

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Scrutiny Committee**
held on Thursday, 21st February, 2013 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor R Domleo (Chairman)
Councillor P Edwards (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors H Davenport, W Fitzgerald and D Newton S Hogben (substitute) C
Andrew (substitute).

Apologies

Councillors S Corcoran, R West and J Wray, Jill Kelly (Diocese of Chester)

10 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11 ALSO PRESENT

Cabinet Members

Councillor M Jones – Leader of the Council
Councillor P Raynes – Finance Portfolio Holder
Councillor D Topping – Environment Portfolio Holder

Visiting Members

Councillor A Moran
Councillor L Brown
Councillor S Corcoran

12 OFFICERS PRESENT

Kym Ryley - Interim Chief Executive
Lorraine Butcher – Strategic Director Children Families and Adults
Christine Mann – Finance Manager
Kevin Melling – Head of Highways and Transport
Peter Hartwell – Head of Community Services
Steve Reading - Finance
Mark Nedderman – Senior Scrutiny Officer

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14 DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP

The re were no declarations of the existence of a party whip.

15 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

Mrs Thornber of Congleton addressed the Committee regarding a proposal contained within the budget report on today's agenda to consult on the closure of Mountview Community Support Centre. Mrs Thornber informed the committee of her disappointment that news about this proposal had been available only through the press. She stated that she had in the past used the respite services for her mother and mother in-law and had more recently used the centre frequently with her husband who had dementia. Mrs Thornber stated that she and her husband were "self funders" and that the last time they tried to book a respite care period, Mountview was not offered to them. When they asked about Mountview they were discouraged. She was therefore not surprised that the centre was underused. She frequently attended the centre on one day per week with her husband and praised the centre for providing a welcome change of environment and for providing opportunities for her husband to socialise and to receive extra mental stimulation, all of which had all contributed to his avoiding the need for residential care.

Miss Firkin also of Congleton addressed the committee on behalf of her mother Mrs Firkin, about the proposal in relation to Mountview and also expressed her concern about the democratic process that had appeared to have omitted consultation on this proposal, and expressed her fears that the closure had been predetermined.

16 BUDGET REPORT 2013-16

The Committee considered a report from the Leader of the Council setting out the framework of a new 3 Year Council Plan, which would give a clear strategic direction for the Council.

The report identified a number of activities that would result in a balanced budget over the next 3 years and sought to protect and enhance essential frontline services, retain sufficient skilled staff, and give local people better value for money as the Council cut its costs.

Attached to the report was a series of appendices which collectively comprised the Financial Plan.

The leader of the Council, the Finance Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director Children and Families and Adults attended the meeting and answered members' questions in relation to the budget report.

Councillors A Moran S Corcoran, L Brown also attended the meeting and asked a number of questions.

The Committee commended the budget for its imaginative, bold and adventurous approach, especially in connection with the proposals to make best use of the Councils assets and the introduction of a new development company, but acknowledged that this approach was not without its risks.

However there were individual items that would attract strong opposition from both within and without the Council. The Leader confirmed that items in the budget could be changed after it was set but if anything came out of the budget, then something new had to go in to maintain the totality of the budget. If a member voted for the budget at Council, he/she could still lobby on individual items afterwards.

With regard to risk, the Chairman commented that there were more savings to be achieved than in any budget he had seen before. There was a risk of those savings not being fully met, and this risk had to be managed. He added that he would put an item on the next committee agenda for members to select those savings that were the most sensitive, critical, and difficult to achieve. This would mean that at the quarterly budget and performance reviews, each of these particular savings could be reported on, rather than the current system whereby intended savings are lost in overall figures.

The Chairman also warned of the risk of “double counting” of savings and gave the example of the same staff cost savings being counted as part of a service, but also as part of the corporate management review.

A number of specific points were raised including:

- There was potential to unlock additional income in connection with land banks and the Council should continue to lobby government to allow the Council to charge developers with land banks that had the benefit of permission for development;
- That proposals for new delivery models within the Council would free the Council from procedural constraints;
- That any risks associated with unidentified savings on efficiency could be mitigated against through increased capital gains and the use of reserves;
- That the Council should continue to strive to achieve efficiencies such as the in-year savings which had been achieved in the current financial year through better use of gritting options during milder weather;
- The new Council responsibilities in relation to the Social Fund and specifically the Council's decision to move to the provision of goods rather than providing cash for recipients was designed to ensure that the Council maintained strong control over the quality of goods and supplies.
- That the measures introduced in last year's budget in connection with post 16 transport would be reviewed during the forthcoming financial year;
- In response to concerns expressed by the Community Safety Scrutiny Committee about the proposed reduction of £250,000 in the CCTV budget, the Finance Portfolio Holder suggested that further consideration was required to achieve that saving but that it did not necessarily have to involve the switching off of cameras as savings had already been identified through reduced costs associated with new cable contacts and new shift patterns for operatives etc;
- There was significant provision within the planning budget to deal with an anticipated but as yet unpredictable level of neighbourhood plans which were expected from Town and Parish Councils;
- The funds emanating from the Community Infrastructure Levy, which would come into force when the Local Plan had been formally adopted, would be specifically earmarked for infrastructure improvements;
- The Council already benefitted significantly from the government's new homes bonus scheme;

- The Council had to remain vigilant in respect of financial pressures beyond the control of the Council in relation to general inflation and expected increased energy costs.

RESOLVED – That the content of the report and discussion of the points listed above be noted.

The meeting commenced at 1.30 pm and concluded at 3.10 pm

Councillor R Domleo (Chairman)