
OVERVIEW OF EFFICIENCY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Half-Year Sickness Absence

2. As part of our monitoring of sickness absence within the Authority, we have received the half-year out-turn figures for 2016/17. The half year figure, April to September 2016, was projecting an outturn of 9.69 days which equates to a 4.33 per cent of working days available lost through sickness absence. As at the end of January 2017, the figures were showing a projected out-turn of 9.7 days, equating to 4.05 per cent of working days available lost through sickness absence.
3. Stress continues to be the highest reason for sickness absence, accounting for 25.9 per cent of all days lost and the average days lost to stress per full-time equivalent has increased by 0.12 days compared to the same period last year. Work-related stress is slightly higher than non-work related stress and we were advised of the support available to employees and to Managers in managing this area of absence.
4. As a good employer, the Council has implemented a number of well-being initiatives for staff which it is hoped will assist with reducing sickness absence levels and the feedback from the events and promotions which have been held to date have been positive and the events well attended. The recent Step Challenge, run by Local Motion, was an example of a particularly successful initiative which a number of staff and some Members took part in.
5. We are confident that sickness absence is well managed within the Authority in accordance with the sickness absence policy, however, we will continue to monitor this.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2016/17 – Quarter 3

6. We have received the Quarter 3 forecast of the 2016/17 revenue budget outturn. Quarter 3 is showing an improvement across all departments, however there is still an overspend within the People Group as a result of significant pressures in Children's Services, which was being offset against other departmental and corporate savings.
7. We discussed the volatility within individual budgets and how Managers used trend analysis and working knowledge to make predictions about future spend and efficiencies across services, and we did accept that there were difficulties in

making accurate budgetary predictions due to a number of unknown factors, particularly across the People Group.

8. We were re-assured about the challenge process which was in place to ensure that budgets were continually monitored and reviewed by Managers, however, we did discuss the possibility of Officers being invited to attend future meetings of our Scrutiny Committee, when departmental budgets were projecting an overspend, to give an explanation as to the reasons for that and any actions being taken to mitigate against it.
9. Members did refer to the effects of the reductions within the 2016/17 MTFP in relation to the Street Scene Service which were now being seen across Wards and the Chair of the Place Scrutiny Committee reported that that Scrutiny Committee would be undertaking a specific review into the area in the forthcoming months. Questions were asked around the new homes which were being built with the Town and the additional income which would be generated as a result of those new homes and whether there was a strong business case for any additional funding to be provided to the Street Scene Service. We were advised however, that any projected growth in Council Tax income, would be offset by the reduction in Government grants.

Library Service

10. Following the receipt of a call-in from Cabinet on 17 January, 2017 in relation to its decision in respect of the Library Service, we held a special meeting on the 31 January 2017.
11. The Members who had signed the call in documentation outlined their reasons for calling in the decision and questions and clarification were sought in relation to the detailed calculation of costs, whether a matrix based risk assessment could be provided and monitored and the future maintenance and public use of the Crown Street Library building.
12. The Cabinet Member and the Director of Neighbourhood Services responded to all of the points raised by Members and the Assistant Director, Law and Governance outlined the legal position in relation to the future of the building, particularly in relation to the Trust position.
13. After carefully considering all the points raised and after hearing the views of two members of the public, the majority view of our Committee was that it was satisfied with the decision Cabinet took on the 17 January, 2017. There was a minority view put forward that until further clarification was obtained in relation to the actual savings to be achieved, the decision of Cabinet could not be supported.

Councillor Ian Haszeldine
Chair Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee