

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes

Thursday, 10 April 2014 at 18:30

PRESENT:

Councillor Stone (in the Chair), Councillors Castle, M Coleman, Collins, Fairhead, Field, Hacon, Robinson-Payne, Shrimplin, J Smith and Wright.

Councillor C Walker attended as a substitute for Councillor Marsden.
Councillor B Coleman attended as a substitute for Councillor Hanton.

Councillor Jeal attended as an observer.

Councillor Plant (Shadow Leader), Laura McGillivray (Interim Chief Executive), Russell O Keefe (Interim Director), Councillor B Walker (Cabinet Member Resources), Councillor Williamson (Cabinet Member Transformation and Regeneration) - all attended for item 2.

Mr A Dyson (Group Manager - Property and Construction) - attended for item 3

Councillor Pratt (Cabinet Member Statutory and Internal Services) and Mr A Carr (Group Manager Tourism and Communications) - attended for item 4

Robin Hodds (Cabinet Secretary) and Karline Smith (Senior Member Services Officer)

1 **MINUTES**

The confidential and public minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2014 were confirmed.

2 **NOTICE OF CALL IN - ACCELERATING TRANSFORMATION AT GREAT YARMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

The Chairman informed the committee that he had Called In this item due to the financial implications and why it had taken the council over a year to identify the need for this proposed initiative to be brought forward.

The Interim Chief Executive reported that there had been a Peer Challenge and that there was pressure on the Council's budget and so it was agreed to look at the whole of the council's budget as it was important to ensure that required savings targets were achieved. Supporting arrangements need to be put in place to enable this to happen. An internal team had been set up to work on this including employing Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC) to carry out an analysis of how the Council operates

including bench marking the Council against other authorities. This is a combined team working from inside and outside the authority. They would be extending the Efficiency Support Work and looking to the future.

The Chairman asked if this was being paid for from the Efficiency Support Grant and this was confirmed.

The Cabinet Member (Transformation and Regeneration) stated that the first year was spent reducing the council's back officer support by 20% along with reducing senior management. During the Christmas period DCLG had written to the Council suggesting that progress on transformation had been slow. PwC has worked with 50 other Councils. A public consultation process would be carried out in the near future.

The Cabinet Member (Resources) stated that the Council now needed to look at every service to determine what should be provided. He pointed out that the Council was looking to PwC to provide options to inform the Council of the way forward.

The Chairman asked if a tendering process was used to recruit PwC. The Interim Director stated that the Council had advertised the tendering criteria through a government framework but did not successfully tender through that route, however, PwC had expressed an interest and the Council then entered into negotiations with them.

The Shadow Leader asked if PwC report would be published and would be made public. The Interim Chief Executive stated that the options identified in the report would be presented to all Councillors and Members would determine if it should go out to the general public.

The Shadow Leader asked why it had taken 11 months since the Peer Challenge outcomes to get to this position, however he was in agreement with PwC assessing the financial situation of the authority. The Cabinet Member (Transformation and Regeneration) stated that the Peer Challenge drew a line in the sand which was a starting point but to lose the Chief Executive for 2 1/2 months had an effect on this work.

A Member pointed out that the easiest way to make savings is to cut spending but asked if income could be increased. The Cabinet Member (Transformation and Regeneration) stated that the Council was now charging for services which is used to offer for free such as Conservation.

The Cabinet Member (Resources) stated that if the Council looked at removing discretionary services such as Tourism and Economic Development these were services that looked towards the future. This was why it was felt that the public should be included in the consultation on the removal of services so that these could be prioritised.

The Interim Chief Executive pointed out that cutting services would be a last resort and that they would make efficiencies first as cutting back on all discretionary services would affect the Borough and its attractiveness to visitors and businesses.

The Cabinet Member (Transformation and Regeneration) informed the Committee that face to face transactions cost between £12-£14 and that electronic transactions cost 37p. The Interim Chief Executive stated that there were lots of things that could be done on-line now using e-forms and the more people are shifted towards this the more savings that can be made.

A Member pointed out that benchmarking can be inaccurate as it is hard to find a comparable family to do this against. The Interim Chief Executive stated that this was correct but that Great Yarmouth had a comparable family matched against it. PwC will look at the activities that staff are working on and compares this against other authorities. The Interim Director agreed that you have to be cautious when benchmarking but it gives a starting point to work from.

A Member asked what the size of the Transformation Team was and how much this was costing. The Interim Director stated that there were three members of staff in the team and that the Programme Manager was on a secondment with her post being back filled.

The Interim Chief Executive stated after she was first appointed she had looked at the finances and the work undertaken so far on the business case. Her view was that the work needed to be accelerated. At a Transformation Board meeting this was discussed and it was agreed to go out to tender for this additional resource to achieve the acceleration. She stated that she acted in accordance with the Council as a whole and had spoken to the Leader of the Opposition about this. The Shadow Leader stated that he had only become aware of the work two weeks ago.

RESOLVED:

The the Committee agree to take no further action and that the Cabinet decision on Accelerating Transformation at Great Yarmouth Borough Council be implemented.

3 LAND HOLDINGS

The Committee considered the Group Manager's (Property and Construction) report.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted, and that the following recommendation be passed to Cabinet:-

As the Leasehold Reform Act gives a qualifying Leaseholder the ability, at any time, to purchase their freehold and there are minimal management costs in holding the leases to the Council, the status quo should remain whereby the Council will deal with claims as they are submitted.

4 CIVIC PROTOCOLS

The Group Manager Tourism and Communications reported that the Civic Protocols document was a working document that could be updated any any time as it was a guide of principals.

Clarification was sought on where Honorary Alderman would be in order for a precession it was confirmed that Honorary Alderman would go after the High Sheriff and Former Mayors would go after the Chief Executive Officer.

The Chairman asked if "where possible" could be added to events should be held at the Town Hall as it was not always possible to hold events there. The former Cabinet Member (Statutory and Internal Services) stated that this had been included due to the level of expenditure spent on the Town Hall and that the plan was to encourage the public to use the building.

The Chairman stated that the Mayors events do not bring in income as they raise money for charity and it was felt that as the Mayors Charity committee was independent they should be independent to decide where events should be held.

The Cabinet Member (Statutory and Internal Services) stated that the Mayors events held at the Town Hall are offered free room hire and just have to cover the staff costs.

A member pointed out that events held at the Ocean Rooms do not incur a hire fee or staffing costs.

The Cabinet Secretary pointed out that this document did not require the approval of Cabinet, as this was a matter delegated to the Group Manager (Tourism and Communications) in consultation with the Cabinet Member (Statutory and Internal Services).

RESOLVED:

That the document be endorsed subject to the addition of the procession order for Aldermen and former Mayors and that the word normally be included in events held at the Town Hall.

5 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013-14

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

6 CALL IN - REVISED HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

The Cabinet Secretary requested that this matter had been called in. The Committee agreed to consider this call in at a special meeting to be held on 23 April 2014.

The meeting ended at: 19:55