

CenSus Revenues and Benefits Task and Finish Group
29 MARCH 2018

Present: Councillors: Nigel Jupp (Chairman), Tim Lloyd, Michael Willett and David Coldwell (ex-Officio)

Apologies: Councillors: Leonard Crosbie
Absent: Councillors: Brian O'Connell

18 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

19 **MINUTES**

The notes of the meeting held 12th March 2018 were received.

20 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

21 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

22 **UPDATE ON THE FIGURES REPORTED IN MARCH 2017 FROM THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES**

The Director of Corporate Resources had been asked to provide an update on the figures reported in March 2017 on the provisions of £440,000 to compensate for potential subsidy reductions in the Council's budgets for 2018/2019 and 2019/20.

This information had been circulated to Members of the Group and the figures were discussed at the meeting. The Members were still unclear on the provision for 2020/21 and asked for further clarification from the Director of Corporate Resources.

Members felt it was important to quantify these figures in order to move forward into future partnerships.

23 **UPDATE ON THE ESTIMATED COST OF CLEANING UP THE CENSUS REVENUES AND BENEFITS DATABASE**

The Group had also asked for an update on the estimated cost of £150,000 to the Council in cleaning the CenSus Revenues and Benefits database and maintaining quality ahead of the Council's withdrawal from the partnership with Mid Sussex District Council. This information had been provided by the Director of Corporate Resources and circulated to Members of the Group.

24

SCOPE OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP'S FINAL REPORT TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Group discussed the findings of the review and highlighted a number of key points for inclusion in the final report.

- The Group noted that the scrutiny of the CenSus partnership had been carried out by a third party, the DWP
- The Group wanted to comment on the transparency of these joint ventures
- It was noted that this was a fairly unique situation, it was a joint partnership but subject to audit and fines from a third party
- The report would highlight the unique relationship of this partnership
- Members noted that the problems were due to management failings at Mid Sussex District Council
- Horsham received quarterly reports on performance, however Members felt that the failings were not evident in these quarterly reports
- Members felt that the system was already vulnerable when Horsham joined the partnership
- Although Horsham District Council was given assurance each year, fines continued to be imposed
- Mid Sussex District Council had been given responsibility to carry out the Revenues and Benefits service and Horsham had a reasonable expectation that Mid Sussex would continue to provide an efficient operation
- Going forward, Horsham District Council should be more aware of these risks when entering into other partnerships
- The Group suggested more careful monitoring of these external partnerships with updates at full Council meetings on a quarterly basis, Member suggested this could form a final recommendation arising from the review
- When setting up future partnerships there should be a mechanism for scrutinising their activity
- The Group felt that there should be standards in place to ensure that these failings do not occur in future
- Members agreed that early intervention could minimise risk

Members agreed that the quarterly monitoring reports were notable for their omissions and that the purpose of the review by the Task and Finish Group was to learn from mistakes and provide guidance for future partnerships.

The Chairman thanked the Members of the Task and Finish Group for their contributions during the review and a draft report would be circulated in due course.

25 **TIMETABLE FOR THE SUBMISSION OF THE GROUP'S FINAL REPORT
TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

The Chairman would circulate a draft report to Members of the Group, the Director of Corporate Resources and Chief Executive for comment. It was anticipated that the final report would be complete by 21st May for presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4th June 2018.

26 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

A date was not set for another meeting. It was agreed that the draft report would be circulated to Members, by email.

The meeting closed at 3.37 pm having commenced at 2.30 pm

CHAIRMAN