

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the
Council Offices, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Tuesday, 7 April 2015
commencing at 4:30 pm**

Present:

Vice Chairman in the chair Councillor R E Allen

and Councillors:

R A Bird, Mrs G F Blackwell, Mrs J E Day, B C J Hesketh, B A Jones, A L Mackinnon,
Mrs F M Ogden, V A Perez, Mrs P E Stokes and H A E Turbyfield

OS.87 ANNOUNCEMENTS

87.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was advised to those present.

OS.88 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

88.1 Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors B C Calway (Chairman), P D Surman, M J Williams and P N Workman. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

OS.89 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

89.1 The Committee's attention was drawn to the Tewkesbury Borough Council Code of Conduct which was adopted by the Council on 26 June 2012 and took effect from 1 July 2012.

89.2 There were no declarations made on this occasion.

OS.90 MINUTES

90.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2015, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman in the chair.

OS.91 CONSIDERATION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

91.1 Attention was drawn to the Executive Committee Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 17-20. Members were asked to determine whether there were any questions for the relevant Lead Members and what support the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could give to the work contained within the Plan.

91.2 It was

RESOLVED That the Executive Committee Forward Plan be **NOTED**.

OS.92 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

92.1 Attention was drawn to the report of the Policy and Performance Group Manager,

circulated at Pages No. 21-26, which set out the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2015/16. Members were asked to approve the Work Programme.

- 92.2 The draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2015/16, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, contained a combination of standing Agenda items such as performance management information, complaints, policy and strategy updates and areas of review that had emerged and had been built into the programme. Agenda items highlighted in bold were new items which had been added to the programme following work carried out by the Committee during 2014/15, or as a result of decisions taken by Council or the Executive Committee, for example, Council had agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should monitor delivery of the Peer Review Challenge Action Plan. A schedule of policies and strategies would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee and would be used to further inform the Work Programme. The Programme remained flexible to allow new areas of activity to be included throughout the year.
- 92.3 It was noted that the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee Update which was due to be considered at the meeting on 8 September 2015 would need to be moved to the meeting on 20 October 2015 as the meeting of the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee was not due to take place until 15 September 2015. A Member indicated that she was pleased to see that the Community Grants Scheme would be reviewed during 2015/16 as this was long overdue. A Member raised concern that the Work Programme did not include any items which would ensure that the Committee was kept informed of proposals for reserves and investments e.g. the sale of land etc. The Chief Executive advised that the Transform Working Group would deal with that particular issue. He would take the comment on board and would ensure that an update was provided at a future meeting of the Committee.
- 92.4 It was
- RESOLVED** That the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2015/16 be **APPROVED**.

OS.93 REVENUES AND BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT PRESENTATION

- 93.1 The Chairman welcomed Richard Horton, Revenues and Benefits Group Manager, and Jo Baker, Revenues and Benefits Operational Manager, to the meeting and indicated that they would be providing a presentation on the Revenues and Benefits Transformation Project.
- 93.2 The following key points were raised during the presentation:
- Revenues and Benefits Transformation Project – The transformation project began in the summer of 2014; site visits were organised to Rushcliffe and North Warwickshire Councils; ‘Ice Creates’ consultants appointed to facilitate the transformation project; it was hoped that the project would result in increased efficiency and cost savings and would change the service to focus on outcomes by promoting financial inclusion and poverty reduction.
 - The Old Reality – Slow processing times in benefits: as at 31 March 2015 new claims were processed in 27.24 days and change in circumstances were processed in 13.42 days; Council Tax collection was at 97.90% which was below the 98% target; staff and managers were anxious over workloads and

did not feel in control; the Council was not able to maximise the available housing benefit subsidy.

- Our Response – A series of regular meetings of the transformation group engaging with staff; mapping the process to strip out bureaucracy; engaging with other organisations, e.g. Severn Vale Housing Society and Citizens' Advice Bureau, and customers; regular daily meetings with staff to discuss workloads and processing – the daily “huddle”; streamlining processes and creating efficiencies; improved customer service.
- Our New Reality (1) – Total estimated cost savings for financial years 2014/15 and 2015/16 amounting to £227,906, the majority of which was due to better performance in housing benefit subsidy as well as removing unnecessary software; freed up a post to work on some of the important areas of financial inclusion; improved staff engagement – more positive and less anxious over workloads; staff and managers in control of workloads, less stress; non-cashable savings of £135,503 of staff time to focus on the outcomes of the financial inclusion work and to spend on more difficult cases in order to achieve a better outcome.
- Our New Reality (2) – Staff focused on achieving better outcomes from housing benefit subsidy to fund the financial inclusion work; the improvement in processing and collection times in Revenues – Council Tax was now being collected at a higher rate than the previous year, currently at 97.50% and on target to achieve 98% by the end of the financial year.
- Our New Reality (3) – Business Rates collection was at 97.65% as at 12 March 2015 and on target to achieve 98%; housing benefit new claims processing for the year was at 18.39 days, the Council's lowest ever processing time, the team had already beaten the new claim processing target for 2014/15 of 26 days; changes in circumstances processing was falling and was currently at 6.9 days, this was a first quartile performance, the team had beaten the 2014/15 target of 12 days by year end.
- Conclusion – The outcomes had exceeded expectations; it had been a highly successful transformation project which had seen a marked change in service delivery.

93.3

A Member questioned how much of the improvement was due to the new way of working and how much could be attributed to simplifications at a national level. The Revenues and Benefits Operational Manager explained that it was processing of claims which had changed significantly, for example, previously there had often been delays after the claim had been logged whilst staff waited for the relevant information to be provided whereas, under the new system, a claim would not be accepted unless it was accompanied by all of the documentation required for processing. Staff provided help and guidance but the onus was on the customer to ensure that they had provided all of the necessary information. In addition there had been a huge cultural change which had seen a vast improvement to staff morale and there was generally a more positive outlook amongst the team. In response to a query regarding the site visits to other local authorities, Members were informed that there had been some good ideas but they could not necessarily be replicated at Tewkesbury Borough Council, for instance, Rushcliffe Council was very high-tech and it could be expensive to bring in the IT required to implement a similar system. The Revenues and Benefits Group Manager indicated that a lot of changes had been made without the need for high-tech solutions; the Department of Work and Pensions was fully automated which had made a difference to the processing times for changes in circumstance claims. The move towards Universal Credit seemed to be more focused on engaging with people and it was important that customers were able to speak to an adviser if they were in real financial difficulty; the new way of working meant that customers were able to meet

with staff who could deal with their Housing Benefit and Council Tax claims and refer them on to other organisations and agencies for further support.

- 93.4 A Member questioned whether performance would continue to be monitored against other authorities and confirmation was provided that this was the case. It was interesting to note that Tewkesbury Borough Council was currently outperforming some local authorities which were run by private organisations. Further site visits were planned and it was intended to go back to North Warwickshire Council to see what was being done in relation to financial inclusion. The Revenues and Benefits Operational Manager reiterated that performance monitoring would be continuous and she would always be looking for ways to make further improvements. The Chief Executive explained that the statistics were brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the quarterly performance management report and he indicated that the Revenues and Benefits team would be happy to produce a report in 12 months' time to update the Committee on what had been achieved within the service. It should be borne in mind that a decision could have been taken to outsource the service which would undoubtedly have resulted in transactional improvements, however, it would not have provided the opportunity to work in partnership with other organisations to make significant changes in respect of financial inclusion which involved some of the most vulnerable people in the Borough.
- 93.5 A Member queried whether the new ways of working were conducive to Universal Credit. The Revenues and Benefits Group Manager explained that Universal Credit was still very much a project and there could still be many changes. In theory, housing benefit would be taken over by the Department of Work and Pensions and Universal Credit, however, in his opinion the Council would still have a role to play in terms of financial inclusion and helping customers to access services. The Chief Executive clarified that, although Universal Credit was coming forward in June/July 2015, this was only one element of the system in relation to young, single people, not a roll out of the whole system. An update would be provided to all Members following the elections, once the new arrangements were in place. A Member went on to question whether a timetable was in place for the implementation of the other elements of Universal Credit and was advised that it was a moving feast; it had originally been planned to have full roll out by 2017 but there was now no clear end date. Members were reminded that Universal Credit was for working age people only and those of pensionable age would continue to receive housing benefit from the local authority.
- 93.6 The Vice-Chairman in the chair felt that it had been a most interesting presentation and he thanked the staff, on behalf of the Committee, for their hard work and their positive approach throughout the review. It was

RESOLVED That the Revenues and Benefits Improvement Project Presentation be **NOTED** and that an update report be brought to the Committee in 12 months' time.

OS.94 GLOUCESTERSHIRE FAMILIES FIRST UPDATE

- 94.1 Attention was drawn to the report of the Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 27-31, which provided Members with an update on the Gloucestershire Families First Programme. Members were asked to

consider the progress made in delivering the programme.

- 94.2 The Community Development Officer reminded Members that Families First was the local name for the national Troubled Families programme. It was initially a three year programme aimed at turning around the lives of the estimated 120,000 troubled families in the country. The Government had announced an expansion of the programme, reaching out to a further 400,000 families over a five year period from April 2015. The programme was overseen by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) which had an agreement from the County Council that an estimated 900 families could be worked with in Gloucestershire; 10%, i.e. 90 families, were within Tewkesbury Borough. The aims of the programme were to get children back into education; reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour; put adults on a path back to work; and to scale down the amount of public service spending required to assist those families. The Families First Programme in Tewkesbury Borough was overseen by the Locality Partnership Group and it was proving to be a great success with the target to engage with 90 families already achieved. Due to this success, Gloucestershire had been chosen as an early adopter for the next phase of the programme which started nationally in April 2015. The original criteria for the programme had been quite narrow, however, it had been revised for the next phase and now included: parents and children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour; children who had not been attending school regularly; children who needed help; adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion and young people at risk of 'worklessness'; families affected by domestic violence and abuse; and parents and children with a range of health issues. The current Targeted Support Team had joined with the Tewkesbury Families First Team to be collectively named the Families First Plus Team. Families First Plus would build on the existing multi-agency partnerships in Tewkesbury Borough in order to improve the way they worked together to provide early help and support for families, children and young people. The team would provide a focus for: building community capacity by working with partners to support families to help themselves and identify community resources to meet need early on; building capacity in universal services by acting as an enabler and supporting links across services and teams; and targeted support by providing a coordinated response to need where a specific intervention was required.
- 94.3 The Families First Plus Team was based at the Borough Council Offices and was managed by Emma Trigwell. Emma went on to provide Members with some case studies on families within the Borough who had been supported by the Families First Programme to demonstrate the level of work involved and the type of issues which the team had to deal with. She advised that some of the main issues being faced currently related to teenagers who were outgrowing their parents. The 'Triple P' Positive Parenting Program was a resource which was used at group sessions, for those able to engage, and also on a one to one basis in the home. There was a high level of domestic abuse within Tewkesbury Borough and there had been a spike in incidents within teenage relationships. Families First Plus had been working with the Holly Gazzard Trust to create a programme which would initially be used by Tewkesbury School and rolled out more widely, if successful. There had also been an increase in child sexual exploitation and work was being done with the Youth Support Service to identify and put support in place. She explained that the majority of referrals to the programme had initially come from schools, however, they were now being made by a range of sources including the Police, Housing Officers, GPs and children's centres. The engagement of partners was key to making Families First Plus a success and ensuring that people were able to access the right services at the right time. The Community Development Officer clarified that it was not a case of the agency making a referral and handing the case over, the organisation stayed involved with the family and was supported by other partners as necessary.
- 94.4 A Member indicated that she had become aware of a child who had an eating

disorder and she questioned whether the Families First Plus Team would have any advice in that regard. The Gloucestershire County Council Families First Plus Team Manager indicated that there had been a significant rise in eating disorders and self-harm amongst teenage girls. GPs should be able to make referrals for children and young people and many schools offered counselling services. A Member questioned whether the team had made any links with churches and was informed that Officers had met with the community church in Prior's Park to discuss how to rebuild relationships. A Member noted that the report had stated that there were no resource implications and she questioned who would be paying for the second phase of the scheme. In response, confirmation was provided that Families First was financed by DCLG which had set aside funding for five years. Although only the first year had been agreed, the Troubled Families programme had cross-party support so Officers were hopeful that the funding would be available for the whole five years. In Gloucestershire the programme was being integrated as 'business as usual' in order to make it more sustainable for the future. In response to a query as to whether the revised criteria for the second phase of the programme had increased pressure on the team, the Gloucestershire County Council Families First Plus Team Manager indicated that demand had increased, although this was being tackled by working with partners. A Member questioned how the success of the programme was measured and was informed that it was a payment by results programme and there were very clear stipulations in terms of meeting the criteria; if a family was referred to the programme on the basis of meeting four of the criteria, all four had to be addressed e.g. if a child had not been attending school regularly, they needed to achieve 85% attendance for an academic year.

94.5 The Community Development Officer explained that Families First Plus was working hard to build in resilience by working alongside families to educate and train them to be better able to deal with situations in the future. Key workers could be with families for up to one year, family support workers helped to ensure that the families remained 'forward facing' and early help co-ordinators co-ordinated services in the community to protect families when they went back out into the community. This helped to ensure that families would know where to turn for help if they were struggling. A Member raised concern that the number of families on the programme had increased significantly, however, assurance was provided that a lot of the families were already being worked with; although there had been an upscale, it was not as significant as expected.

94.6 Having considered the information provided and views expressed it was

RESOLVED That the progress made in delivering the Families First Programme be **NOTED**.

OS.95 ANNUAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT 2014/15

95.1 The report of the Policy and Performance Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 32-54, attached, at Appendix 1, the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2014/15. Members were asked to approve the contents of the report.

95.2 Members were advised that it was a requirement of the Council's Constitution to

report the activities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis. The report demonstrated the broad coverage of activities that the Committee had scrutinised and reviewed during the year. This had been achieved through progress reports from Officers on the delivery of key strategies and policies; quarterly performance management reporting; Working Groups to review specific areas of interest; presentations from Officers and external organisations; scrutiny reviews of new strategies and policies; and a call-in of an Executive Committee decision. A Member noted that the Flood Risk Management Group had only been mentioned in terms of monitoring and he felt that some additional detail should be included given the significant work which had been carried out by the Group over the course of the year, and which would continue over the next 12 months. In addition, he pointed out two typographical errors in the last Paragraph of the first column on Page No. 40 which related to the Review of Social Media Policy and Guidelines; the workshop had been held on 17 December 2014 as opposed to March 2014 and the policy had subsequently been approved by the Executive Committee in February 2015, rather than 2014. The Chief Executive undertook to make those changes and it was subsequently

RESOLVED That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report 2014/15 be **APPROVED**, subject to the inclusion of additional detail about the work of the Flood Risk Management Group and the following typographical amendments:

- Page No. 40 – Review of Social Media Guidelines – ‘All members of the Committee were invited to attend a workshop held on 17 ~~March~~ **December** 2014, following discussion, the policy was endorsed by the group. The policy was subsequently approved by Executive Committee on 11 February ~~2014~~ **2015**’.

OS.96 COMPLAINTS REPORT

96.1 The report of the Policy and Performance Group Manager, circulated at Pages No. 55-60, provided a six monthly update on the Tewkesbury Borough Council complaints recorded and managed through corporate feedback management procedures and the Local Government Ombudsman complaints received about the Borough Council. Members were asked to consider the information provided and determine whether any further action was required.

96.2 The Chief Executive explained that Tewkesbury Borough Council was very fortunate in that it did not tend to receive a large amount of formal complaints. It was noted that 20 formal complaints had been recorded between July and December 2014, nine of which had been resolved within the target time. Only one of the complaints had been upheld. 99 complaints had been received via the Council’s website and 12 compliments had also been received. A full breakdown of complaints by type, remedy, Parish and channel was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. It was pleasing to note that, although the Ombudsman had received four complaints as at December 2014, none had progressed beyond the initial

investigation. It was proposed to review the complaints procedure to see how it could be further improved and to ensure that the information was being reported to Members in a meaningful way. A report would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

96.3 A Member expressed the view that, as well as the number of complaints, it was important to also consider customer satisfaction. The Chief Executive indicated that he was disappointed that over half of the formal complaints had been dealt

with outside of the target date and this was something which would be covered in the review report. A Member sought further information as to how the complaints received online were dealt with and assurance was provided that Officers always went back to the customers to resolve these complaints which tended to be issues with particular services. A Member queried whether complaints were received about enforcement and was informed that a number of planning complaints would be in relation to enforcement. Whilst all of those complaints would be recorded, they were not necessarily included in the report if they were resolved within the service.

96.4 It was

RESOLVED That the Complaints Report be **NOTED**.

OS.97 FEEDBACK FROM THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE HEALTH AND CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

97.1 Members were invited to discuss any issues arising from the last meeting of the Gloucestershire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee following the circulation of a Member Update on 20 March 2015.

97.2 The Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee indicated that she was very grateful that the Council had been supportive in allowing continued membership of the Committee. She felt that it had been helpful in many ways, particularly in terms of the local hospitals and services for Tewkesbury and the surrounding communities, and she hoped that this would continue in the future.

97.3 On behalf of the Committee, the Vice-Chairman in the chair thanked the representative for her valuable contributions over the years. It was

RESOLVED That the feedback from the Gloucestershire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee be **NOTED**.

The meeting closed at 6:00 pm