

# Decisions of the Business Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee

13 December 2012

Members Present:-

Councillor Hugh Rayner (Chairman)  
Councillor Brian Salinger (Vice-Chairman)

|                           |                              |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Councillor Maureen Braun  | Councillor Andrew Strongolou |
| Councillor Kath McGuirk   | Councillor John Marshall     |
| Councillor Alison Moore   | (In place of Brian Gordon)   |
| Councillor Rowan Turner   | Councillor Lord Palmer       |
| Councillor Barry Rawlings | (In place of Jack Cohen)     |

Also in attendance:

Councillor Robert Rams – Cabinet Member for Customer Access and Partnerships  
Councillor Daniel Thomas – Deputy Leader of the Council / Cabinet for Resources and Performance

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Jack Cohen                      Councillor Brian Gordon

## 1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2012 be approved.

## 2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

Apologies for absence had been received from:

- Councillor Jack Cohen who was substituted for by Councillor Lord Palmer OBE; and
- Councillor Brian Gordon who was substituted for by Councillor John Marshall.

An apology for late arrival had been received from Councillor John Marshall.

## 3. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

None.

## 4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Details of the questions asked and the answers provided were published with the agenda papers for the meeting. Verbal responses were given to supplementary questions at the meeting.

**5. MEMBERS' ITEMS**

None.

**6. ANY MATTERS REFERRED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE RELATING TO KEY DECISIONS MADE BY:**

**Cabinet, 6 December 2012**

The Committee considered the following decision of the Cabinet meeting held on 6 December 2012 and asked questions of the Deputy Leader of the Council / Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance and the Cabinet Member for Customer Access and Partnerships in respect of the following:

| <b>Decision Item:</b> | <b>Subject:</b>   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>5</b>              | <b>Report of the Deputy Leader of the Council / Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance and Cabinet Member for Customer Access and Partnerships</b><br>New Support & Customer Service Organisation:<br>Recommendation for Preferred and Reserved Bidder and Full Business Case |

The Committee received comments from Mr Keith Martin, Ms Barbara Jacobsen, Mr Julian Silverman and Ms Fiona Brickwood.

**RESOLVED** that, following consideration of the call-ins from Councillor Lord Palmer OBE and Councillor Alison Moore, the above decision was not referred back to the Cabinet for reconsideration.

**7. COUNCILLOR CALLS FOR ACTION**

None.

**8. WELFARE REFORM - COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME AND THE CRISIS FUND**

The Deputy Leader of the Council / Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance presented two reports which were due to be considered by the Cabinet on 17 December 2012 on the Council Tax Support Scheme and Crisis Fund.

The Committee received comments from Ms Barbara Jacobsen and Mr Julian Silverman.

The Committee noted that if the Council did not devise its own local scheme, a centrally prescribed system would be imposed. Members noted that residents in receipt of benefits would be expected to pay a proportion of their liability for council tax.

In considering the proposals set out in the reports, the Committee made the following points:

- One option that had been considered which would avoid charging people through the council tax scheme was to fund the shortfall through an increase in Council Tax. Officers reported that the Council would forego government funding if this proposal was adopted and, in any case, this would be in contravention of Council policy.
- The Council could consider introducing a 'band cap'. Officers reported that this had not been adopted for 2013/14 for the reasons set out in the report to Cabinet. The Committee noted that introducing such a cap would affect people with large families disproportionately.
- Members expressed concern that there was no protection for vulnerable groups, including the disabled and single mothers. Officers reported that protection for specific groups had been considered, but this was not recommended since it would result in the inefficient distribution of resources. In developing the proposals, Cabinet Members and Officers had determined that it would be fairer to target the limited funds available on those who are actually in hardship through the Crisis Fund, rather than provide blanket protection to all in a defined group.
- Members questioned whether consideration had been given to the cumulative effect of all of the welfare reforms, including benefit caps and under-occupancy rules. Officers reported that an analysis had been completed and the Council would be communicating with each of the families most affected in early 2013 to advise them of options and the assistance available.
- The Committee questioned whether the proposal had implications in relation to the public sector equality duty. Officers reported that equalities impact assessments have been undertaken for both the Council Tax Support Scheme and Crisis Fund which were detailed in the reports to Cabinet. Officers advised the Committee that they were satisfied that obligations under the public sector equality duty had been fulfilled.

**RESOLVED that:**

- 1. The Committee note and endorse the proposals set out in the Cabinet reports on the Council Tax Support Scheme and Crisis Fund, acknowledging the limited timescale that the Council has had to respond to the changes to welfare system.**
- 2. The Committee agree that a Task and Finish Group should be established in April 2013 to monitor the impact of the welfare reform changes to assist Cabinet Members and Officers to review and revise the scheme as appropriate.**
- 3. Cabinet be requested to note the concern of the Committee that the welfare reform changes will have a significant financial impact on families and the Council in the future.**
- 4. Officers be requested to provide Committee Members with details of the criteria used for assessing applications for Crisis Fund and Discretionary Housing Hardship Fund.**

**9. BUSINESS MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED that:**

- 1. The Committee note the Forward Work Programme**
- 2. Consultation on items of business for future meetings be conducted via e-mail**

**10. ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT**

None.

The meeting finished at 9.58 pm