

Report to:

Council

Agenda
Item

Meeting Date: 13th November 2012

Public/Private*: Public

Title: **Resources Overview and Scrutiny Chairman's Report –
Councillor Reg Watson OBE**

OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel supported the Highways Claimed Rights Review and attended a meeting of the Environment and Economy O&S Panel on 13th September 2012 where they considered the issue. Comments from that meeting have been presented to the Executive.

THE SAVING PAPER TASK AND FINISH GROUP (SPTFG)

This Group held its first meeting on 27th September. A Scrutiny Review Scoping Document was presented to the Panel for approval.

Members of the SPTFG are making progress with saving paper and following an excellent suggestion from the Portfolio Holder we are now looking at providing paperless solutions which should go some way towards reducing the high costs of the paper systems currently in place. The Task Group will report back to the Panel meeting on 4th December 2012.

SICKNESS ABSENCE 2012/13

The Panel welcomed the Branch Secretary and Convenor of the North West Branch of UNISON, Mr. Lexa, to the meeting for this Agenda Item.

The Panel continue to believe that improvements can be made in reducing the present levels of sickness and absence. In particular, the Panel feel that the current rate of return to work interviews (87%, although Mr. Mason noted that the real figure was more likely to be over 90%) can be improved upon. Ms. Culleton added that where workers were not working a standard 9 to 5, returning to work interviews were often difficult to complete. All

Managers agreed that a Lean Systems Review may result in a reduction of sickness/absence levels.

Mr. Lexa stated that an assumption had been made that long term sickness was stress related but there were many other reasons for long term sickness. He agreed that the figures required further analysis to determine how much sickness was stress related. The Panel will continue to monitor sickness levels.

LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX

This Government change will have a major effect on the delivery of services to both the public and the Council. Members' raised the following questions:-

Q:- If the income was reduced by 10% and not everyone would be affected by the reduction, e.g. disabled groups, what percentage of the shortfall would be spread among the remainder?

A:- Mr Mason explained that the proposal was to make no change in the first year. This would mean that 30% would be spread among the remainder of the claimants.

Q:- How will the Council deal with the additional workload created by the new legislation?

A:- Mr Mason advised that Officers were aware of the potential cost implications and 120-190K had been ring-fenced for this purpose in the Medium Term Financial Plan. Mr Gerrard added that the role of the Council could change to offering more advice to customers on those issues.

DELIVERY OF TRANSFORMATION SAVINGS

The Panel was assured that the savings plan was on track and the Portfolio Holder advised that a saving of £4.311 million had already been made with a further 699K identified and due to be delivered by 2015/16. That would leave a balance of £1.819 million still to be delivered by April 2016. Members of the Panel considered the Executives proposal to front load of the savings in delivery a majority of the £1.819M by 1st April 2013. A Member noted that the Council had an ethos of Environment and Economy and suggested that there should be no further cuts on Economic Development.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIPS 2011/2012

- **CARLISLE LEISURE**

Members expressed concern that Carlisle Leisure Limited had not provided financial information as it was considered commercially sensitive. Mr. Crossley advised that

Carlisle Leisure Ltd had a contract with the City Council and that it should be possible to obtain that part of the financial report that related to the City Council.

- **TULLIE HOUSE TRUST**

Members were updated on the current position regarding the Trust and Mrs Edwards stated that the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel would consider the Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery Trust Business Plan 2013/14 at their meeting on 22nd November 2012. Members from the Scrutiny Panel would be invited to attend.

PROJECTS ASSURANCE GROUP

- **COMMUNITY RESOURCES CENTRE** - The adjudication meeting had been scheduled for 24 October 2012 to resolve the issue of expenses with the contractor, however it was confirmed that the centre is now open and operational.
- **DALTON AVENUE, RAFFLES** - Issues remain around the land value which is preventing the project from going forward however dialogue is continuing between the contractor and the Portfolio Holder.

CORPORATE RISK MANAGEMENT

WELFARE REFORM AGENDA

Two risks have been identified relating to the implementation of a new system for administration of Council Tax support and those risks were still current. There was both a reputational and financial risk in setting the scheme appropriately. Consultation was ongoing until 19th November 2012 and the implications of that would need to be considered. As the wider agenda of the Welfare Reform became known, the impact on residents and the Council would need to be considered.