

SELF REGULATION SELECT COMMISSION
27th March, 2014

Present:- Councillor Currie (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Beaumont, Beck, Ellis, Godfrey, Sharman and Watson.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors J. Hamilton, Tweed and Vines.

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest to report.

61. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or the press.

62. COMMUNICATIONS

No items of communication had been received, but the Senior Adviser (Member Development and Scrutiny) advised the Select Commission that a member development session on Chairing Skills was taking place on Friday, 28th March, 2014 and some places were still available.

63. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 20th February, 2013 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

Reference was made to Minute No. 58 (Revenue Budget Monitoring) and the questions about Looked After Children which were raised at the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission and which the Chairperson felt were adequately covered.

64. AGENCY WORKER USAGE

Consideration was given to a report presented by Phil Howe, Director of Human Resources, accompanied by Warren Carratt and Mori McDermott from Children and Young People's Services and Adrian Gabriel from Environment and Development Services, which provided an overview of agency worker activity across the Council including rationale for use.

It was noted that the Council had a master vendor contract for the supply of temporary agency workers in place since 2007 and it was important that usage of such workers should be managed in a cost effective and business efficient way. In order to ensure this happens an overarching policy document, plus a range of guidance documents were in place to inform managers of the processes and procedures which should be followed to achieve this efficiency.

If used correctly the additional costs for agency workers in higher hourly rates and agency commission could largely be offset by not incurring other 'On-costs' associated with National Insurance and Pension contributions or costs nor eventual redundancy payments or employment litigation costs associated with employment being brought to an end.

Senior management in each Directorate were supplied, on a monthly basis, with a range of data regarding their agency usage. Detailed workforce data was also supplied on an annual basis to assist with workforce planning.

Over the last three year period the overall spend on agency workers had dropped significantly although there was a slight upward trend showing in this current year (2013/14).

A short summary of Directorate activity was provided and reference made to the information contained within the appendices, which were included with the report as submitted.

Discussion ensued and the following issues were raised and subsequently clarified:-

- Current spend in Children and Young People's Services to cover vacant posts, sickness/absence and maternity leave and whether this was not in accordance with the current policy.
- Detailed update of agency worker usage in Directorates was received and the accumulation of continuous service was questioned on specific examples, e.g. the Admin. Assistant in Environment and Development Services and whether this was more widespread elsewhere when Agency workers may be retained beyond the 12 weeks outlined in the policy.
- Allocation of appropriate resources and the risks to the Council should it not be able to cover vital posts through agency cover.
- Loss of key staff through voluntary severance/redundancy and the role of the manager in minimising the reliance on agency staff.
- The control and safeguards in place to minimise the risk to vulnerable people.
- Agency cover for key social work staff and the aspirations for long term solutions in Children and Young People's Services.
- Duration of assignments for agency cover, the maximum extensions and the long term aim.
- Flexible working arrangements, opportunities and options for staff.
- Reliance on agency cover for sickness absence and the areas most at risk.
- Managerial responsibility to manage flexible working given that the vast majority of requests come from women.
- Implementation of the Temporary Agency Workers Policy, its performance management and an appreciation of the hard work undertaken by staff.

- Noting the Temporary Agency Workers Policy was subject to review by the end of 2014.
- Appropriate co-ordination and redeployment of staff and the confidence of managers to implement.

The Select Commission were informed of plans to review the Temporary Agency Workers Policy by the end of 2014 and it was suggested that this be included as part of the work programme going forward.

Resolved:- (1) That the continued use of agency workers, if managed in accordance with the Temporary Agency Workers policy and supporting guidance, be supported.

(2) That the review of the Temporary Agency Workers Policy be included as part of the work programme going forward.

65. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD ENDING 31ST JANUARY 2014

Further to Minute No. 207 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 19th March, 2014, consideration as given to a report presented by Stuart Booth, Director of Finance, which provided details of progress on the delivery of the Revenue Budget for 2013/14 based on performance for the first ten months of the financial year. It was currently forecast that the Council would overspend against its Budget by £1.183m (+0.5%). This represented an improvement in the forecast outturn of -£934k since the December monitoring report. The main reasons for the forecast overspend continued to be:-

- The continuing service demand and cost pressures for safeguarding vulnerable children across the Borough.
- Income pressures within Environment and Development and ICT Services.
- Continuing Health Care income pressures within Adult and Children's Services.
- Additional, one-off property costs relating to the continued rationalisation of the Council's asset portfolio as part of the efficiency drive to reduce operational costs.
- Some savings targets were currently pending delivery in full in 2013/14.

The moratorium on all except 'essential' spend had been in place since 16th October, 2013. The impact of this and the approval of 102 applications for Voluntary Early Retirement/Voluntary Severance (VER/VS) were now reflected in this monitoring report. 45 applications were also currently under consideration.

Reference was made to the reasons for the projected pressure from winter maintenance given that the winter had been relatively mild and an explanation was provided on budget and salt usage.

Resolved:- That the current forecast outturn and significant financial challenge presented for the Council to deliver a balanced revenue budget for 2013/14 and the actions implemented to address the forecast overspend be noted and welcomed.

66. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2013/14 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME BUDGET 2014/15 TO 2016/17

Further to Minute No. 208 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 19th March, 2014, consideration as given to a report presented by Stuart Booth, Director of Finance, which provided details of the current forecast outturn for the 2013/14 programme and enabled the Council to review the capital programme for the financial years 2014/15 to 2016/17.

The budget process that led to the original Capital Programme for 2013/14 to 2016/17 ensured that the Council's capital investment plans were aligned with its strategic priorities and vision for Rotherham.

In order to maintain that strategic link and make best use of the capital resources available to the Council, it was important that the programme was kept under regular review and where necessary revisions were made. This programme was initially reviewed in July, 2013, following the finalisation of the 2012/13 outturn capital expenditure and financing and had now been the subject of further reviews, the result of which was reflected in the Directorate summary table as set out in the report along with the detailed analysis of the programme for each Directorate.

Clarification was sought on the A57 Improvement Scheme, which was nearing completion, and whether the schedule of works completion date had slipped any.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the recommendation to approve the updated 2013/14 to 2016/17 Capital Programme be noted.

67. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Self Regulation Select Commission take place on Thursday, 24th April, 2014 at 3.30 p.m.