

Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Wednesday, 16th December, 2015.

Present: Cllr David Harrington, Cllr Derrick Brown, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Chris Clough, Cllr Lynn Hall (Substitute for Cllr Mathew Vickers), Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Tracey Stott, Cllr Laura Tunney, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr David Wilburn

Officers: Kate Fulton (R), Garry Cummings (R), Paul Diggins (DNS), Simon Willson (CESC), Michael Henderson, Graham Birtle (LD)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Paul Baker, Cllr Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Sonia Bailey, Cllr Michael Clark, Cllr Philip Dennis, Cllr Matthew Vickers,

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2015 - for signature

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2015 were signed by the Chairman.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2015 - for approval.

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2015 were agreed.

4 Q2 2015-16 Performance Report

The Committee received a report that provided details of the Council's performance for the period, to the end of Q2, highlighting key achievements, areas for improvement and proposed actions. It also included information relating to Freedom of Information requests, complaints and commendations and the staff suggestion scheme. Whilst it aimed to give a perspective on the overall performance of the Council, its primary focus was on the achievement of the success measures and associated targets agreed as part of the development of the Council Plan 2015/18.

The Committee was informed that 68% of success measures had been achieved, or were on track.

Members noted and supported the new style of the report.

Members discussed the information they had been provided with and that discussion could be summarised, as follows:

- it was noted that, for some targets, with small cohorts, percentage outcomes could swing significantly from period to period.

- members were reminded of changes to crime recording practices by Cleveland Police, that were linked to increases in crime statistics, and, in particular, violent

crimes.

- reference was made to residents' fear of crime and a discussion took place on the impact changes to street lighting may have had on this. Members reported very positive feedback from residents, in terms of the new lighting, though a member did raise a handful of cases in her ward where residents had concerns. The Chairman agreed that he would take this matter forward with the Corporate Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services.

- Members noted that it was anticipated that the three success measures within the Organisational and Operational Effectiveness theme, that were currently not on track, would be by the year end.

- There was a query relating to the overall attendance at, and the economic impact of, SIRF 2015 and it was agreed that clarification of the query would be circulated to the member who raised the issue.

RESOLVED that the report and discussion be noted / actioned as appropriate.

5 Medium Term Financial Plan update - September 2015

Consideration was given to a report that updated the Committee on the current financial position of the Council as at 30 September 2015.

Members noted the current MTFP and were provided with commentary on any significant projected variances. Generally the environment was getting tougher but services were keeping within budgets.

Updates on Big Ticket initiatives were provided and it was noted that

Children – There had been an improvement in terms of the sum of £2,659,000 allocated to fund growth in this area, in recognition of the transition period prior to delivery of target savings. Projections now indicated that only £2, 249, 000 would be required, releasing a saving of £410, 000.

Pressures coming from fostering continued.

Adults – Savings of £360k during 15/16 were projected, due to a smaller level of growth than anticipated. It was noted that there were a number of areas of volatility which may impact on the financial position. These included:

- Care costs and care fees
- Financial implications of the Care Act and responsibilities under Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards legislation

Energy and Waste – Pressures had increased to £669k. The main reasons for this had been the shutdown of the waste facility for seven weeks and consequential need to utilise landfill, together with the continued reduction in recycling income.

Members noted that, with regard to street lighting and utilities, a previously anticipated saving of £48k would now be a small pressure of £9k. This had arisen as there had been a slight delay on the street lighting programme starting

and a slight overestimation, during the early days of the programme, as to how many columns could be installed in a day.

RESOLVED that the Medium Term Financial Plan, Capital Programme and current level of General Fund balances be noted.

6 Scrutiny Review Of Freedom Of Information Requests

The Committee received a report that primarily presented the findings and recommendations of a review of the Council's processes and practice with respect to Freedom of Information requests. Members were reminded that the Committee had received a comprehensive baseline report at its previous meeting.

Members asked a number of questions and raised issues relating to

- The role of the information Commissioner
- Opportunities to streamline the system and cut costs
- Training of staff
- Use of the Council website and publication scheme
- Use of a document management system and working more effectively by using technology.

Member noted the findings and supported the recommendations contained in the report.

RESOLVED that:

1. the detail of the report be noted.
2. opportunities presented through recent restructures be maximised to provide an effective gatekeeping and signposting function.
3. consideration be given to the wider use of a case management tool, maximising any automated functionality.
4. training be provided to key officers on the use and interpretation of the Freedom of Information legislation including practice and procedures adopted by the council.
5. the Councils Publication Scheme be reviewed and refreshed, as required, linking the publication of information to frequently requested data sets.
6. the Council continues to participate in sharing good practice, local and regional benchmarking groups.
7. opportunities resulting from the Parliamentary review of the Freedom of Information Act, once published, be maximised.

7 Statutory Forward Plan

The Committee considered the Statutory Forward Plan 1st December 2015 – 31

March 2016.

RESOLVED that the plan be noted.

8 Executive Scrutiny Work Programme 2015/16

It was suggested that, in view of the large number of items scheduled for the 8 March meeting of the Committee, the start time should be changed to 9.30am, with a 12.30pm finish.

It was also suggested that the Development Day scheduled for 26th January 2016 should be opened to all members.

RESOLVED that:

1. the meeting scheduled for 8 March meeting times be scheduled to take place between 9.30am and 12.30pm.
2. the Development Day be opened up to all members. The Chairman would email all members to this effect.

9 Reports on Chairs' Updates

Members considered the Chairs' updates on Select Committees' reviews.

RESOLVED that the updates be noted.

10 Executive Scrutiny Chair's Update

Members were informed of potential changes to performance reporting to the Committee. The Chair explained that during discussions between himself and the Council's Chief Executive Officer, it had been suggested that the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive may attend future meetings of the Committee, on a twice yearly basis, to provide a full Council overview, rather than the quarterly reports currently presented. The suggestion would need to be considered in further detail but Members indicated their support for such an approach.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.