

RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Chairman's Report

Meeting held 29th March 2012

The Panel first considered the Overview Report and noted that in the Forward Plan two issues fell within the remit of the panel: Planned Enhancements to Council Properties, Provisional Outturn Reports. These would be considered in the June meeting.

The Panel responded to the Scrutiny Annual Report, which was accepted and recommended to be referred to the Scrutiny Chairs Group for approval.

The main item on the agenda was the Welfare Reform and Localisation of Council Tax Support, on which topic the Panel received a full, clear and informative report from the Shared Revenues and Benefits Manager.

There were three main strands to the reform: Benefits Welfare Reform, including Localised Support for Council Tax and the Introduction of Universal Credit and Working Age Benefit Reforms; Retention of Business Rates; Council Tax Discount and Exemption Charges. The full details are to be found in the minute RO SP.28/12.

Three main areas of concern were highlighted:

Transactional & Operational Issues. These were complex, the guidelines were not totally clear and involved staffing issues

Financial. Very significant issues, with implicit incentives for local authorities

Impact on residents – especially concerning vulnerable people viz a viz benefits, the impact of Universal Credit and the ways of managing the homelessness service.

There were many questions to consider. The officer felt that the Welfare Reform Changes were achievable, but the timescale was causing great anxiety and there were social issues which would put pressure on the authority.

It was resolved that the presentation be given to all Councillors at an Informal Council Briefing and that an update on the reforms be submitted to the Panel in six months time.

The Panel received the Annual Review of Significant Partnerships, which was an overview which explored the business case, financial information and action plan behind each partnership.

The Employee Opinion Survey 2012 was broadly welcomed by the Panel noting the apparent positive trends.

Regarding the Project Assurance Group, the Chief Executive gave a summary of the significant projects including the Old Town Hall Project and the Planned Enhancements to Council Buildings. Two schedules had been drawn up and the project would be managed by the Economic Development Group and scheduled to be completed by March 2013. The update was noted.

The Corporate Risk Management update re-iterated the new risks identified in association with delivering Central Government's Localisation and Welfare Reform Agendas. The current system of pooling and re-distributing business rates would cease by April 2013 and Councils would retain their locally based business rates.

Initially they would be protected from substantial change; in the long term the rates would be affected by economic growth. There was a potential financial risk and mitigating actions are being considered. The update was noted.

In the current economic climate it has not always been possible to be as proactive as the Panel might have wished to be. Nevertheless it has been an interesting and challenging year and I would wish to pay tribute to members and officers for their valued contributions, advice and insight throughout the year,

Cllr Stephen Layden

Chair of Rosp

April 2012