MINUTES OF IMPACT OF REDUCED CAPACITY TASK GROUP

15 DECEMBER 2011

PRESENT:

Members of the Group: Councillors Mahoney (Chairman), G Francis, Mistry, Mrs O’Rourke, Roodhouse, Sandison, Srivastava and Miss Watts

Officers: Debbie Dawson, Scrutiny Officer; Linn Enticott, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer.

19. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2011 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

20. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillor Helen Walton.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

22. FINDINGS FROM CASE STUDIES BY SUB-GROUPS

At its last meeting the task group decided to break into three sub-groups to undertake case studies focusing on the three specific service areas below:

- CIS Systems Support and ICT
- Work Services Unit/Parks and Grounds Maintenance
- Partnership Working and Community Safety

The lead member for each sub-group gave members a brief overview of their findings. The main points were as follows:

Works Services Unit/Parks and Grounds Maintenance

It was clear staff had formed a resilient team with a strong ‘can do’ attitude to their work. The merging of teams had worked well and staff had been supportive of the changes. This had been felt through the whole team from the Portfolio Holder and senior management level down to all staff.

Examples of some of the concerns that had come to light included:

- Current workloads meant task deadlines were being pushed forward into next year, some of which related to actions from scrutiny reviews.
• A lack of administrative and management support capacity. This has been compounded by the ongoing housing repairs pilot scheme which has been extended, though an end date had not been set.

• There were still four members of administrative staff ‘at risk’.

• The WSU is operating at full capacity. As opportunities for developing new commercial services continue this will impact on staff resources and they would need to build additional capacity.

**CIS Systems Support and ICT**

The service area had undergone significant change with the loss of staff and the merging of teams. On the whole staff morale seemed upbeat and staff were fairly enthusiastic about the changes. There was a tendency for staff to want to retain certain specialist tasks, though this was being worked through.

The Portfolio Holder and senior staff are clear about future priorities and direction, but the ICT strategy is out of date and needs to be replaced with a more concise version that incorporates the evolving changes in the service area. There was a sense in which Cabinet was perhaps moving at a quicker pace than the organisation.

A decision had been made at Council on the 14 December which would help alleviate some of the staff management resource issues.

Concerns were raised at the late stage that ICT was brought into the end-to-end review process and more joined up thinking with other service areas was needed. Where new IT systems were being proposed ICT needed to be involved at the initial stages to give the appropriate guidance and support and to enable them to balance their resources. It was also felt that cost recharges need to be formalised to improve the transparency of costs involved with the implementation of the end-to-end process.

The Council was working with Warwickshire Direct to develop a clear vision for the future.

The service was operating at maximum capacity and the removal of any further staff would jeopardise future change and improvement.

There were issues surrounding the channels of communication. Staff had been given information about potential changes before decisions had been made. To avoid stress, channels of communication should be kept open but information should be given that was up-to-date and given at an appropriate time.

It was suggested that the issue of staff engagement and communication in relation to service changes and redundancies should be referred to the Employee Wellbeing Task Group.

**Partnership Working and Community Safety**

The focus of this sub-group was quite different in nature to the other two case studies, and the group were not particularly concerned with staff morale and wellbeing issues.

The sub-group had found its subject matter too broad. Several meetings had taken place with relevant managers and the overall picture that had emerged had been that they were coping well with the changes.
There were timing issues in relation to community safety and the sub-group felt that it was too soon to assess the overall impact of service reductions. A number of potential areas of concern had emerged (which were detailed in the report) but it was unlikely the knock-on effects of changes in funding would be reflected in crime statistics for another 12 months. It would be more beneficial to review this again at a later date. The Crime and Disorder Committee regularly reviewed crime statistics.

It had been difficult to analyse the effects of the changes to the Local Strategic Partnership because the LSP had undergone a complete change and was working to a different set of priorities. It refocused its work around the Regeneration Strategy and urban renewal. The number of Board members had reduced from 35 to 8.

During further discussion the following points were raised:

Members raised concerns in relation to impact of public service constraints and the effects on broader partnership working and organisations such as Warwickshire CAVA.

The Partnership Working and Community Safety case study had proved to be a broad and complex topic. There may be benefit in Customer and Partnerships Committee looking more closely at the operation of the LSP and whether its operating model is fit for purpose in the changing public service landscape.

It was clear from the findings of the sub-groups that there was an issue around administrative and management support capacity, which was placing pressure on managers’ ability to focus on the more strategic aspects of their roles.

As an organisation the impact of the cuts was being managed well though a lot of this success had been as a result of the goodwill of staff. The group commented that the managers and officers interviewed as part of the case study process had been co-operative and open with members and this had been greatly appreciated. Overall, the case studies had proved to be an effective and positive means of gathering evidence.

There was a lack of evidence in relation to customer feedback and it was felt some form of measures needed to be put in place for the future.

23. REVIEW OF ONE PAGE STRATEGY AND NEXT STEPS

The Task Group reviewed the one page strategy and raised the following points:

A lot of evidence had been gathered to address the questions in the one page strategy. It was clear that the end-to-end reviews were driving change through the authority and the outcome was a resilient organisation which had adapted well to the changes made in relation to the recent cuts.

A key point raised was that following staffing cuts, some services were operating at maximum capacity and would not sustain further reductions in staff without impact on services.

The Task Group agreed that it was too soon to assess the impact on community safety and this should be reviewed further by the Crime and Disorder Committee in 12 months time.
The housing repairs pilot scheme was causing a number of issues and members questioned the reason for the delay in awarding a contract, whether customers were getting value for money and when the pilot was likely to end. It was agreed that this topic should be passed to the Customer and Partnerships Committee for further scrutiny.

The group agreed the following conclusions and recommendations should be included in the review report:

Firm timescales for the delivery of a revised ICT Strategy should be set.

Action should be taken to improve the process of end-to-end reviews, to ensure that ICT staff are engaged at an earlier stage and that there are regular updates on the Intranet regarding end-to-end review work, so that relevant staff are kept informed.

Information relating to morale, motivation, workload and stress issues amongst staff should be passed onto the Employee Wellbeing Task Group. The issue of staff engagement and communication in relation to service changes and redundancies should also be referred to the Employee Wellbeing Task Group for their consideration.

It was too soon to assess the impact on community safety and this should be reviewed further by the Crime and Disorder Committee in 12 months time.

The Customer and Partnerships Committee should continue to oversee the work of the LSP and be requested to look at this in more detail in the context of the changes made to the LSP, its new way of working, and how whether its operating model is fit for purpose in the changing public service landscape.

Service areas working at full capacity should not see any further staff reductions. Management and administrative support capacity would need to increase to support further service development and improvement.

A robust risk management system exists but there is a need for the corporate overview of the impact of reduced capacity, with the relevant information gathered together in a consistent, cohesive approach.

In the future the decision-making process should include more public reporting to all members on the different options for consideration and likely impacts.

The current Equality Impact Assessments are stand-alone documents and the information from them has not been gathered together. The evidence of any potential impact from the EqIA’s needs to be fed into the corporate risk registers and managed effectively.

The group requested that the Scrutiny Officer prepare a draft review report and circulate this by email to members of the task group prior to consideration by the Crime and Disorder Committee at its meeting in January 2012.

The Task Group placed on record their thanks to all officers involved in the review.

CHAIRMAN