

RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 18 JULY 2013 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillor Watson (Chairman) Councillors Atkinson K, Betton (from 10.35am), Bowman S, Craig, Forrester (as substitute for vacancy) Layden and McDevitt.

ALSO PRESENT Councillor Dr Tickner – Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder
Councillor J Mallinson – Observer
Alex Sargeson - Student

OFFICERS Town Clerk and Chief Executive
Director of Resources
Organisational Development Manager
Scrutiny Officer

ROSP.46/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were submitted.

ROSP.47/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in respect of the business to be transacted at the meeting.

ROSP.48/13 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

There were no items which had been the subject of call-in.

ROSP.49/13 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Alex Sargeson, a Politics student from Leicester University to the meeting.

ROSP.50/13 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 4 April 2013 and 6 June 2013 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

ROSP.51/13 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.17/13 which provided an overview of matters that related to the work of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel's work.

The Scrutiny Officer reported:

- The Notice of Key Executive Decisions had been published on 5 July 2013 and the following issues fell within the remit of the Panel:

KD.010/13 – Medium Term Financial Plan (including the Corporate Charging Policy) and the Capital Strategy 2014/15 to 2019/20
KD.012/13 – Asset Management Plan 2013 to 2018
Both items would be available for scrutiny on 29 August 2013.

KD.017/13 – Asset Review Business Plan Reinvestment Property Acquisition – This item was a request for the release of funding, the decision would be taken by the Executive on 5 August 2013.

Members did not raise any questions or comments on the items contained within the Notice of Key Decisions.

- The following references from the Executive at their meeting on 31 May 2013 had been circulated:

EX.48/13 – Provisional General Fund Revenue Outturn 2012-13

EX.49/13 – Provisional Capital Outturn 2012-13 and Revised Capital Programme 2013-14

EX.50/13 – Treasury Management Outturn 2012-13

EX.51/13 – Provisional Outturn for Council Tax and NNDR 2012-13

EX.52/13 – Elected Members' Allowances – Provisional Outturn 2012-13

- The following references from the Executive at their meeting on 1 July 2013 had been circulated:

EX.67/13 – Treasury Management Counterparties

EX.74/13 – 2012/13 Summary of Service Standards

- The Work Programme was attached to the report. The Significant Partnership report would be considered by the Panel at its meeting on 29 August 2013.

The Chairman reminded the Panel of the Saving Paper Task and Finish Group and the move towards paperless meetings. He raised concerns regarding the amount of paper which had been sent out for the Council meeting on 16 July. He felt that the Group should reconvene to discuss potential areas to make savings and include the Town Clerk and Chief Executive and ICT Connect.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio agreed that more work could be done to reduce the paper within the authority and make further savings. He thanked ICT Connect for their support in signing Members up to paperless meetings and for the informative session they held on tablets.

Members agreed that the amount of paperwork sent to Members made it difficult to absorb all of the necessary information and make comment on it. They felt that the information which Members had to receive could be compacted so Members could keep up to date with the information.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive acknowledged that there must be more effective ways of communicating information to Members and agreed to look at the issue further if Members so required it. He added that work could be done to find ways of making the information more accessible and useful to assist Members in decision making and separating the information relevant to their roles.

In response to a Member's concerns the Director of Resources explained that the City Council had a robust business continuity plan in place which covered any potential issues with IT failure.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Key Decision items relevant to this Panel OS.17/13 be noted.

2) That the following Key Decisions be considered by the Panel at their meeting on 29 August 2013:

KD.010/13 – Medium Term Financial Plan (including the Corporate Charging Policy) and the Capital Strategy 2014/15 to 2019/20

KD.012/13 – Asset Management Plan 2013 to 2018

3) That the following Minute Excerpts from the Executive be noted:

EX.48/13 – Provisional General Fund Revenue Outturn 2012-13

EX.49/13 – Provisional Capital Outturn 2012-13 and Revised Capital Programme 2013-14

EX.50/13 – Treasury Management Outturn 2012-13

EX.51/13 – Provisional Outturn for Council Tax and NNDR 2012-13

EX.52/13 – Elected Members' Allowances – Provisional Outturn 2012-13

EX.67/13 – Treasury Management Counterparties

EX.74/13 – 2012/13 Summary of Service Standards

4) That the Saving Paper Task and Finish Group be reconvened to monitor recommendations and investigate further savings.

ROSP.52/13 2012/13 END OF YEAR SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted report CE.06/13 which set out the authority's sickness absence levels for the period April 2012 to March 2013, the trends through 2012/13 and other sickness absence related information.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reported that the full time equivalent (FTE) sickness absence recorded in 2011/12 had been the highest experienced by the authority in five years. As a consequence efforts had been made to address the increasing levels of absenteeism and a Lean Systems Review of the sickness absence was also initiated and managers were provided with further support to help reverse the trend.

The 2012/13 annual sickness absence level had reduced by 18% to 9.06 working days lost per FTE employee compared to 2011/12. The reduction could be attributed to four out of six directorates experiencing a reduction in absenteeism and nearly 550 less FTE days being lost to short term absences and 870 less days lost to long term absences. A full break down of the sickness absence levels for 2012/13 had been included in the report as appendix A.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive informed the Panel that previous sickness figures had not included the shared Revenues and Benefits Service due to significantly higher absences in the group that had been TUPE'd from Copeland and Allerdale Councils. The Human Resources team had worked closely with managers in the service and as a result the figures were consistently on par with the rest of the authority and were included in the 2012/13 absence figures.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive gave details on the reasons for the absences which were primarily musculo-skeletal related problems. Further analysis was required into the causes of the problems but only one in seven of employees absent with the symptoms had been seen by Occupational Health. It was also worth noting that nineteen other employees had been referred to a physiotherapist without being absent from work.

He highlighted that 96% of Return to Work Interviews had been conducted for absences occurring in 2012/13 which represented a significant improvement on previous years. The main reasons that the Interviews had not been completed was either because the employee had left the authority before returning to work or the employee had gone off sick again before the interview had been completed.

The report had included a graph showing the trend in the number of days lost to sickness absences that had resulted from accidents occurring whilst the employee was at work. The graph showed an overall downward trend but, due to the workforce size and total days lost to sickness absence decreasing, the proportion of the days lost caused by work related accidents was actually increasing.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive detailed the actions which had been carried out to improve the sickness absence including the Lean Systems Review and a revamped Attendance Management Policy and Procedures document. He also highlighted a number of actions which were still to be completed which included additional work on Trent and additional reporting on physiotherapy, occupational health and counselling.

In considering the Sickness Absence Report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- Had the benchmarking been carried out?

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive explained that the information was being compiled. He added that it would be helpful for the authority to compare absenteeism against organisations in general and not just local authorities. He agreed to circulate the information to Members.

- Had any consideration been given to bonuses for staff who did not have any sickness absence or incentives for staff to reduce sickness?

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive confirmed that discussions regarding incentives had taken place in the past. It was felt that the incentive for work was the salary. He thought that ensuring that the work place was an enjoyable place where staff had a clear sense of purpose and supportive management would have a positive effect on sickness and was a long term gain for the authority. He acknowledged that incentives may also make staff come to work when they were ill and he did not want this to happen.

- Had there been any further analysis of the increase in the 'other musculo-skeletal' sickness absence and why had only 1 in 7 been referred to Occupational Health??

The Director of Resources highlighted the increase in long term absence in the Resources Directorate. He explained that these absences were due to 4 long term absences recorded as other musculo-skeletal and they accounted for the rise in absence recorded under that reason. Three of the staff had returned to work and one member of staff had

retired on ill health. The return of the staff would be shown in next year's absence figures as reduction in the other musculo-skeletal reason.

- Was the authority confident that the reasons for absence were being recorded correctly? In particular, were staff declaring whether stress related absence was work related or not?

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive had no reason to be concerned that staff were not completing the reasons for absence correctly.

- Was there any evidence available that showed that Occupational Health referrals were working?

The Director of Resources reminded that Panel that absence levels had been particularly high approximately 8 years ago. As a result a number of measures had been introduced including a robust Occupational Health referral system which resulted in the absence figures reducing dramatically.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive suggested that the Occupational Health provider be invited to a future meeting to discuss the work being undertaken and the benefits of the service.

- Would the transfer of the Highways staff to the County Council affect the sickness absence figures?

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive responded that it was reasonable to expect that the reduction in manual staff would impact on the sickness absence figures.

RESOLVED – 1) That the 2012/13 end of year sickness absence report (CE.06/13) be noted.

2) That the Town Clerk and Chief Executive circulate the benchmarking information to Members.

3) That the Occupational Health provider be invited to a future meeting of the Panel to discuss the impact of the service on absence figures.

ROSP.53/13 ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN REPORT

The Organisational Development Manager presented the end of year 2012/13 Organisational Development Plan (CE.07/13).

The Organisational Development Manager reminded the Panel of the background to the Organisational Development Plan which had been included in the report as Annex A. She highlighted the progress made against each priority drawing attention to the Employee Opinion Survey, the Leadership Development Programmes, the introduction of the Management Competency Framework and the Corporate Training Programme.

She circulated a comparison document to Members which compared 2011 key measures of success against 2013. She highlighted a number of successes which included the number of employees working towards qualifications, sickness absence and items from the Employee Opinion Survey.

The Organisational Development Manager informed the Panel that a Members Health day had been arranged for 10 September to take place before the Council meeting. The Employee Assistance Programme had been opened up to Members and their families and more information on both would be circulated to Members.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder thanked the Organisational Development Team for their hard work in arranging a wide variety of training, support and health and wellbeing events, the importance of which had been highlighted with the tragic death of Professor Joe Hendry.

In considering the Organisational Development Plan Members raised the following questions and comments:

- What had been the cost of the staff flu jabs?

The Organisational Development Manager responded that the flu jabs had been £9 per vaccine and had been funded through the holiday purchase scheme income.

- How many future managers had been identified within the authority?

The Organisational Development Manager explained that approximately half of the staff undertaking the ILM courses were aspiring managers. Alongside the ILM course the authority had ran a number of courses aimed at aspiring managers and they had been well attended.

- How many staff had moved positions within the authority as a result of the training programme?

The Organisational Development Manager agreed to provide a written response to Members.

- What was the water bottle project?

The Organisational Development Manager outlined a Men's Health day which had been held in 2011. Results on the day showed that some men, particularly those that worked outdoors, had a low water level and were slightly dehydrated. The team had a number of water bottles printed with Carlisle City Council and Healthy Cities to give staff alongside holders to encourage them to drink more water.

RESOLVED – That the Organisational Development Plan update (CE.07/13) be noted.

(The meeting ended at 11.05am)