



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 25th JUNE 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S Smith (Chair), Councillors G Coates, M Couchman, H Hadley, T Jay, K Norchi, M Summers and A Wells

CABINET Councillor Carol Dean

The following officers were present: Stephen Gabriel (Chief Executive), Anica Goodwin (Executive Director Organisation), Rob Barnes (Executive Director Communities), Rebecca Smeathers (Executive Director Finance (S151)), Zoe Wolicki (Assistant Director People), Christie Tims (Corporate Project Co-ordinator), Pardeep Kataria, Tracey Pointon (Legal Admin & Democratic Services Manager) and Laura Sandland (Democratic and Executive Support Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Ben Price

2 APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE-CHAIR

Resolved that Councillor A Wells was appointed as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

(Moved by Councillor M Couchman and seconded by Councillor M Summers)

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd April 2024 were approved as a correct record.

(As the only member of the committee 2023/24 Councillor G Coates moved the minutes as a correct record)

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

5 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair gave the following update

Firstly I wanted to thank the previous Chair, Councillor Daniel Cook for his work and diligence over the year and robustly scrutinising me as part of the cabinet at the time, which by the way was always terrifying and fun at the same time. As well as cabinet Council officers were vigorously questioned with many of the issues raised through the committee going on to direct help the lives of ordinary residence so thank you.

Secondly many of you will be aware that I was previously on cabinet and thus invited to what seemed like most of the Scrutiny committees. It did mean I saw a lot of passionate conversations, and some that probably weren't so passionate but approaching what I'd say is aggressiveness in nature and I think we do have to be careful, and I wanted to bring it up at the start of this one. So it brings me to the Nolan principles which of course has councillors we subscribe to. It states the following, holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with the respect they deserve. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs. So my request to members is that while some of the issues raised here can be extremely emotive particularly on this committee and I'm sure Health & Wellbeing as well could we try to be courteous and understanding with both each other and officers of the council.

My third update is to remind members of upcoming training arranged in partnership with the LGA (Local Government Association) unless it's changed we've got training on the September the 16th again with the LGA, and there will be a councillors from another authority attending share their experiences. I was saying the other day to be honest the last one that I was on was absolutely fantastic so I would fully recommend it.

6 RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair updated on the recommendations going to Cabinet on 27th June around housing voids

The recommendations are:

1. to instruct Officers to review the costs versus return, of employing an in-house inspection team to see if we can drive down the costs of voids.
2. to review how we recover damages costs from existing tenants and see if there is a more proactive way, we can approach this long term
3. that the Portfolio Holder calls Equans in to address Members major concerns around void turnaround times and ask them what their action plan is to improve this.

7 CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FROM CABINET / COUNCIL

None

8 CORPORATE PROJECTS UPDATES

Christie Tims, Corporate Project Officer presented an update on the Corporate Plan and Upcoming Peer Review.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. How are we engaging with residents? - From July to the end of August we will be doing a wide spread resident campaign it is still being developed but we would welcome any contributions that members may have as to things we can consider. Working with the voluntary sector to make sure we are reaching hard to reach areas and working with the comms team to reach residents and contribute.
2. On the co-creation slide it states facilitated discussion, engagement and collaboration events held with key stakeholders are we as councillors not key stakeholders yes part of this process is the scrutiny and will be emailing this presentation to all councillors to make sure we can get all the input we can.
3. If plan is signed off in July how do we as councillors have any input. - Plan not signed off until February next year, up until that point it is a consultation document. Consultation Plan will go public after Cabinet
4. Emerging Strategic Priorities how are we going to drill down so we know what we can offer and what is realistic. When we consult with Stakeholders can we make sure that the language we use is everyday English and is understood by everyone. – Yes we will be plain English testing all consultation documents. With Stakeholders we are talking about specific projects that sit under the key objectives to feed into budget review group process.

9 QUARTER 4 2023-24 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Report of the Leader of the Council to provide the Committee with an overview of Council performance for the fourth quarter of the 2023-24 financial year (January to March 2024). Reporting the council's position in relation to progress with strategic corporate plan projects and updates on the financial position, corporate risks, audits, information governance and complaints. Cabinet will consider the report on 18th July 2024.

The Committee sought clarity on the following:

1. Outrun Variants - Variance is 3.3 million which is an increase from £2.274 million that was reported previously the difference relates to a bad debt adjustment. In process of finalizing the accounts and will be working through under spends with budget managers to look at consistent underspends.
2. Red marker on Financial stability into the future with no data assigned to it. Is red the correct rating given the three years balanced budget and then we know that certain things drop out the budget that actually do get added back in by Government. - The red status on this risk relates to the long-term financial sustainability of the council the deficit in future years is increasing significantly. The risk relates to the 2023/2024 budget setting, but we will look at for the next meeting with a view of changing the name.
3. Future High Street Fund (FHSF) – Program - Risks – more understanding on risks moving forward, is the risk profile reducing. FHSF is a complex program with a number of risks which have mitigated as far as they can, but what is reflected from the report it is not possible to entirely mitigate all the associated risks. The project board meets on a monthly basis, so the project is kept under regular review. The risks are managed and will continue to be managed.
4. FHSF – PDF page 89 Individual notes and due date on the right. These dates are all in the past can we have a complete column included in the report.
Officers will take back to look at the presentation whilst looking at making the report more transparent.
5. Public open spaces. Underspend could this be given to Councillor's to spend on Wards. – Underspend due to Some staff shortages which are now back in post. Certain 106 monies do come with conditions Officer to bring back explanation of how the monies are spent.
6. Page 16 Strategic Projects – risk showing green is that correct? Officer to check if this is realistic and update on progress.
7. 'Where managed by' is included in the report are these all up to date - Yes, checked by Corporate Management Team
8. Review of Leaseholder Services and are leaseholders being kept up to date - Full implementation of all the recommendations within the timescales and yes leaseholders will know the outcomes but the delivery will take longer.
9. Where a budget hasn't been spent is the budget lost. (pg 62) - 106 set aside it's not lost its set aside for the next financial year. Under normal budget underspent budget managers have an opportunity to request it to be carried forward if there was a legitimate reason for it not being spent they can request for it to be carried forward.

Resolved that the committee:

Endorsed the content of this report for consideration by Cabinet.

(Moved by Councillor T Jay and seconded by Councillor M Summers)

Report of the Leader of the Council provided Corporate Scrutiny with information and a timetable for the Financial Stability Plan and Productivity Plan prior to consideration by Cabinet on 27 June 2024.

Members sought clarity on the following:

1. Where is the Stability Plan in the report. – The report outlines the measures in the financial Stability Plan these will be the measures that we are going to take to identify required savings in the future.
2. Finalisation of the Productivity plan to be signed off by the Leader of the Council
3. Revenue Support Grant is the abbreviation RSG
4. 5 year budget forecast, what is the main driver of the deficit more than quadrupling by 2025/27 – Main driver for the deficit is the business rates re-set. The business rates were valued back in 2013, any growth since then the council takes a proportion of once it is re-set nationally the council will lose some of the business rate re-set and ½ million pounds grant may be lost 2026/27 may change in new homes bonus grant
5. Under spend to save, Transformation Reserve. Mainly Information Communication Technology based, what does this mean in terms of the transformation reserve. - Assumption that ICT will be the way we improve ways we work and an area where we can make most savings.
6. Peer Review, how was it initiated and how long is it expected to take. – Initiated by Chief Executive last one in 2013 and they should be every 5 years.
7. Growth going forward, don't strip savings out for the sake of it. – We are in a deficit 2025/26 position of 1.1 million pounds and savings do need to be made. We are mindful of the need to make some savings.
8. What impact is the interest on the savings. – budgeted for higher rate of interest, it is difficult to predict growth

Resolved that committee endorsed:

1. The approach and timetable detailed in the Financial Stability Plan.
2. The budget and medium-term financial planning process.
3. The contents of this report prior to consideration by Cabinet.
4. The Productivity Plan prior to submission and full publication to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).
5. The delegation for finalisation and sign off of the Productivity Plan to the Leader and Chief Executive.

(Moved by Councillor A Wells and seconded by Councillor H Hadley)

11 WORKING GROUP UPDATES

The Chair stated that, if possible, rather than use working groups the committee could use the meetings to discuss items in more detail. There was a discussion on cross committee working if an item overlapped to other Scrutiny Committees.

12 FORWARD PLAN

No further items added form the forward plan

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13 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The committee discussed the work plan and decided to add the following

The Chair will provide a de-brief report following the Leaseholders Collaborative Working Group meeting on 10th July. (August)

Outline ICT Strategy (To be confirmed)

Housing Repairs Performance (To be confirmed)

Corporate Plan and Vision (August)

The Chair will email a list of items to Committee Members for discussion at the next meeting.

Chair