

Support Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 15 September 2011

PRESENT:

Councillor James, in the Chair.

Councillors Berrow, Browne, Casey, Delbridge, Evans, Murphy, Penberthy, Stark, Stevens and Wildy.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Lock, Lowry, Rennie and Janet Isaac (Co-opted representative).

Also in attendance: Councillor Ian Bowyer – Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and People, Chris Trevitt – Head of Capital and Assets, Colin Moore - Assistant Director for Lifelong Learning, Jayne Gorton - Schools Organisation, Access and Services to School Manager, David Shepperd – Head of Legal Services, Rob Batten – Financial Services Team Leader, Paul Chapman – Head of Value for Money and Efficiencies and Ross Johnston – Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 1.00 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declaration of interest was made in accordance with the code of conduct in relation to items under discussion at this meeting –

Name	Subject	Reason	Interest
Councillor Wildy	Minute 31. School Academy Transfer Update	Her husband is a School Governor at Lipson Community College	Personal

27. MINUTES

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2011 are confirmed as a correct record.

28. CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

29. **ANNUAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT 2010/11**

The Support Services Overview and Scrutiny panel noted the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report 2010/2011.

30. **RELOCATION OF THE REGISTER OFFICE TO POUNDS HOUSE**

Councillor Ian Bowyer, Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Property and Chris Trevitt, Head of Capital and Assets provided a verbal update on the Relocation of the Register Office to Pounds House. Councillors were informed that –

- (a) a traffic impact assessment of Outland Road was commissioned, however, due to the school summer term holiday the assessment was not carried out until schools had returned and the results were only returned on 14 September 2011;
- (b) the assessment reviewed three junctions on Outland Road, two existing junctions and one potential future junction between 7am and 7pm on a weekday, as, these being the busiest times for Outland Road;
- (c) a summary of the findings revealed that –
 - the relocation of the Register Office would produce no new journeys;
 - existing access to Pounds House was deemed not to be a problem as the traffic flow was slow;
 - the additional traffic to Pounds House was deemed not to be a problem as the traffic would be outside of the busy traffic hours;
- (d) in terms of traffic issues, the conclusion of the traffic impact assessment revealed that the relocation of the Register Office was a viable proposal.

It was commented by councillors that –

- (e) the traffic impact assessment should have been undertaken on a Saturday afternoon to incorporate increased traffic flows for visitors to Home Park, particularly as this was the most likely day for the Register Office to host weddings;
- (f) the traffic impact assessment should have incorporated the likely increase in traffic on Outland Road when the Life Centre opens to the public;
- (g) the recent bus timetable information for services on Outland Road, that was emailed to councillors, had not been accurately completed, with Councillor Murphy informing the panel that the research she had

undertaken had been conducted from all publicly available information and had established the following inaccuracies –

- it was reported there were seven services, when in fact, there were only six, as the school bus at 08:25 and 16:02 was the same service;
 - the 16B service did not commence until 18:40 and the Register Office opening hours was 9am – 5pm;
 - the First Great Western Park and Ride Service only stopped at the Park and Ride stop and not close to Pounds House;
 - the service 35 (Ham – City Centre) stopped on Peverell Park Road every 15 minutes and this was not included in the survey;
- (h) as the traffic impact assessment did not include Saturday's and the bus timetable information was inaccurate both should be revised with the information provided at a future meeting, however, as the project had an impact on budgetary savings the process should be accelerated.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (i) the project would not be taken further until the scrutiny process had been satisfactorily completed;
- (j) if the Traffic Impact Assessment had been completed on a Saturday it would not have incorporated rush hour traffic on a weekday morning or evening.

Agreed that –

- (1) the traffic impact assessment results submitted on 14 September 2011 be emailed to all members;
- (2) the provisional Support Services OSP meeting on 27 October 2011 be activated to further scrutinise the relocation of the Register Office to Pounds House;
- (3) an Equalities Impact Assessment should be undertaken and submitted to the meeting on 27 October 2011;
- (4) a more comprehensive Traffic Impact Assessment should be completed and submitted to the meeting on 27 October 2011.

31. **SCHOOL ACADEMY TRANSFER UPDATE**

Colin Moore, Assistant Director for Lifelong Learning and Jayne Gorton, Schools Organisation, Access and Services to School Manager presented a report on School Academy Transfers and informed councillors that –

- (a) since the transfer of twelve schools to academy status the council had witnessed unprecedented changes relating to how the Local Authority and academies work together in the future;
- (b) there were two forms of academies; sponsored academies (old Style) and the new academy converters who do not require sponsorship, all academies are funded direct from government;
- (c) all academies now discussed and brokered directly with the council about purchasing council services but are also purchasing services from other providers;
- (d) as a result of the school academy transfers a large number of school staff and school/council finances had transferred to the academies direct control, in addition schools insurances had increased significantly by approx £150K in 2011 as a result of academies having to purchase insurances directly from insurers rather than being included as part of the council's insurance;
- (e) the impact on schools transferring to academies is council wide and not just an issue for Children's Services.

It was commented by councillors that –

- (f) the report was well written, however, it lacked figures to give a sense of perspective to the issue and in order to rigorously scrutinise school academy transfers councillors needed to see key financial indicators and staffing figures and costs;
- (g) the Children's and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel (CYP OSP) were also scrutinising school academy transfers.

Agreed that a meeting be set up between Cllr David James, Chair (SS OSP), Cllr Mark Lowry, Vice-Chair (SS OSP), Paul Chapman, Lead Officer (SS OSP), Cllr Nicky Wildy, Chair (CYP OSP), Cllr David Stark, Vice-Chair (CYP OSP), Claire Oatway, Lead Officer (CYP OSP), Colin Moore, Assistant Director for Lifelong Learning and Mark Grimley, Assistant Director for Human Resources and Organisational Development to discuss School Academy Transfers and decide upon how each scrutiny panel would review the topic and in what format.

32. **LOCAL CARBON FRAMEWORK**

Paul Chapman, the Head of Value for Money (VFM) and Efficiencies, gave a presentation on the Local Carbon Framework. Councillors were informed that –

- (a) Plymouth had a very good national reputation in having a low carbon footprint and were selected as one of nine local authorities to pilot a project on development of a low carbon economy;

- (b) as well as making recommendations to government departments the pilot project had many objectives, which included, but were not limited to –
- setting out how, as a city, Plymouth could work towards reducing carbon emissions targets;
 - encouraging community participation and improving knowledge of local people to reduce carbon emissions and thus save money and protect the environment;
 - to define what constituted a low carbon economy and agree a step by step action plan on achieving this by 2050;
- (c) Plymouth had been very successful in reducing its tonnes of CO₂ per person with the figure being 6.0 in 2005 compared to the latest figure of 5.5 in 2008;
- (d) the University of Plymouth and the University of Exeter had undertaken research on carbon reduction and their findings were helping to form part of Plymouth's Low Carbon Framework;
- (e) key findings to date had led to a number of recommendations being provided to assist in producing a low carbon economy, these included –
- creating an information line and website;
 - introducing financial incentives to reduce tonnes of CO₂ and fines for non-compliance;
 - increasing awareness and knowledge through a mentor programme for local businesses.

Following members questions it was reported that –

- (f) the figures were only available from 2008 as the data provided by the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) was only produced two years in arrears;
- (g) the procurement process had been developed to promote local carbon reduction by ensuring that, with any spend below £70k, at least one locally-based supplier should be invited to quote for the business. With tenders over £70k, local businesses were being encouraged to bid for Council business, wherever possible.

It was agreed that –

- (l) the panel supports the recommendation to undertake 'Phase 2' of the Local Carbon Framework' development as a programme of engagement and consultation prior to the production of the final Local Carbon Framework report in late 2011;

- (2) Paul Chapman, Lead Officer would provide an emailed response to all members regarding the following issues –
- SWDWP findings on carbon emissions;
 - population figures in Plymouth;
 - the procurement process;
 - Plymouth City Council's attempts to reduce CO2;
- (3) the Democratic Support Officer would disseminate copies of all the presentations from this meeting to all members of the Panel.

33. **CORONERS SERVICE REVIEW**

David Shepperd, Head of Legal Services gave a presentation on the Coroners Service and informed councillors that –

- (a) Plymouth had a full-time coroner with a number of other coroners staff; the Coroners Personal Assistant employed and managed by Plymouth City Council (PCC) and four Coroners Officers employed and managed by the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary;
- (b) the role of the coroner was to investigate deaths which occurred in certain circumstances. In all circumstances the coroner would open an inquest and seek to establish the medical cause of death;
- (c) it was the responsibility of the Legal Service Department of PCC to manage the Coroner's Service budget which was £700k per year;
- (d) in financial year 2010-2011 the budget achieved an under spend of £54k compared to a £57k overspend in 2006 when the Legal Service Department first took over the management of the budget;
- (e) the achievement in reducing budget spend had been due to the aligning of processes of the police, coroners service and register office so that they were more efficient. As a result the average time to complete a coroners inquest had been reduced from 55 weeks in 2007 to 27 weeks in 2011;
- (f) the legal service department had identified future challenges which would improve the coroners service further, these included –
- a proposal to co-locate the Coroners Service with the Register Office (location to be determined by conclusions of Accommodation Strategy);
 - the standardisation of administration processes;
 - further budget reductions through increased business efficiencies.

Following members questions it was reported that –

- (g) the Coroner was encouraged to hold inquests in public (council owned) buildings such as the council house so as not to incur additional costs;
- (h) the Legal Service Department was waiting for an announcement from the Devon and Cornwall constabulary as to whether the number of Coroners staff would be reduced following the budget cuts in the Devon and Cornwall constabulary;
- (i) the budget allocated to the Coroners Service was provided from the Revenue cost of the local authority and was included in the formula for the Revenue Support Grant (RSG).

David Shepperd, Head of Legal Services was thanked for his attendance.

34. **CASHIERS SERVICE AND PAY POINT REVIEW**

Rob Batten, Financial Services Team Leader presented a report providing a position statement on the recent closure of the Cashiers Service. Members were informed that –

- (a) following the closure of the Cashiers Service PCC had received no complaints and there were no concerns or issues;
- (b) payment can take up to three days to be received if it had been paid in a post office or shop and that any reminder letters were not dispatched until after the three day period following the payment being required to be made;
- (c) cheques were a vital mechanism to enable PCC's customers to make payments and it was believed that the proposal to abolish cheques in 2018 had been overturned.

Agreed that 'figures on reminder letters being sent to customers' is provided to all members in writing and Paul Chapman, Lead Officer would check if this information had been provided since the last meeting.

35. **VALUE FOR MONEY (VFM) UPDATE**

Paul Chapman, the Head of Value for Money (VFM) and Efficiencies, provided the Panel with a VFM Quarterly Update. Councillors were informed that –

- (a) the VFM team were challenging departments to ensure the achievement of £15.6m of savings as set out in the delivery plans for 2011 – 2012;
- (b) part of the departmental challenge had seen the review of business and administration across the council, which aimed to standardise practices and support new initiatives to achieve savings;

- (c) there had been a significant improvement in the governance around benchmarking, which had ensured benchmarking tools were used in a more robust fashion and finance and performance data had been streamlined;
- (d) in delivering VFM the aim moving forward was to ensure benefits were being delivered in operational areas of the council to ensure that the council improved on customer focus;
- (e) in delivering benefits in operational areas there was a need to deliver a training course to staff so that they could understand how to deliver benefit realisation.

In response to questions councillors were informed that –

- (f) there was more that could be done to improve VFM across the council, however, the VFM teams limited resources only allowed them to focus on major projects;
- (g) there was the potential to expand the VFM team by using a pool of staff who had recently completed a Leadership programme course;
- (h) of the £15.6m savings required in the budget delivery plans £2.4m had been identified as not going to be achieved, directorates had been challenged to identify other areas to save money in order to find the required savings;
- (i) the procurement team had recruited 7 buyers and were advertising for the final post.

Agreed that -

- (1) a meeting be set up between Cllr David James, Chair (SS OSP), Cllr Mark Lowry, Vice-Chair (SS OSP), Paul Chapman, Lead Officer (SS OSP), Cllr Nicky Wildy, Chair (CYP OSP), Cllr David Stark, Vice-Chair (CYP OSP), Claire Oatway, Lead Officer (CYP OSP), Colin Moore, Assistant Director for Lifelong Learning, Mark Grimley, Assistant Director for Human and Resources and Organisational Development and Jane Keeley, Procurement Manager to discuss the contract award for Children's transport;
- (2) Paul Chapman, Lead Officer provide a written response to all members on the following issues –
 - why has the Lord Mayor's budget not been delivered;
 - regarding 3 Elliot Terrace – what are the figures on how much was expected to be achieved and what is the reality of the achievements;
- (3) Paul Chapman, Lead Officer report back to the November meeting on providing staff incentive programmes or reward and recognition schemes to assist in the delivery of VFM. In undertaking the research attention should

be given to the Leicester City Council model and private sector incentive schemes.

36. **TASK AND FINISH GROUPS**

- (i) Impact of the restructure in Revenues and Benefits, Customer Services, Cashiers and Incomes and Creditors

Members noted the Project Initiation Document.

Agreed that –

- (1) the Task and Finish Group be held on Thursday 27 October 2011;
- (2) the membership of the Task and Finish Group be confirmed outside of the meeting.

37. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS AND FEEDBACK FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

The panel was informed that the appraisal process was scheduled for the November meeting due to the staff appraisals only being completed on 31 August 2011.

The tracking resolution document was noted.

38. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel noted its work programme.

39. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.