

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CORPORATE MANAGEMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 7.30 P.M. IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
COUNCIL OFFICES, WEELEY**

Present: Councillors Steady (Chairman), Miles (Vice-Chairman), Caines, Challinor, D Oxley and Platt

In Attendance: Finance and Procurement Manager (Richard Barrett), Corporate Performance Manager (Ian Phillipson) (Items 25 – 29), Sports Facilities Business Manager (Jeanette Thomasson) (Items 25 – 28 (Part)), Democratic Services Manager (Colin Sweeney) and Democratic Services Officer (Michael Pingram).

25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bucke (with Councillor D Oxley substituting), V E Guglielmi (with Councillor Challinor substituting) and Watling.

26. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 5 August 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none declared.

28. CORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE WORKING PARTY – EFFICIENCY SAVINGS AND INCOME GENERATION

The Chairman began by speaking about the Cabinet meeting on 6 September 2013 in which it had discussed Special Expenses. He then explained that he had given a presentation of the advantages and disadvantages of Special Expenses and how the Corporate Management Committee was aiming to be more focused and efficient. Councillor Steady explained that after discussions between the members of Cabinet it was agreed that Special Expenses would be reviewed and Officers would look at alternatives to the Special Expenses Scheme, giving examples of advantages and disadvantages associated with it.

The Chairman then explained to the Committee that there had recently been two Working Parties which had been set up to look at identifying possible savings for the Council as well as any potential income generation. He said the first meeting focused on Leisure Services' fees and charges and the second meeting looked at other ways to achieve these goals. Suggestions raised included exploring and developing Careline and better use or sale of Council assets as well as spreading out joint activities more evenly with Town and Parish Councils.

The Sports Facilities Business Manager gave a brief overview of Leisure Services' fees and charges and explained the differences between Level 2 and Level 3 memberships at the Council's Leisure Centres. She then went on to explain there had been a dilemma between raising prices to generate further income against the issues of morality as the higher prices could keep people from being able to afford to exercise.

Mrs Thomasson continued by talking about the need to look at the current fees and charges individually and see if there was potential to increase prices. She said the Council had benchmarked with other similarly sized venues and compared favourably. She highlighted that it could be difficult to directly compare with others as the size and quality of the facilities can differ. Finally, she said that due to a slight improvement in the economic situation, users were starting to have the confidence to pay via direct debit and any fee increase could have a negative effect on this. In conclusion, Mrs Thomasson felt it was a year too soon to raise membership prices.

In discussions, the Committee asked if pensioners received discounts for the swimming pools and whether the Council had considered taster sessions or finding out which Centres requires the most subsidy on a cost per person basis.

It was **AGREED** that, as a Working Party, it would work with officers to provide the information requested by Cabinet.

29. PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUARTER 1 2013-14 (JUNE 2013)

The Corporate Performance Manager presented to the Committee a report on the performance of the Council in the first quarter of 2013-14 in respect of the 14 projects selected in line with the Cabinet's goals. He explained that the layout and format of the report was different to how it usually would be. It was felt that previously it had been more cumbersome and lacked in detail. The new format, he said, would be able to efficiently assess how successful the Council was in meeting specific targets.

Mr Phillipson then explained that one target was to benchmark against other Councils and that he attended quarterly meetings with the aim to compare data. He went on to explain that the new system had flagged-up issues that the old system might not have.

A member asked if the complaints figures were only in relation to formal, written complaints and said it could be difficult to define a complaint as some complaints might not have been about the Council's officers and the work they did.

The Chairman felt the new system was good as it would allow the Committee to better assess particular targets that were not being met. Mr Phillipson then explained that at future meetings, a Corporate Director or Head of Service would be invited to attend to answer questions from Members in relation to their department's performance.

A Member raised concerns by the long-term sickness figures and asked if the figures for stress-related illnesses were available. Mr Phillipson said he would provide a more detailed report that would explain what illnesses were causing long-term staff sickness for the next quarter. He also said he would speak to Human Resources about stress-related sickness to assess the current processes in place.

A member raised concerns that if staff were absent through stress-related illness it could have an effect in that departments might be understaffed. He used the example of Rush Green Recycling Centre and suggested it could be dangerous to have low levels of staff. The Chairman agreed the Committee could raise its concerns and pass any comments on to Essex County Council.

30. CORPORATE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT FOR THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2013/14

The Finance and Procurement Manager presented to the Committee a report that gave an overview of the Council's actual financial position against the budget as at the end of

June 2013. Mr Barrett explained that the report showed particular trends were emerging but that the second quarterly report should show more detailed trends.

The Chairman asked about salaries and employee expenses and asked if the figure was likely to remain the same. Mr Barrett explained that some vacancies were being held and departments were considering if they really needed to fill posts.

The Chairman then asked if job sharing and multiple roles had been explored. Mr Barrett said this was an on-going exercise with the first snapshot being taken in December.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

31. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee noted the new item relevant to the terms of reference of the Committee contained in Forward Plan No.143.

32. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

Constitution Review – Procurement Rules

Given that the Councils Constitution was subject to an on-going review, the Chairman exercised his right to consider the above matter in order that the re-advised Procurement Rules could be considered as part of that process.

Mr Barrett explained that a new flow chart which advised buyers the route to buy items from had been added but the rest were tweaks rather than major changes. He then explained the different rules for the different amounts spent.

He further went on to say that one key part of the new Procurement Rules was a focus on local suppliers and he explained how a database was gradually being built but stressed it was a long-term plan. Mr Barrett also explained the role of the Finance and Procurement Team which would be one of guidance rather than controlling the process.

The Chairman asked if the Council had shared information with other Councils. Mr Barrett explained that the Council attended regular meetings with other members of Procurement Agency of Essex but it was an area the Council could improve on.

The meeting was declared closed at 9.05 p.m.

Chairman