



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 17th JUNE 2020

PRESENT: Councillor T Jay (Chair), Councillors R Bilcliff, S Goodall, M Oates, Dr S People, P Standen, M Summers and P Thurgood

CABINET Councillor Daniel Cook

The following officers were present: Anica Goodwin (Executive Director Organisation), Lynne Pugh (Assistant Director Finance), John Day (Knowledge, Performance and Insight Co-ordinator), Tracey Pointon (Legal Admin & Democratic Services Manager) and Jo Hutchison (Democratic Services, Scrutiny and Elections Officer)

Apologies received from: Councillor(s) B Price

1 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th February 2020 were approved as a correct record.

(Moved by Councillor Dr S People and seconded by Councillor S Goodall)

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair thanked Officers for the training which had been provided to facilitate the transition to remote meetings. The Chair also thanked members for attending the training provided as well as joining this first remote meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair welcomed the two new members of this Committee; Councillors Michael Oates and Peter Thurgood.

The Chair reminded members that whilst the agenda and reports for the March 2020 Corporate Scrutiny Committee meeting were published, the meeting was cancelled. Under the work plan item later on the agenda the Chair reported that the Committee would look at this year's possible items of business. The Chair suggested that following this meeting, he would request that Democratic Services re-circulate to members the Review of Council and Cabinet Decisions since May 2019 Report which was attached to the March agenda and the Chair asked that members raise with him (ahead of the July Committee meeting) any specific decisions which they would like to be brought forward onto this Committee's agenda over the coming year.

The Chair further reminded members that the draft Annual Report of this Scrutiny committee was circulated to all members of the Committee in May 2020 for comment. The Chair reported that the intention was that this Report would be received by full Council in July. The Chair therefore requested that if members had any final comments on that report, to provide them to the Chair by 30th June 2020.

4 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan. It was suggested that the Capital Outturn Report be considered by this Committee at its July Committee meeting.

5 QUARTER FOUR 2019/20 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Report of the Leader of the Council which provided the Committee with a performance update and financial healthcheck was received.

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council, Councillor D Cook, and the Executive Director Organisation, Assistant Director Finance and the Knowledge Performance and Insight Co-ordinator to the meeting.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and reported that COVID-19 had had, and was expected to continue to have, an impact. Updated forecasts had been prepared which modelled the impact on the Council's finances. It was currently anticipated that income levels would be 10% lower, although at this point the Leader reminded members that no one could know the full impact.

The Committee sought and received clarification in the following areas:

1. The strategy for Solway and whether an adjustment in this was required. The Leader reported that it was capital which would be allocated to Solway and that he considered that the strategy behind Solway would continue to be relevant in the current situation.
2. The impact on the town centre strategy, including property /business values, and the interaction with the Future High Street Fund business case. The Leader reported that COVID-19 would be likely to impact on the town centre and advice was being taken.

3. The progress being made on the Customer Portal. The Executive Director, Organisation reported that two priority processes had now moved into full testing mode, and that by the Q1 Report there would be likely to be more progress to report.
4. The progress on regeneration work at Tinkers Green and Kerria. The Leader agreed to update members by email as to the current position.
5. The reasons for the underspend of the budget for the Joint Waste Arrangements. The Leader noted that over successive years there had been an underspend and agreed that this was an area where further advice would be sought.
6. The Leader confirmed that the unbudgeted government grant referred to was a COVID-19 related grant.
7. Following a question, the Knowledge, Performance and Insight Co-ordinator agreed to review the figures set out in the Universal Credit summary to ensure that all historic figures were accurately represented in the graphs.
8. The Leader was asked about the updated forecast for the General Fund which identified on the central case scenario an impact of £2.5m, which the report indicated would require savings of around £2m per annum savings over the next five years, starting immediately. The Leader confirmed that the council was waiting for the Government's decision on Fairer Funding.
9. Whether the council's corporate debt strategy would be revisited in light of the financial impacts on residents of COVID-19. The Leader hoped that it would be possible to continue to work within the existing strategy.
10. The impact on the council's ICT strategy of the financial pressures and the need sometimes to look over a longer time period to see the benefits of IT investments. The Leader agreed that this often presented difficulties around IT investment and that financial appraisals over a longer period could be considered. It was further questioned whether it was appropriate to delay work in respect of the new UPS which was stated to be required. The Executive Director, Organisation agreed that whilst there was an option to delay looking at the ICT Strategy, she would feedback the comments on the new UPS.
11. Whilst the trend was welcomed, further information was sought on the reasons for the flattening off in the figures for rent arrears from universal credit claimants. The assistant Director Finance reported that there was a deliberate policy to ensure that the final 2 weeks of the financial year were rent free.
12. Clarification was sought over the reduced income from fees and charges amounting to £1.7m. The Leader referred members to his response to a Question at Council on 16 July which provided the requested breakdown.
13. Clarification was sought on the underspend against the safer and stronger communities budget and the Assistant Director Finance reported that this had gone into a specific reserve for ear-marked projects.
14. Whilst there had been reduced income from attractions such as the Castle due to the impact of COVID-19, and whilst it remained difficult to know when it may re-open, it was suggested that consideration should be given to starting to look at future plans for the Castle.
15. Clarification was sought over the property investment strategy and the returns which could be reasonably expected, in terms of both capital

appreciation and rental incomes. It was reported that professional advisers were appointed in this area and that property funds in which investments had been made were of a diversified nature, and that the strategy was to deliver longer term returns.

16. Clarification was sought on: (1) whether the underspend in terms of Highways maintenance would be used for Kettlebrook ponds as well as A5 ponds and (2) treatment of rent receipts at Ankerside. The Assistant Director Finance agreed to circulate a response to members on these items.
17. It was welcomed that the CCTV project had been delivered on time and the Leader reported that initial feedback had been positive. The Leader confirmed that this service did not have access to ANPR data.
18. It was noted that the reporting period for this Performance Report (up to end March 2020) meant that this report was not a complete picture of the impacts of COVID-19 and that the next report may provide difficult information.

RESOLVED that the Quarter Four 2019/20 Performance Report be endorsed.

(Moved by Councillors R Bilcliff and seconded by Councillor M Summers)

6 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Committee considered the Work Plan and discussed the inclusion within it of:

1. The Capital Outturn Report on the July 2020 agenda
2. The inclusion of Solway on the August 2020 agenda
3. Further amendments as considered necessary by the Chair following consultation with relevant Officers.

The draft Work Plan is set out below:

Corporate Scrutiny Work Plan

Work Plan 2020 – 2021		
TARGET MEETING DATE	SUBJECT	MEETING WHEN ITEM ADDED TO WORK PLAN
May 2020	Parking Toolkit review	October 2019
TBC - June 2020	Gungate Masterplan	January 2020
15 th July 2020	Capital Outturn Report	June 2020
15 th July 2020	Member Training update	June 2019
15 th July 2020	Member Support Working group – sub group on Member Communications	

25th August 2020	Quarter 1 2020/21 Quarterly Performance Report	
25th August 2020	Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2021 onwards - revisit	November 2019 (date change - June 2020)
TBC - 25th August 2020	The Assembly Rooms – review of project	November 2019
TBC - 25th August 2020	Solway Trading Company update	December 2019 (date added -June 2020)
8th October 2020	Review of Legal Services (post implementation)	November 2019 (date change - June 2020)
10th December 2020	Quarter 2 2020/21 Quarterly Performance Report	
3rd February 2021	Quarter 3 2020/21 Quarterly Performance Report	
TBC	Review of Cabinet decisions over previous 12 month period (<i>circulate to members post June meeting for comment</i>)	June 2020
TBC	Housing Repairs & Investment Contract Review	November 2019
TBC	Solway Trading Company Update (2x per year)	December 2019
TBC	Market tender progress Update	August 2019
Quarter 4 2020	Asset Management update	December 2019

Upcoming Corporate Scrutiny Committee Meetings

15 July 2020
 25 August 2020
 8 October 2020
 19 November 2020
 10 December 2020
 3 February 2021
 11 March 2021

Chair

