

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 17 September 2018 at 7.00 pm

at the Meeting Room 1, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton, OX14 4SB



Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Debby Hallett (Chairman), Chris Palmer (Vice-Chairman), Mike Badcock, Matthew Barber, Robert Hall, Sandy Lovatt, Ben Mabbett and Judy Roberts

Officers:

James Connolly, Andrew Down, Paul Howden, William Jacobs, Adrianna Partridge, Ron Schrieber, Mark Stone and David Wilde

Also present:

Councillors Ed Blagrove and Robert Sharp. Paul Abraham, Clare Dorey and Richard Spraggett (Capita).

Sc.29 Apologies for absence

Councillor Vicky Jenkins submitted apologies.

Sc.30 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 9 and 26 July 2018 were agreed as accurate records and were signed by the Chairman.

Sc.31 Declarations of interest

Councillor Matthew Barber declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 9, Council tax reduction scheme, 2017/18, as some of the savings from the scheme were apportioned to his employer, the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner.

Sc.32 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The chairman informed the committee that she had asked Mark Stone, chief executive, to clarify the committee's roles and responsibilities.

The chief executive stated that the scrutiny function was one of the key checks and balances to the council decision making process.

The committee could guarantee transparency and could hold the administration and officers to account. In his opinion scrutiny worked best when it was involved early in the decision making process.

Sc.33 Public participation

None.

Sc.34 5 Councils contract changes and action plan

The committee considered the report of the head of partnership and insight which gave an update on progress to date and next steps with regards to completing and implementing planned changes to the Five Councils Capita contract and establishing an action plan for the Council that would support its business direction and priorities for the next five years.

Councillor Ed Blagrove, Cabinet member for corporate services, introduced the report. Also present to answer questions were Mark Stone, chief executive, Andrew Down, head of partnership and insight, David Wilde, IT consultant and Paul Abraham, Capita.

The committee was informed that the Council had worked closely with Capita to develop and take forward the following five contract changes:

- a) Establishment of an IT end user computing environment for South and Vale Councils only, meeting our compliance needs for General Data Protection Regulations and enabling a range of new technology opportunities for secure mobile, flexible and multi-agency working;
- b) Return of the Fraud Service in the Revenues and Benefits function as an in-house service so we can continue to grow our success in this field;
- c) Bringing finance business service partner roles and a number of other key responsibilities back in-house and better defining the roles and responsibilities between the supplier and customer across the finance function;
- d) Bringing ownership of strategic Human Resources (HR) back in house and better defining the roles and responsibilities between the supplier and customer across the HR function;
- e) Upgrading our finance system to a fully supported and up to date version of Unit 4 Business World (formerly called Agresso).

The scope of the changes for b), c) and d) were virtually agreed, with the changes intended from the end of October 2018, subject to any time limitations set by TUPE and subject to completion of the revised inter-authority agreement between the five councils. The scope of the changes for a) and e) were also near completion. The proposed changes would be submitted to Cabinet in October.

These changes were part of a wider action plan, attached as an appendix to the report, to achieve stability.

The chief executive informed the committee that Capita's commitment to improving performance and renegotiating the contract had contributed significantly to the progress made to date.

In response to members' questions about the action plan, it was reported that:

Vale of White Horse District Council – Scrutiny Committee minutes

- Some of the IT issues were caused by the Council's legacy pre-contract IT being integrated with the Capita provisioned IT which had not been consolidated into a single environment. It was anticipated that the IT infrastructure would be brought up to a suitable standard by January 2019.
- Since the publication of the action plan, some of the projects RAG rated as amber (in negotiation) had been reclassified as green (under way and on track).
- The IT Enterprise Architecture road maps would be circulated to committee members.
- The upgrade of the Agresso finance system was scheduled for April-June 2019.

The committee congratulated the Cabinet member, officers and Capita representatives on the progress made to date and requested a further update to its January 2019 meeting.

RESOLVED: to:

1. Note the progress made on implementing changes to the Five Councils Capita Contract;
2. Note the action plan attached at Annex A for the short term (1 year) to resolve other outstanding issues across our technology platforms and the Five Councils contract and to establish a medium-term technology strategy; and
3. Request that a further progress report be submitted to the committee in January 2019.

Sc.35 Capita performance: HR, payroll and IT

The committee considered the report of the head of partnership and insight which, further to the meeting held on 9 July 2018, gave a brief update on the performance of the council's contractor, Capita, in the delivery of the HR, payroll and IT services.

Andrew Down, head of partnership and insight, introduced the report. Also present to answer questions were Councillor Ed Blagrove, Cabinet member for corporate services, Mark Stone, chief executive, David Wilde, IT consultant, Paul Abraham and Clare Dorey, Capita.

The committee was informed that, since the previous report, there had been no significant HR and payroll issues for the Vale. For the key performance indicators, 100 per cent payroll accuracy had been achieved in June, July and August and payroll timeliness had also been met in full.

The IT service had improved operationally and good progress was being made with a view to agreeing a new IT strategy for Vale and South (see Minute 34 above).

RESOLVED: to note the report.

Sc.36 Financial outturn 2017/18

The committee considered the report of the head of finance and senior business partner (Capita) on the final year end position for revenue and capital expenditure against budget for the financial year 2017/18.

William Jacobs, head of finance, introduced this item. Also present to answer questions were Councillor Robert Sharp, Cabinet member for finance, and Richard Spraggett, senior business partner (Capita).

With regard to revenue expenditure, there had been an underspend of £2.5 million which had been transferred to the council's reserves. Whilst this was a significant amount, the committee welcomed the detailed explanations for the income and expenditure variances set out in the report.

With regard to capital expenditure, £13.7 million had been slipped into future years. The head of finance confirmed that almost all of this amount was due to non-expenditure in 2017/18 rather than delays in invoicing.

RESOLVED: to note the overall outturn position of the council as well as the outturn of individual service areas.

Sc.37 Council tax reduction scheme 2017/18

The committee considered the report of the head of finance which gave an update on the effect of the council tax reduction scheme (CTRS) on council taxpayers during 2017/18.

Paul Howden, revenues and benefits manager, introduced the report. Also present to answer questions were Councillor Robert Sharp, Cabinet member for finance, and William Jacobs, head of finance.

In response to members' questions, the committee was informed that:

- The CTRS caseload had reduced significantly over the last two years which meant that the CTRS bill had reduced and more residents were paying council tax.
- The council's policy of taking legal action to recover outstanding council tax acted as an effective deterrent and contributed to the council's excellent collection rate.
- The roll out of Universal Credit would necessitate some amendments to CTRS. Any approved changes would be introduced with effect from April 2020.

For a number of years, the committee had received an annual update on the scheme. However, given the reduction in caseload and the fact that the scheme appeared to be operating efficiently, the committee agreed that officers should only submit a report in the event of significant changes to CTRS being proposed.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

Sc.38 Self-assessment questionnaire

Adrianna Partridge, head of corporate services, gave a presentation setting out the results of the councillor self-assessment questionnaire.

There had been an excellent response and the results would be used to shape a tailored development programme for members.

Sc.39 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

The committee noted its work programme.

The chairman reported that she had agreed with officers to remove the CAB/Wantage Independent Advice Centre presentation from the work programme as it would be more appropriate for the presentation to be made to all councillors.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm