided information on the position at the end of July 2013, namely that the benefits shortfall equated to over £550k, that arrears directly attributed to bedroom tax was £223k, but however the number of accounts in arrears was decreasing and 83% of tenants had now made some payment.

Ms. Mills detailed the future issues associated with the Benefit Cap and that 15 Families in OVH tenancies were affected, that shortfalls were between £19 and over £108, that 1/3 of families would lose over £100 and that tenant engagement was still a problem; and concluded that future issues associated with direct payment related to double the average arrears cases, low levels of financial literacy, that 13% had returned to landlord payments and Credit Union rent accounts verses Direct Debit.

RESOLVED:

That Ms. Mills be thanked for her informative presentation.

### **11.2 Welfare Reform Update**

Further to Minute No. 5 (2) of 11 June 2013 the Committee considered the report of the Head of Commissioning and Neighbourhood Co-ordination on the work of the elected Member led Welfare Reform Reference Group.

The report updated on the impact of the implementation of Welfare Reform legislation so far; work that partners and the Council were doing collectively around the mitigation of impact where possible; and the preparatory work for further Welfare Reform legislation impacts.

RESOLVED:

That the work of the Member led Welfare Reform Reference Group be noted and recognition be given to the work of partners and the Council to mitigate, wherever possible, the impacts of Welfare Reform legislation.

### **11.3 Foodbanks - Presentation**

Further to Minute No. 5 (2) (d) of 11 June 2013 Ms. Steph Prewett, Head of Commissioning and Neighbourhood Co-ordination, advised that Sefton Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) had produced a film that detailed the operation of the Sefton Foodbanks and the detrimental impacts on residents of recent welfare reforms such as the Bedroom Tax and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The film highlighted how levels of debt were increasing across communities and that more people were becoming

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (PERFORMANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)- TUESDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER, 2013

reliant on foodbanks. The film also depicted two real life case studies that showed the impact of the welfare reform changes.

The Committee then viewed the film produced by the CAB.

Ms. Prewett concluded by advising that Sefton CVS Young Advisors were also producing a film on the impacts of welfare reform and that it would be beneficial for the Committee to view the film at its next meeting.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Ms. Prewett be thanked for her informative presentation;
- (2) Sefton Citizen's Advice Bureau be congratulated on the production of their video on the impact welfare reform changes; and
- (3) arrangements be made for the film, currently being produced by Sefton CVS Young Advisors on the impacts of welfare reform, be viewed at the next meeting of the Committee.

### **11.4 Council Tax and Business Rates Collection**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Finance and ICT that updated on the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates for 2013/14; and on the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS).

The report provided statistical information on the CTRS forecast financial position; Council Tax Collection for 2013/14; collection against working age CTRS cases; CTRS discounts; Council Tax Benefit/ CTRS caseload comparisons; a summary of working age claimants at 31 July 2013; the Exceptional Hardship Fund; Council Tax arrears; and Budget Monitoring Update: Business Rates 2013/14.

The report indicated that Government changes to the Council Tax and Business Rates Schemes in 2013/14 meant that there was a greater financial risk to the Authority should income levels reduce, and financial targets not achieved. Consequently, it was important that Members were kept informed of the financial position for the Authority on these issues throughout the year.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the financial position on the collection of Council Tax for 2013/14, as at the end of July 2013 be noted;
- (2) the forecast financial position of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2013/14 be noted;
- (3) the financial position on the collection of Business Rates as at the end of July 2013 be noted; and

- (4) the Head of Corporate Finance and ICT be requested to submit a further update report to the next meeting of the Committee on the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates for 2013/14 and on the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

## **12. STRATEGIC ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Further to Minute No. 5 (3) of 11 June 2013 the Committee considered the report of the Director of Built Environment on the progress made towards the development of a new asset management plan (AMP) including the asset disposal policy/criteria.

The report indicated that the new AMP was at an advanced stage of drafting and was expected to be submitted to the Strategic Capital Investment Group for comment and review at its scheduled meeting in September and that thereafter it would be reported to Cabinet; and that the Asset Disposal Policy would contain the detailed explanation of how assets would be selected for disposal and which method of disposal would be selected.

The report concluded by indicating that when a decision had been made to dispose of an asset or portfolio of similar assets, the Council would adopt the most appropriate method of disposal; and that the intention would always be to secure best value for the Council by way of financial return or other valuable outputs compatible with the Council's established priorities and operational objectives. This may include utilising sites as a Council contribution to a partnership approach such as an asset backed vehicle. Furthermore, where appropriate, the Council would secure a planning brief or outline planning consent prior to marketing and then seek to ensure that the chosen disposal method enabled a sufficient degree of control to be retained in the case of disposals of buildings in need of refurbishment or sites to be redeveloped.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the report on the progress made towards the development of a new asset management plan including the asset disposal policy/criteria be noted.

### **13. EQUALITIES REVIEW UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 27 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 10 June 2010 the Committee considered the report of the Director of Corporate Services that updated on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Equalities Review Report presented to Cabinet in June 2010, namely:-

“That

- (1) the Sefton Equalities Partnership be commended for its achievements to date in progressing the Equality Framework for Local Government;
- (2) the Strategic/Service Directors be recommended to:
  - (i) develop the mainstreaming of equality and diversity into the core business of departments; and
  - (ii) develop a more consistent approach to training in the application of Impact Assessments across all Council departments.
- (3) The Head of Procurement be recommended to amend the Procurement Equalities Questionnaire Form, as indicated in Appendix 10 to the report, in order to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and simplify procedures for small businesses of 5 employees or less, wishing to tender for work with the Council; and
- (4) the Assistant Chief Executive be recommended to consider the inclusion of an Equalities Impact Statement on the Council's Committee Report template and the Sefton Equalities Partnership be requested to give guidance on the suggested content of such statement.”

RESOLVED:

That the report updating on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Equalities Review Report presented to Cabinet in June 2010 be noted.

### **14. CABINET MEMBER REPORTS**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Corporate Services that included the most recent reports from the Cabinet Member - Corporate Services and Performance and the Cabinet Member - Communities and Environment relating to those parts of their portfolios that fell within the remit of this Committee. Members' queries were noted for follow-up with the appropriate Officers.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (PERFORMANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)- TUESDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER, 2013

RESOLVED:

That the update reports from the Cabinet Member – Corporate Services and Performance and the Cabinet Member – Communities and Environment be noted.

**15. WORK PROGRAMME KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Corporate Services in relation to the Committee's programme of work and latest Key Decision Forward Plan for period 1 October 2013 to 31 January 2014; and requesting that Members of the Committee consider potential topics to review for the Municipal Year 2013/2014.

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that the items for pre-scrutiny from the Key Decision Forward Plan had been considered by the Committee.