

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

24 September 2019

Task Group Update

1. Communications with Councillors Task Group

Membership

Cllr Graham Wright
Cllr Ruth Hopkinson
Cllr Gavin Grant
Cllr Trevor Carbin (Chairman)
Cllr Jose Green

Supporting officer: Adam Brown

Terms of Reference

1. To review Wiltshire councillors' experience and expectation of internal communications from the council across its service areas.
2. To contribute to the work already underway to develop a new online information portal for Wiltshire councillors.
3. To make recommendations to ensure that the communications received by Wiltshire councillors take into account their expectations to assist them in undertaking their role as effectively as possible.

Recent activity

The task group have not met since the last meeting of this committee. They are currently progressing their agreed survey for distribution amongst Wiltshire Councillors. Once this survey has been shared the results will feed into the task group's next stage of work.

2. Digital Strategy and Implementation Task Group

Membership

Cllr Howard Greenman
Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman)

Cllr Bob Jones OBE
Cllr Stuart Wheeler
Cllr Gordon King

Supporting Officer: Natalie Heritage

Terms of Reference:

1. Explore the options of the Microsoft Exercise and look at learning from other councils on how to potentially use those solutions
2. Look at the list of projects and how things become projects - explore how these can be better vetted in future to ensure project meet best needs
3. Look at audit of existing software and how much we are/are not duplicating systems and costs
4. How we interface between service users/residents and the council and its digital systems

Recent Activity

The Task Group met on 4 September to discuss their interim report with the Executive and Officers (also included with the paperwork with this agenda), as well as progress with the Digital Programme. Members also received a presentation on how the new Highways Infrastructure Asset Management System (HIAMS) functions; both customer-facing and back office elements.

The Task Group were impressed with the functionality of HIAMS and the work that has taken place to get the system up and running; specifically, the element that allows users to see where a defect/fault, such as a pothole, has already been reported.

Members agreed that they would meet on a quarterly basis, with the next meeting scheduled for 9 December. This meeting will see the Task Group look at the process for the re-design of the intranet, as well as receiving a live demonstration of HIAMS in action.

3. Financial Planning Task Group

Membership

Cllr George Jeans
Cllr Pip Ridout
Cllr Ian Thorn (Chairman)
Cllr Stuart Wheeler
Cllr Richard Britton
Cllr Gavin Grant

Supporting officer: Henry Powell

Terms of Reference:

1. To understand and review the Medium Term Financial Strategy (4 year financial model)
2. To understand and review the approach and robustness of the financial planning regime within the Council
3. To understand and help develop the approach to the annual budget setting cycle
4. To review the specific contribution of overview and scrutiny in the annual budget setting cycle with a focus on outcomes
5. To undertake periodic budget monitoring including reviews of key midyear trends and developments and to ensure that these are taken into account when updating the Financial Plan
6. To work under the direction and guidance of the Management Committee and report regularly to the Cabinet Member, Management Committee and select committees (as appropriate) on its work and findings and to make any necessary referrals
7. To review the council's Performance and Risk monitoring reports and the Corporate Performance Framework.

Recent activity

On 22 July 2019, the Task Group considered the following items, with the comments included subsequently reported to Cabinet:

Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review

- The Task Group supported the reduction in the council's administrative burden (from the numerous re-calculations of people's allowances currently required) without disadvantaging those receiving benefits.

Budget Monitoring, Performance & Risk Management 2019/20 Q1

- The Task Group welcomed the combining of finance, performance and risk data in the new report format and also the provision of quarter 1 budget monitoring data in July rather than September.

Proposed Loan to Wiltshire Museum

- The Task Group hoped all methods of recovering the costs of artefact storage from developers had been explored.

Enterprise Resource Planning

- The Task Group welcomed the move to a more efficient financial management system that would be upgraded routinely and automatically

Provision of Loan Facility for Wiltshire College

- The Task Group questioned whether the assets proposed as security for the council's loan were truly recoverable given the potential impact of doing so

(e.g. on the provision of education to young people) and whether this increased the risk level.

Council house build programme phase 2 update

- The ESC Chairman received an informal briefing on this item from the report author (Residential Development Manager). He raised questions on financial viability and the purchasing of Section 106 units and was satisfied with the responses provided.

Establishing local authority companies

- The Task Group queried whether the proposed remuneration of £2k for independent directors was sufficient to attract those with the required skills and expertise.
- The Task Group welcomed the overall direction and congratulated those involved on the amount of work undertaken to bring us to this point.

On 11 September, the Task Group considered the following items:

Three Year Budget Strategy 2020/21 – 2022/23

- Members received a briefing on a shift towards 3-year council budgets, which are currently being developed from a zero-base. The strategy sets out the approach to resource allocation over the medium term, balancing the budget in full for a three-year period and forecasting a further two years.
- This is a priorities driven approach, rather than service driven.
- It was reported that budget engagement will be redesigned to reach a wider audience and to enable people to genuinely affect the outcome. Rather the previous model of three public meetings, the council will aim for a multi-faceted approach including piggy-backing on wider business/community events to increase engagement. Making consultation earlier enough to understand people's priorities and then build the budgets using that knowledge.

Budget Scrutiny Process

- It was agreed to schedule a series of task group meetings focusing on their budget priorities

5. Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Task Group

Membership

Wiltshire Councillors:

Cllr Trevor Carbin

Cllr Christine Crisp

Cllr Alan Hill (Chairman)
Cllr Nick Murry

Swindon Borough Councillors:

Cllr Maureen Penny
Cllr Des Moffatt
Cllr Chris Watts
Cllr Rahul Tarar

Supporting officer: Adam Brown

Terms of Reference

1. Develop an overview and scrutiny framework and operational protocols which meet the requirements of democratic accountability for the use of public funds by a partnership body which is led by the business community under a mandate from the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.
2. Whilst developing the framework, the Task Group will carry out trial activities to scrutinise the outcomes and work of the SWLEP. In fulfilling this role the task group will:
 - a) Perform all overview and scrutiny functions on behalf of both Councils in respect of the SWLEP and JSEC
 - b) Appoint such sub-groups as it consider appropriate to fulfil those functions.
 - c) Review and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge or any of the SWLEP and JSEC functions.
 - d) Make reports and recommendations to the Councils relevant partner in connection with the discharge of any functions.
 - e) Approve a forward work programme, including the programme of any sub-groups it appoints so as to ensure that the Task Group and sub-groups' time is effectively and efficiently utilised.
 - f) Foster and encourage an inclusive, structured, non-partisan and non-adversarial approach to overview and scrutiny which is reliant on evidence rather than anecdote.

Recent activity

The task group last met on 9 September. At the meeting the task group received an update from the latest meeting of the SWLEP Board, including the future rail strategy; the Chippenham Station Hub project; and the future scrutiny engagement of the SWLEP.

At their meeting on 13 June the task group received an initial report which detailed the potential options for future Overview and Scrutiny engagement with the SWLEP. At this meeting the task group agreed that OS engagement with the SWLEP should continue, and that this engagement should go further than just regular updates to OS committees.

A further report on this topic was considered by the task group at their 9th September meeting. The report provided greater detail on the two following options: continuing as a task group with refreshed terms of reference and forming a joint scrutiny committee. After consideration of both these options the task group agreed that their preferred option for the future scrutiny of the SWLEP would be the following:

To create a joint Scrutiny Committee which comprises of all Local Authorities from the SWLEP area and relevant representatives that can provide scrutiny from a business perspective, who meet to scrutinise and examine LEP decisions.

This will now be investigated further, with final proposals brought back to the Committee's next meeting.

6. Public Consultations Task Group

Membership:

Cllr Gavin Grant
Cllr Ruth Hopkinson
Cllr Jim Lynch
Cllr Pip Ridout
Cllr Fred Westmoreland
Cllr Stuart Wheeler (Chairman)

Supporting Officer: Natalie Heritage

Terms of Reference

1. To investigate:
 - a. The quantity and scope of council consultations and the level of response
 - b. How the council determines when, and when not, to consult the public on proposals or potential service changes
 - c. How the council determines the best design and format for each consultation
 - d. The public's perception and experience of council consultations
2. To make constructive recommendations for improvement if appropriate.

Recent Activity

The Task Group held their final meeting on 2 September 2019, where members discussed their final report with the Executive and Officers. The Chairman thanked the Task Group, Executive and Officers present for their time and contributions.

The Task Group's final report and recommendations are included with the paperwork of 24 September OS Management Committee.

7. Commercialism Task Group

Membership

Cllr Richard Britton
Cllr Tony Deane
Cllr Gordon King
Cllr Ian Thorn
Cllr Stuart Wheeler (Chairman)

Supporting officer: Marie Gondlach

Terms of Reference

- a) To support implementation of the council's commercialism agenda, by considering and making recommendations regarding,
 - Developing existing income streams
 - Developing new commercial opportunities, either through existing assets or developing or acquiring new ones
 - Councillor and officer expertise in this area
 - The experiences of other local authorities
 - Legal and commercial issues
 - The ethos, values and reputation of the council when considering opportunities.

- b) To liaise with the Financial Planning Task Group, Audit Committee and the Traded Services for Schools Task Group to ensure that a holistic approach is taken with regards to commercialism for the council.

Recent activity

The Commercialism task group met for the second time on 9 September to further scope its work. The task group received information on traded services models available and on imminent projects for the council.

The task group will now focus on establishing its work programme.

Following Cllr While's resignation there is now a vacancy, however the task group still has a manageable membership (5 members). The task group would therefore suggest that it would be beneficial if it could set its work programme before considering appointing another member.

Proposals

- 1. To note the update on Task Group activity provided.**

- 2. To note the request from the Commercialism Task Group to not consider the appointment of an additional member to fill its current vacancy until its work programme has been established.**

- 3. To endorse the following option for Wiltshire's future Overview and Scrutiny engagement with the SWLEP: To create a joint Scrutiny Committee which comprises of all Local Authorities from the SWLEP area and relevant representatives that can provide scrutiny from a business perspective, who meet to scrutinise and examine LEP decisions.**

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