

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

28 January 2020

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: Natalie Heritage

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 Communications with Councillors Task Group met on 9 January, to discuss the results of their recent Councillor survey. The members agreed that the survey's results showed that there may not be an issue with communication, rather, that technology could be better used to improve communication channels. As a result, the Task Group will be attending a bespoke 'Digital Hints and Tips' session, run by the OD/HR team on 4 February 2020.

Alongside this, the group will also be meeting with Democratic Services, HR and ICT to provide input into 2021's Councillor Induction Programme and the Member Development programme. It is then anticipated that the Task Group will be in a position to draft their final report.

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 visited Payroll on 9 January 2020 and were provided with a briefing session and demonstration of how the Virtual Assistant is working, to help ensure that the team is more effective and efficient. Members found this meeting valuable and are grateful to all of the officers who gave up their time to deliver the session.

A report from the Task Group is also included with the agenda pack.

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
Cllr Tony Trotman

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

The Task Group met on 4 December 2019 and considered the following items:

Waste budgets for 2019-20 and 2020-21

- We are still in an interim position awaiting delivery of a new waste disposal facility, which will be early in 2020. As a result, the council was projected to overspend by £2.4M as reported to Cabinet in November.
- Some commercial disputes had led to the current position, but once the new model is in place these should be resolved. Audit have also been asked to ensure that the payments the council is making to the contractor are based on sound financial evidence.
- There have been several issues:
 - The lack of planning permission for the Westbury site.
 - Contractual issues regarding TUPE pension responsibilities the council inherited from the contractor and which weren't foreseen.
 - The TUPE rates are now built into the budget for 2020-21, though these are still subject to agreement under the contract update mechanism.
 - Fleet maintenance demands, which placed a £0.5M pressure on the waste revenue budget.
- The 2019-20 budget is £39.8M and 2020-20 will show £1.960M growth.
- The 2020 budget includes an element of income reduction due to reducing prices for recycled plastics, cardboard and textiles. We have had the benefit of 75% gain-share with the contractor on recycled materials so the reduction in the market price has obviously impacted this. We are now recycling more in the UK than previously. The decreasing prices are due to China recycling more of its own waste.

- Increases in landfill tax are built into the budget and comprises approx. 8% of the service budget. We reduce the tonnages sent to landfill every year, but the tax rates also increases every year.

Mid Year Updated Medium Term Financial Plan

- Members felt that greater clarity was needed around the financial objective, “To generate income through a commercial approach” and the new Financial Objectives in general.
- Members queried whether a corporate contingency budget (para 10) might inevitably be used as an alternative to tight financial control. If such a budget was introduced the Task Group would wish to understand how it would be managed and released etc.

Council Tax Base

- Noted.

SAP improvement programme

- This is a major change programme with a go-live date of April 2022. Successful delivery will lead to greater efficiency as officers will spend less time trying to access financial and staffing information.
- Members requested that councillor involvement in the programme’s be considered, including Overview and Scrutiny.

4. 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: Marie Gondlach

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 will hold its final meeting on Thursday 5 December to review its work to date and contribute to the development of the terms of reference and arrangements for future scrutiny of the LEP.

5. 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

There has been no meetings of the task group since the last meeting of this committee.

Proposals

To note the update on Task Group activity provided.

Report authors:

Natalie Heritage, Senior Scrutiny Officer, T: 01225 718062, E:

Natalie.Heritage@wiltshire.gov.uk

Marie Gondlach, Senior Scrutiny Officer, T: 01225 713 597, E:

marie.gondlach@wiltshire.gov.uk

Henry Powell, Scrutiny Lead, T: 01225 718052, E: henry.powell@wiltshire.gov.uk