MINUTES OF IMPACT OF REDUCED CAPACITY TASK GROUP

12 SEPTEMBER 2011

PRESENT:

Members of the Group: Councillors Mahoney (Chairman), G Francis, Mrs O'Rourke, Roodhouse, Srivastava, Helen Walton and Miss Watts

Officers: Doug Jones, Head of Business Transformation; Matthew Deaves, Communication, Consultation and Information Manager; Debbie Dawson, Scrutiny Officer; Linn Enticott, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer.

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 August 2011 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillor Mistry.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sandison declared a general interest as a member of the Local Strategic Partnership Climate Change and Environment Theme Group.

4. RISK WORKSHOP

The task group considered the examples of strategic and operational risks contained in the report. It was stressed that the purpose of this exercise was to consider how the Council is managing its risks in the context of reduced capacity and not to scrutinise the Council’s risk management processes.

Members discussed ways the data could be used to inform the work of the task group. The following points were raised:

- It was explained that the risk assessments contained live risks for services still in operation. Equality Impact Assessments had been carried out to identify the likely impact and potential risks associated with proposals to withdraw or reduce services.

- Concern was raised that some of the risk scores played down the actual level of risk. The scoring categories as outlined in the risk matrices were explained. Officers advised that the operational risks were assessed at manager level and scoring could be expected to change as a result of reduced capacity.

- The strategic risk register is a live document that is updated on a regular basis and considered by Audit Committee twice a year. Operational risk registers are reviewed on an ongoing basis by managers.
• The Communication, Consultation and Information Manager informed the task group that legislation required local authorities to undertake Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) in relation to key spending decisions. The EIAs formed part of the papers considered by full Council at budget-setting in February 2011. A schedule of EIAs is also published on the Council website.

• The EIA forms included a section entitled 'Making a Judgement', which assessed the likely impact of key spending decisions.

• Members questioned how the EIAs related to the risk management processes and were informed that there was no formal link.

• It was noted that the Audit Committee routinely considers the Council’s risk management arrangements, and minutes of these meetings would provide useful assurance to the task group that the Council had robust processes in place.

• Members raised concerns that risks were being identified from an operational point of view but there was a lack of a strategic overview and no formal links existed embedding the strategic risks into the operational level.

• Members questioned whether the right strategic risks were being identified, and whether the impact of reduced resources on these risks was being properly considered. It was important to consider the future capacity of the organisation and whether the Council had the resources needed to deliver against its Corporate Strategy and adapt to forthcoming legislative changes.

• The group commented there was a lot of paperwork involved in producing the risk assessments and equality impact assessments and felt there could be a smarter way of working.

The task group discussed the specific topics the review was intended to cover and what the next steps should be. The points raised were:

• It was suggested that particular service areas that have seen a significant reduction in capacity could be identified and focused on in more depth.

• Members commented that the Parks and Public Realm services had been significantly affected by a reduction in resources, and there could be value in exploring the actual impact of service changes here, with particular reference to the services that directly affect the public.

• A suggestion was made that the complaints log could be looked at as evidence of impact on services, though the task group should avoid duplicating the work of scrutiny committees who are looking at relevant performance indicators.

• It was important for the task group to be assured that the right governance structures were in place to manage the impact of reduced capacity.

• Further areas identified that could be considered as part of the review included:
  - the extent to which the Council has delivered against its Corporate Priorities in recent years
  - feedback from residents on whether the Council has met community aspirations
  - evidence of partnership working and shared services – this could be picked up as the review progresses.
• Members commented that the group should take an overview of how reduced capacity has impacted the Council as a whole. From this the group could select examples of where reduced capacity had occurred and these could be looked at in more detail in sub-groups. Community safety was one area for consideration, as the Crime and Disorder Committee was the parent committee for this review.

• The group highlighted that an up-to-date council structure had been requested and this would be useful at the next meeting. It would also be helpful to include the previous structure for comparison purposes.

The task group agreed to adjourn the meeting until more data could be gathered. It was decided the meeting should re-convene on Monday 26 September and that the following items be included:

(1) The past and present organisational structures of the Council;
(2) Budget figures for each service area for before and after the spending review.
(3) A presentation by the Communication, Consultation and Information Manager providing an overview of key points from the Equality Impact Assessments
(4) Relevant extracts from the Audit Committee’s minutes providing evidence that the Council’s risk management arrangements are fit for purpose.

CHAIRMAN