

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Scrutiny Committee**
held on Tuesday, 6th March, 2012 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor J P Findlow (Chairman)
Councillor D Newton (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors G Baxendale, B Burkhill, S Corcoran, W S Davies, F Keegan,
B Moran, G Wait, D Neilson and D Topping

178 OFFICERS PRESENT

Lisa Quinn Director of Finance and Business Services.
Mark Nedderman Senior Scrutiny Officer

179 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

180 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

181 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present who wished to address the Committee.

182 BUDGET TASK GROUP

The Committee considered a report of the Borough Solicitor relating to the work of the Budget Task group in 2011/12.

In June 2011, the Committee had set up a Budget task group consisting of the following 6 Members:

Councillor P Findlow (Chairman), Councillors B Burkhill, D Newton, B Moran, F Keegan, and G Wait.

The group initially met on 25 July and set a task of providing an 'effective and timely input into the budget setting (Business Planning) process to 'influence the budget setting process and to submit initial comments on the draft budget prior to approval'.

The group met on nine occasions throughout the business planning process for the period 2012/2015; the last meeting being held on 13 February 2012.

The report summarised the activity of the group throughout that 8 month period and recommended some improvements to the process in future years.

The group had concluded that although it was important for Corporate Scrutiny Committee, through the Budget task group, to take a holistic view of the budget, the other 5 Scrutiny Committees should not be ignored and in future years, it was suggested opportunities should be made available for all Overview and Scrutiny committees to have an input into the business planning process on a committee by committee basis.

Members considered it essential to have timely access to up to date information on the proposed budget. During the business planning process it had been noted that the new style of business plan had gone through several mutations which resulted in confusion as to whether Members had in their possession the latest version of the plan. It had been suggested to the group that the best solution to this problem was to access the information electronically. The group concluded that consideration should be given to making sure that all members were provided with appropriate hardware to enable them to access financial information electronically. It was also important that measures were in place to ensure that changes made during the process were tracked and easily identifiable during the progress of the business plan, particularly where savings and growth items that had been included.

Although the concept of linking the budget to corporate priorities was commended by the group, in practice, Members found the new style of document difficult to follow and lacked detail. Consequently, Members had requested that consideration be given to improving the narrative in future years and to providing more detailed figures.

The Scrutiny Chairmen's group had recently considered a protocol produced by the Director of Finance and Business Services. The protocol aimed to formally recognise the involvement of the 6 Overview and Scrutiny committees in the Business Planning Process. The group supported the Scrutiny Chairmen's Group's position and subsequently recommended as the first step to secure wider involvement, that Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be given an opportunity to comment on the emerging priorities influencing the business plan, at the latest by September of each year.

At its meeting held on 2 March 2012, the Scrutiny Chairmen's Group had recommended that this Committee consider widening the membership of the Budget task group in future to include representatives from the 5 other Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the Director of Finance and Business Service be requested to report back to a future meeting of the committee with proposals to address the issues raised by members of the committee regarding the format of the current business planning process without the need to abandon the new integrated corporate plan and budget approach;
- (b) That the Budget Task Group continue in the 2012/13 financial year with an open invitation to each of the other 5 Overview and Scrutiny committees to send a representative.

The Committee reviewed the work programme for 2012/13.

The Procurement and Shared Services Portfolio Holder at a recent 1:1 Meeting had reported that the voluntary redundancy scheme was due to be reviewed in March and that statistics were now available in relation to the Council's sickness records.

Councillor Sam Corcoran also suggested that the Committee should consider reviewing the Council's policy in respect of exemptions on Council tax for second and empty homes in anticipation of an expected change in legislation.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the report be received;
- (b) That the Head of HR be requested to consult Members of this committee informally in respect of the Review of the Council's Policy on Voluntary Redundancy prior to the Cabinet taking a decision in April 2012;
- (c) That the Head of HR be requested to submit a report to the next meeting of the Committee on Sickness records at Cheshire East;
- (d) That The Director of Finance and Business Services be requested to submit a report to a future meeting to brief Members on the current arrangements which provide discounts in respect of Council Tax for empty properties and second homes in Cheshire East, with a view to the policy being reviewed.

184 **FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS**

The Committee considered items listed in the current forward plan.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be received.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 2.55 pm

Councillor J P Findlow (Chairman)