

SELF REGULATION SELECT COMMISSION
18th September, 2014

Present:- Councillor Currie (in the Chair); Councillors Cutts, Ellis, Sansome, Sharman and Watson.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Johnston and Tweed.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

22. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

A member of the public asked whether the publication of the Jay report would see greater scrutiny of Cabinet Members' decision making as part of Rotherham's Executive.

Councillor S. Currie, Chair of the Self-Regulation Select Commission confirmed that the implications of the Jay report would be scrutinised through Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, as they had done with a previous Serious Case Review report.

The consideration of the Jay report through Scrutiny would allow the public and the press to ask questions and receive further information.

When the full programme was known about how the Jay report and its implications and recommendations would be considered by Scrutiny, a written response would be provided in full to the member of the public.

23. COMMUNICATIONS

Councillor S. Currie informed the Self-Regulation Select Commission that, following a question received at the Council meeting in September regarding the Council's Standing Orders relating to full council meetings, a cross-party review group of members of the Self-Regulation Select Commission and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to look at the issues raised. A terms of reference for the review group would be produced.

Resolved: - That Councillors Cutts, Watson, Sansome, Ellis and Currie be members of the cross-party review group.

24. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 31st July, 2014, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

25. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2014/15

Further to Minute No. 24 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6th August, 2014, consideration was given to a report presented by Stuart Booth, Director of Financial Services, which provided details of progress on the delivery of the Revenue Budget for 2014/15 based on performance for the first three months of the financial year. It was currently forecast that the Council would overspend against its Budget by £6.752M (+3.2%).

When the 2014/15 Budget was set, there had been recognition that there was the potential for this to be a challenging year with the need to manage service demands very closely and that the level of balances reflected this potential increase in financial risk in the system.

The main reasons for the forecast overspend were:-

- The continuing service demand and cost pressures for safeguarding vulnerable children across the Borough.
- Cost pressures arising from some schools converting to academies.
- Income pressures within Environment and Development Services and ICT.
- Demand pressures for Direct Payments within Older People and Physical and Sensory Disability clients.
- Additional, property costs from the continued rationalisation of the Council's buildings as part of the efficiency drive to reduce operational costs.
- Some savings targets were currently pending delivery in full in 2014/15.

Cabinet had agreed the implementation of the opportunity for staff to apply for Voluntary Severance/Voluntary Early Retirement and where this could be supported these savings would help to reduce the in-year financial pressure and also contribute to closing the budget funding gap for 2015/16 and beyond.

As the current forecast outturn was significantly different to budget, Cabinet was asked to support the implementation of the same successful three stage strategy (Section 7.4 of this report) used in 2013/14 to bring spend in line with budget by the end of 2014/15.

The above actions would mitigate the current level of forecast overspend and assist the Council to deliver a balanced outturn and preserve its successful track record in managing both its in year financial performance and its overall financial resilience.

The Select Commission was advised of the forecasted over and underspends for each which were set out in detail as part of the report.

A discussion and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and subsequently clarified:-

- What, if any, financial measures had the Council put in place following publication of the Jay report? Provision needed to be made in relation to implementing the recommendations, providing support for victims and potential claims: -
 - The Local Authority was preparing a response to the potential challenges and the Audit Committee would also have a role in this to ensure good financial management;
 - The Leader had identified £120,000 to provide therapeutic services to victims of child sexual exploitation. This had been funded within existing resources and did not represent a budget pressure;
 - The Jay report emphasised the multi-agency nature of the workforce. It followed that there would be a multi-agency financial response;
 - The Self-Regulation Select Committee welcomed the Chief Executive providing further information about regarding a detailed costing of the response to the Jay report.

- What period did the Local Authority's Medium Term Financial plans cover, three or five years? : -
 - The Local Authority's MTF represented a sustainable and resilient five-year plan regarding the vast majority of the Council's funding via revenue grant. It should be remembered that the General Election likely to be held in 2015 could bring a change in national financial policy. The MTF was projecting on-going cuts until 2018/2019.

- Given the forecast over-spend and the requirement to make in-year savings, consideration should be given to immediately going to Stage Three of the Council's strategy to address over-spend;

- Has the Council / Local Authority given any consideration to registering concerns about the inherent risks to the community following the cuts?

- More frequent monitoring was requested for future updates relating to over-time and agency and consultancy expenditure: -
 - It was important that the different areas of the budget were given proportional consideration.

- Was any work being done on looking at ways to retain staff within the City Region to ensure that skills were retained in the local economy: -
 - This would be a future item on the Self-Regulation Select Commission's work programme;
 - Shared Services were in place between Rotherham and Doncaster Local Authorities and Rotherham and Sheffield Local Authorities. Market testing for shared services beyond

the City Region had taken place but had not progressed further.

- Were any budgets being treated differently when it came to re-alignment and over-spending, and was there a role for the Self-Regulation Select Commission in this analysis?
-
- The winter pressures budget had spent more over the relatively ambient 2013/2014 winter.

Resolved:- (1) That the current forecast outturn and significant financial challenge presented for the Council to deliver a balanced revenue budget for 2014/15 be noted.

(2) That the three Stage Strategy to address the forecast overspend as detailed in this report, to bring spend in line with budget by 31st March 2015 be noted.

(3) That Members of Parliament be notified of concerns relating to budget pressures falling on the Council as a result of some Academy Conversions and implementing the requirements of the Care Bill.

(4) That concerns be passed to relevant bodies regarding the increasing, sustained risk that austerity measures were posing to communities.

(5) That the Self-Regulation Select Commission requests that agency/consultancy costs be included in the revenue budget reports to this committee.

26. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE (QUARTER 1)

In accordance with Minute No. 6 of 27th June, 2014, the Performance and Quality Manager presented the current position statement by exception based on the available performance measures for all of the 11 key delivered outcomes contained within the Council's Corporate Plan.

Each of the 11 outcomes had been allocated either 3 or 5 measures in agreement with Service Directors. The measures allocated would be RAG rated dependent upon its individual performance.

The report set out each of the Priority Measures together with their RAG rating.

No outcomes during quarter 1 had been rated red. Any rated amber or green could be found on Appendix B of the report submitted.

The Performance Quality Team was currently working alongside colleagues within CYPS to develop a proxy Child Poverty Indicator.

Discussion followed and the issues raised were: -

- The need to accept or reject reports on risk, and a move away from 'noting' these reports;
- The importance of looking at direction of travel and the potential to utilise performance clinics and scrutiny to challenge poor performance.

A demonstration was provided that showed the new tool available to members to look at Council performance entitled the 'Corporate Plan SharePoint Page'.

Members' Development presentation or a Seminar on the use of the portal would take place.

The portal would contain information about the Corporate Plan's performance measures and performance clinics.

Discussion ensued and members of the Self-Regulation Select Commission focused on the information relating to housing, housing VOIDS and repairs.

Resolved:- (1) That the current position against each of the Corporate Plan outcomes, including the proposed interventions and corrective actions, be noted.

27. COMPLAINTS - ANNUAL REPORT (APRIL 2013 - MARCH 2014)

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Performance Officer, with regard to complaints made between 1st April, 2013 and 31st March, 2014, under the Corporate Complaints Procedure, the Adult Social Services and Children's Social Services complaint regulations.

In total, over the last twelve months, there had been 672 complaints received by the Council, a 0.05% decrease (668 received 2012/13) of which 98% had been responded to within the timescales promised, the same as in 2012/13, and 94% in 2011/12.

There had been continued improvement in the way that complaints were dealt with across the Council. The management of complaints and the quality assurance processes in place had contributed to the reduction in complains escalating through the complaint procedure ensuring that things were swiftly put right when things went wrong and work with the customer to resolve their dissatisfaction.

It was also noted that the Directorate Complaints Team had continued to maintain recent significant improvements in the following areas:-

- Learning from all Complaints to identify service improvements
- Less Ombudsman complaints upheld
- Improved performance on enquiries responded to in time
- Reduced the number of informal complaints received
- Maintained the number of complaints escalating through the complaint procedure
- Less complaints upheld
- All responses were quality assured
- Had assisted with more Councillor Surgery enquiries
- Had reduced compensation costs
- Had reduced CYPs investigation costs
- Increased the number of compliments recorded

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

- How different Directorates prioritised eCasework reports differed and this could lead to inconsistencies;
- The approach of the Directorates differed, some responded directly to surgery requests/members of the public, whereas others responded to the Councillor only: -
 - The Self-Regulation Select Commission supported the approach of Directorates responding directly to the member of the public and providing a copy of the response to the Councillor.
- Were the targets achievable with the available resources? : -
 - The target was to achieve 100% resolution with less escalation to further stages and less complaints upheld by the Ombudsman.
- It would be reasonable to expect that complaints about cuts to services would increase;
- The emphasis on learning from complaints was very positive and should be commended.

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

(2) That the Self-Regulation Select Commission's preference for responding to e.Casework requests be passed on to the Council's Directorates.

28. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Self-Regulation Select Commission be held at the Town Hall, Rotherham, on Thursday, 23rd October, 2014, commencing at 3.30 p.m.