

CORPORATE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board on Wednesday, 22 January 2014 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chairman), Roberts (Vice-Chairman), E. Cargill, Dennett, S. Hill, C. Loftus, A. McInerney, N. Plumpton Walsh and G. Stockton

Apologies for Absence: Councillors A. Lowe and Wainwright

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney, A. Jones, I. Leivesley, E. Dawson, N. Goodwin and P. McCann

Also in attendance: None

ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

		<i>Action</i>
CS29	MINUTES The Minutes from the meeting held on 29 October 2013 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
CS30	PUBLIC QUESTION TIME The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.	
CS31	EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES The Minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio which had been considered by the Executive Board were attached at Appendix 1 for Members' information. Further to a debate over the Business Rates Pooling item, Members expressed an interest in attending a seminar in the future on topics relating to financial matters of the Council. Officers would arrange for this to be included within the Local Government Finance training course for Members to be held in March 2014. RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.	Strategic Director - Policy & Resources

CS32 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT GROUP MINUTES

The minutes relating to the Member Development Group held on 17 October 2013 were presented to the Board for information.

One Member made reference to the changes which had taken place recently regarding the Declarations of Members Interests' and their interpretation. It was suggested that Members attend a seminar so they could better understand these changes. The Board would be contacted further regarding this.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

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CS33 LOCAL AREA FORUMS

The Strategic Director, Communities, submitted a report to Members which provided additional information on the decision making process for Local Area Forum funds. This was requested at the last meeting in October 2013, following the presentation of the Local Area Forum Annual Report on expenditure.

Members were advised that once a project had been identified, this was received by the Area Forum Projects Co-ordinator for inclusion on the list of projects for the respective Area Forum. The Lead Officer of the Forum would then ensure that project information was circulated to Members for their consideration ahead of project meetings. Project meetings were held three times a year alongside Area Forum pre agenda meetings. Members would then be asked to consider the projects applied for in the project meetings and make recommendations for approvals in liaison with Lead Officers. It was noted that decisions could be reached outside of project meetings if required, in order to meet particular project timescales.

The Area Forum Projects Co-ordinator would then progress decisions made, provide feedback to applicants and coordinate project delivery and administering the funds.

It was also noted that in considering projects, match funding and leverage of external funding into the Borough was a key consideration during the approval process. For example in 2012/13 an additional £821,908 was invested from external funding into Area Forum Projects.

One Member raised concerns about an issue relating to an Area Forum. The Strategic Director offered to meet

the Member to discuss the issue further. It was also suggested that the Business Efficiency Board be asked to include Area Forum Funding as part of their 2014-15 audit programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CS34 DISCRETIONARY HOUSING BENEFIT SCHEME

The Strategic Director, Policy and Resources, presented the Discretionary Housing Benefit Guidance to the Board, requesting that they recommend that it be adopted by the Council at the next Executive Board meeting.

The Board was advised that the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) provided claimants with financial assistance, in addition to any welfare benefits, when the Council considered that help with housing costs was required.

Members were referred to the draft DHP Guidance document which was appended to the report. They were advised that due to the significant changes in welfare provision that were taking place, it was considered helpful to provide further guidance to staff who administered DHPs; this document was intended to do just that. The guidance was intended to give officers a framework to work with when assessing claims to the Fund, thus ensuring an equitable treatment of applications for what was a limited sum of money.

It was noted that notwithstanding the guidance, each case would still be looked at on its individual merits. Additionally there was an appeal process to Members which was already in existence, which provided a further test to the fairness of the application of the Policy.

Members agreed that the DHP Guidance document would be extremely useful in assisting the staff to do what was a very difficult job, and agreed that it be recommended for adoption.

RESOLVED: That the Discretionary Housing Benefit Guidance be recommended for adoption by the Executive Board.

CS35 MARKETS UPDATE

Members were provided with an update from the Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise, on the initiatives

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and activities which had taken place at the Borough's three markets (Widnes indoor market, Widnes outdoor market and Runcorn outdoor market), during the period 1 November 2012 to 31 December 2013.

It was reported that there were a number of changes and improvements that had been made during the last 12 months, including accessibility improvements, new trader incentives, Links to Business Start Ups and the implementation of the 'New Stalls and Commodities Committee'. The Board was also provided with details of the new promotions and partnerships with Widnes Ice Rink and Widnes Vikings FC, as well as information on existing partnerships with the NHS and the Police.

Members were informed of the training and development initiatives that had been delivered to traders to help them develop their businesses using social media. A further course was planned for them in January 2014 aimed at using public relations effectively.

With regards to future priorities, Members were advised of the refurbishment work planned to the public toilet facilities and to the entrance of the open market in Widnes. Issues around the future power supply were raised as well as the charging of traders for their electricity usage. It was noted that WiFi access would also be a priority in the coming months.

Members discussed the levels of rent arrears at Widnes Indoor Market and expressed concern over the high levels being experienced. It was noted that a large proportion of the arrears were historical and related to former market traders. Officers reported that reluctantly, in recent months the Council had been taking a firmer route in reducing the levels of debt and had been in direct contact with those in arrears, to try to recover the debts.

Members agreed that the markets were important to the Borough as they encouraged people to shop locally, which then created a knock on effect for other businesses. They also commented that people were drawn to the markets for the social interaction and community feel.

The Board requested that a further report on the market statistics and arrears be submitted to them at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

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CS36 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORTS - QUARTER 2

The Board received the performance management reports for quarter 2 of 2013/14 and were requested to consider and raise any questions or points of clarification, in respect of performance management for the second quarter period to 30 September 2013.

The reports related to the following functional areas which reported to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board and were in relation to the Council's priority of Corporate Effectiveness and Business Efficiency:

- Financial Services;
- Human Resources & Organisational Development;
- ICT and Administrative Support;
- Legal and Democracy;
- Policy and Performance;
- Property Services; and
- Catering, Stadium and Registration Services.

It was noted that the reports detailed progress against service objectives, milestones and performance targets and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period.

RESOLVED: That the Policy and Performance Board note the performance management reports for quarter 2 of 2013-14.

CS37 SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Board received a report on the number of working days lost in the second quarter of 2013-14 and provided comparative data from second quarter 2012-13.

Councillor Dennett requested the data relating to the number of days lost in Primary Schools.

RESOLVED: That the report contents and comments made be noted.

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Meeting ended at 7.42 p.m.