



**MINUTES of
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 JANUARY 2019**

PRESENT

Chairman	Councillor M W Helm
Councillors	I E Dobson, P G L Elliott, M S Heard, S J Savage and Miss S White
In attendance	Councillor H M Bass

721. CHAIRMAN'S NOTICES

The Chairman drew attention to the list of notices published on the back of the agenda.

722. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R P F Dewick and N R Pudney.

723. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED

- (i) that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 November 2018 be received.

Minute No. 638 – 2018 / 19 Programme of Work

In response to a question regarding the attendance of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC), Members were advised that a letter had been sent to the Select Committee and a Member briefing with the PFCC had been arranged for 7 February 2019.

Councillor M S Heard questioned that at the last meeting he had requested that a letter also be sent to the Fire Service and he proposed that this be checked and clarified at the next meeting of the Committee. In response the Director of Resources advised that Officers would check the recording of the last meeting.

RESOLVED

- (ii) that subject to the above clarification to be reported back to the Committee, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 November 2018 be confirmed.

724. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was none.

725. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

Councillor S J Savage sought clarification in respect of the presentation from the Department for Work and Pensions and on receipt of this advised that he did not have an interest to declare.

726. DWP SERVICE DELIVERY / JOBCENTRE PLUS

The Chairman introduced Mr Dave Cope, District Operations Manager for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in Essex.

Mr Cope proceeded to provide the Committee with a verbal update. Information provided included:

- Universal Credit: Universal Credit (UC) full service was now being offered. UC was replacing six previous benefits including Housing benefit, Working Tax Credit with one application process encompassing all. The new system was applicable to new claims only with current claims following a migration process. Automatic migration had been paused and as a result it may be that existing benefit holders would not be migrating over the UC this year.

Mr Cope outlined a number of exceptions to which UC would not apply and reported that since its initial going live in December 2018 120 people had been identified for UC.

- Maldon District: Mr Cope outlined the service provided to the Maldon District and explained that a sustainable solution to extend the service geographically across the District had not yet been identified. A review of resourcing of the Maldon service was being undertaken and Mr Cope indicated that in his opinion more resources may be required. It was noted that the aim was to give as many people in the Maldon District the easiest possible route to intervention.
- Online chat facility – The DWP would be developing an online chat facility, similar to those used by other large organisations, to assist and improve the service provided to customers.

Councillor I E Dobson joined the meeting during this item of business.

Councillor S J Savage declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item of business.

In response to a number of questions raised the following additional information was provided:

- Mr Cope explained how UC was integration of a government system and if a person was working their employer was legally required to report earnings to the HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs) which would feed in the UC system.
- In respect of Fraud the majority of this work was carried out by data matching. The Director of Resources advised that the Council had to provide National

Fraud Initiative data returns every December / January and the Government then sent a list of matches back which then had to be individually reviewed.

- Mr Cope referred to flexibility and how a number of changes had been made to working arrangements to move away from concentrating on those that can easily be helped to addressing those persons who have complex needs and UC provided the flexibility to do this.
- Members were informed that there were delays at the start of a claim process. Payments for UC were made monthly to try and align it more to being in work than the traditional system. The problem with this was that the first payment was not due for a month once a claim have been made, however there were advanced payment options and exceptions which could be applied. Mr Cope referred to the support available to customers through the Citizen Advice Bureaus (CAB) and Local Authorities.
- Mr Cope highlighted the main differences between the old system and the new UC and reported that a number of customers found the new system very straightforward. Monthly budgeting was essential as customers were paid directly whereas previously the DWP had, for example, paid rent directly to landlords. It was noted that agency work was encouraged under the new UC. It was essential for all customers to have photographic identification (ID) and the DWP provided assistance for those not in possession of this.
- In respect of sustainability, the UC business case was based on the billions it would save because it sought to incentivise work. Mr Cope informed Members that it was virtually impossible to be better off on benefits if a customer was on UC.
- It was explained that second properties were identified through data matching. UC was also designed as a joint claim, and if a customer had a partner (notified to the DWP) they would also have to claim.
- Tax credits were to be phased out as UC was rolled out fully.
- The Service to those residents in the rural areas such as the Dengie was raised and in response Mr Cope highlighted that previous strict requirements for a customer to attend an office on a set date and time were given flexibility under UC. In light of this work was being undertaken to identify alternative interventions, such the use of skype. It was reported that a new Government IT project would assist in providing the hardware required by Officers to implement this.
- The DWP had recently contracted the CAB to provide a “help to claim” service to assist customers getting online and with debt advice. Funding for this service had been previously been given to Local Authorities but it was noted that the majority contracted this to the CAB.
- The Group Manager - Customers referred to the service provided by the DWP to the most vulnerable residents of the Maldon District alongside work with a number of other partners including, the CAB, Home Start, One Support, Drug and Alcohol Services. The Group Manager - Customers confirmed that the Council was committed to work with the DWP to continue to have co-location at the Council offices and build upon the service offered.
- UC included a youth obligation and therefore those under 25 engaging with the DWP received intensive support from day one. Mental health was a huge aspect and the DWP engaged with as many partners as possible. It was noted that youth unemployment had dropped in the last few years.

The Chairman thanked Mr Cope for attending the meeting and his informative presentative.

727. 2018 / 19 PROGRAMME OF WORK UPDATE

The Committee received the report of the Director of Resources confirming the Committee's Work Programme for 2018 / 19, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor M S Heard declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item of business as he was employed by the Essex Police Authority.

The Director of Resources went through each item detailed on the 2018 / 19 programme of work and provided Members with an update in respect of the scrutiny items. In response to a number of questions the following information was provided:

- Provision of Healthcare Services including the recruitment and retention of GPs
- A Member raised concern that the word 'invite' within the scope of the scrutiny was incorrect and should be changed to refer to invitation.
- Monitoring of the Organisational Change Programme – It was noted that at the next meeting of this Committee there would be an update from the Gateway Review suggesting that the Council was ready for a piece of work and ready to do some further scrutiny on this.
- Review of Fire and Rescue Service provision in the Dengie - The Director of Resources advised that if an acknowledgement to the letter sent by the Council to the Select Committee had not been acknowledged by Friday 11 January 2019 Officers would write to them again.

The Director of Service Delivery advised that the letter was sent to the Select Committee on 14 / 15 December 2018 with a copy only recently being sent to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC). Members were informed that in response to a press enquiry the Chairman of this Committee had issued a statement highlighting the issue of the non-attendance by the PFCC to a meeting of this Committee.

- Dealing with Waste Water - Councillor Miss S White provided an update in respect of Anglian Water and its proposal to increase sewage capacity in Latchingdon. At this point, Councillor S J Savage provided information regarding the need for a licence and public / press awareness when discharging into a river. This was noted by the Director of Resources.
- Jobcentre Plus - It was agreed that following the presentation by the Department for Work and Pensions at this meeting this item of scrutiny be removed from the 2018 / 19 Programme of Work.

RESOLVED that subject to the amendment, as detailed above, the contents of the report be noted.

728. TREASURY MANAGEMENT, INVESTMENT AND CAPITAL STRATEGIES FOR 2019/20

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources, the purpose of which was to comply with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)

revised Code of Practice for Treasury Management's requirement for regular scrutiny of Treasury Management Strategy and Practices.

The Director of Resources advised Members that the Treasury Management strategy (Appendix 1 to the report) had been updated in line with statutory requirements and good practice, having regard to the council's financial position and the advice of the Council's external treasury advisor, Arlingclose Ltd. The supporting Treasury Management Practices was attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

The report was due to be considered by the Finance and Corporate Services Committee at its meeting on 29 January 2019.

The Director of Resources advised that Arlingclose had offered to give a presentation to this Committee or a combination of this Committee and the Finance and Corporate Services Committee providing details of economic context, background, potentially BREXIT and the effects around the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and Investments. It was agreed that this presentation should be offered to a joint meeting of this Committee and the Finance and Corporate Services Committee. In response to a question, the Director of Resources agreed to amend the Treasury Management Strategy highlighting those areas specifically relating to Maldon along with specific choices and forward this to Members for discussion at the presentation.

The Committee complimented the Director of Resources on the comprehensive report and its appendices which provided more information than that received in previous years.

RESOLVED

- (i) that the Treasury Management Strategy and Practices be noted;
- (ii) that a presentation on Treasury Management from Arlingclose Ltd, the Council's external treasury advisor, be arranged for this Committee and the Finance and Corporate Services Committee.

729. ANY OTHER ITEMS OF SCRUTINY MEMBERS WISH TO CONSIDER

Councillor S J Savage drew Members' attention to the Minutes of the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee (acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee) regarding council tax precepts. He requested an item of scrutiny to look at the council tax base and monies brought in for new builds outside of the tax base. In response the Director of Resources advised Members of an email sent to all Members on 27 December 2018. She outlined the precept process and advised that Town Councils were not major preceptors as they did not share in either the risk for non-payment or the rewards. The Director provided further detailed information regarding this and sought clarification on the actual scrutiny requested. Councillor Savage provided further information regarding his request and sought a report from the Director of Resources. The Director of Resources proposed that she met with Councillor Savage and produce a report on this area. She also suggested that this information be shared with the Parish / Town Clerks to ensure that they were clear in what information they were providing to Parish / Town Councillors.

The Director of Resources reminded Members of a suggestion at the last Council meeting for this Committee to consider scrutinising the Dawn Barge Trust, the level of funding given, arrangements in place and the ongoing benefits that the Council received. Then in addition, on a broader scale what the Council did when it awarded grant funding and how this and benefits were tracked in the long term. It was agreed that this item of scrutiny be added to the 2018 / 19 Programme of Work and that the Director of Resources would bring a summary to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the items detailed above be added to the 2018 / 19 Programme of Work.

There being no further items of business the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.50 pm.

M W HELM
CHAIRMAN