

Report to: Council

Agenda
Item

11(ii)(b)

Meeting Date: 4th November 2014

Public/Private*: Public

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

Member Involvement Update

All members will receive a questionnaire from Cllr Rob Burns who is chairing the Task Group. I would ask all members to return the questionnaire as soon as possible.

Thanks to the Council members who attended the Scrutiny Training Day, the attendance was unfortunately low, but well received by those in attendance.

Overview report and work programme

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer reported that a request had been sent out to Members of all three Overview and Scrutiny panels for volunteers to be involved in the Members Involvement and Empowerment Task Group. Subsequently Councillors Burns, Caig, Mallinson, McDevitt, Nedved and Watson had been appointed and the first meeting took place on Friday 19 September 2014. Details will be reported back to the Panel on 30 October 2014.

The Chairman highlighted meeting dates which clashed with those scheduled by the County Council and the issues it caused for dual hatted Members. He urged officers to work with the County Council so it could be approved by full Council in January.

Revenue budget Overview and Monitoring Report: April to June 2014

Member's attention was drawn to a number of high risk budgets which had been identified as requiring detailed monitoring throughout the year; Section 106 commuted sums currently held by the Council; together with details of the Council's Direction of Travel and action taken in writing off bad debts.

The Executive had considered the report at their meeting on 18th August 2014 (EX.89/14 refers) noted the budgetary performance position of the Council to June 2014 and the action by the Director of Resources to write off bad debts as detailed in paragraph 9 of Report RD.20/14.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *Members discussed the previous car parking review which the Council had undertaken. Many of the recommendations had been auctioned and the projected yield had not materialised. Members asked if the review would be revisited.*

The Director of Resources confirmed that the authority had been losing 10% per annum on car parking charges and following advice from the review the Council had slowed the reduction in income but had not increased the income. He informed the Panel that a new review of the entire car parking structure would be undertaken.

The Director of Governance agreed that there had been a rise in planning applications for private car parks in Carlisle, the planning team were looking at the applications to ensure they met planning law and were compatible with the Council's Local Plan. He felt that the authority needed a clear parking strategy which tied in with the new Local Plan.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder felt that the reduction in car parking income was a result of the recession and the change in shopping habits. He felt that the City had to ensure that they had a good offer to attract people into Carlisle.

- *The income from the Lanes had continued to decline and the report had indicated that this had been a result of economic recession. It was agreed that this had initially been a result of the recession but it was felt that the continued decline was actually as a result of the change in retail pattern. It was suggested that the Council looked at the long term future of the investment in the Lanes.*

Quarter One Performance Report 2014/15

In considering the performance report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *Members were disappointed to see the increase in the number of days it took to process new benefits claims and asked for more details on the current absence levels within the Shared Service.*

The Director of Resources explained that there was an unprecedented level of sickness and vacancies mainly within the Copeland Council staff. There was a variety of reasons for the absences but many of the vacancies were due to staff moving to Sellafield. He informed the Panel that it took at least one year to train new assessment officers and during this time there was an increase in the time taken to process new claims. He stressed that there were no issues with staff in Carlisle.

The Director of Resources added that the main cost to the authority was the reduction in performance as it affected the most vulnerable people in the community. There was a financial cost in overtime payments and outside contractors and all three authorities had made a financial contribution to cover those costs.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder added that there would be a review of the Shared Service if the situation did not improve in the next three months. He explained that one of the results of the Welfare Review had been key staff leaving the authority for more secure positions and a lack of applicants for vacancies due to unknown future of the service.