

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, 21 JANUARY 2013**

PRESENT:- Councillors Kevin Small (Chair), Peter Heaton-Jones (Vice-Chair), Toby Elliott, Claire Ellis, Brian Ford, Richard Hurley, Colin Lovell, Des Moffatt, Robert Wright, Stan Pajak and Abdul Amin

Councillor Roderick Bluh, the Leader of the Council, was also in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Ballman, Maureen Penny, James Robbins and David Wood

### **49. Declarations of Interest**

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

### **50. Public Question Time**

Mr Richard Symonds, of 73 The Bramptons, put questions regarding the following matters:

- the Committee's Digital City (UK) Task Group
- the financial penalties incurred due to the late submission of the Digital City (UK) Ltd accounts
- responsibility for the payment of those penalties
- the incorporation of elements of the Council's previous electronic voting system into the current UK Broadband scheme
- the treatment of roads during the recent poor weather conditions.

The Chair confirmed that written answers would be provided in response to Mr Symonds questions.

### **51. Minutes**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 26<sup>th</sup> November and 17<sup>th</sup> December 2012 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### **52. Leader of the Council: Annual Report - Half Year Update**

Further to Minute 4, Councillor Rod Bluh, the Leader of the Council, presented his half-yearly report on the Council's performance in delivering its service priorities and targets for 2013/14 and beyond. Councillor Bluh placed his report in the context of what had been another very difficult year as a result of the continuing financial pressures and increased demand for services and also addressed particular developments and new challenges that had arisen since the report was deferred from consideration at the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 17 December 2012

Following Councillor Bluh's introduction of the report, members were given the opportunity to put questions to him on the subject matter of his report and presentation. Issues raised by members included:

- the reality of the budget and other pressures on the Council and the duty of members to focus on the legitimate and constructive debate of issues in order to keep the public informed and to identify sustainable solutions
- the public response to "the big conversation" and progress generally in getting local communities involved in the Council's decision making process
- the feasibility of making use of the HRA to deliver dividends for the General Fund
- consultation in support of the development of the Local Plan and flexibility in relation to the identification of land for employment development
- progress in relation to the Union Square development and the commencement of building work on the College site
- Community Right to Bid and community plans
- the level of Government funding in support of the transfer of Council Tax support responsibilities to the Council and the impact on benefits levels of recently announced job losses in the borough
- the development of the localities and the intention to devolve more funding and responsibility to the localities
- Locality involvement in the development of by-laws, the existing role of the parishes in this function and the relevance and effectiveness of by-laws in supporting modern local governance
- the delivery of care services for vulnerable people
- school building costs generally and, specifically, the cost attributed to the Croft School development
- the requisite cultural change to the operation of the Council in order to best support the Localities model
- the master plan for the town centre
- the scrutiny role in relation to the evaluation of the operation of the Localities
- the future use of the big screen at Wharf Green and its possible use to promote local content
- the memorandum of understanding between the Council and Bristol and Cardiff
- potentially negative and unintended effects of the Community Right to Bid arrangements
- the Council's arrangements for working with the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioner
- the success of sports related activities in Wharf Green over the period of the Olympic Games and proposals for more such activities in future
- the surge in interest recognised by sports clubs during and immediately after the Olympics and the possibility of the Council actively seeking to extend this surge in interest into local schools
- problems over the recent holiday period around extended periods of "non-collection" of refuse and green waste and measures to promote a greater level of community responsibility for taking care of their areas
- the need for recognisable and definitive links between locality plans and the Local Plan itself
- "mixed party wards" and the need to ensure all elected ward members are equally involved in the work of the Localities

- ward member involvement in corporate, strategic and local planning and transportation issues
- the protection of the continued community use of Community assets that might be the subject of interest under the Community Right to Bid provisions of the Localism Act

It was agreed that information requested by individual members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item should be forwarded to the Committee Clerk for distribution to members.

The Chair concluded this item by thanking the Leader of the Council for his attendance and for his full and open answers to members' questions in relation to the issues and priorities identified in his presentation.