



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 7th FEBRUARY 2024

PRESENT: Councillor D Cook (Chair), Councillors C Bain, G Coates, S Doyle, D Maycock and L Smith

CABINET Councillor Thomas Jay

The following officers were present: Andrew Barratt (Chief Executive), Rob Barnes (Executive Director Communities), Rebecca Smeathers (Executive Director Finance (S151)), Paul Weston (Assistant Director Assets), Zoe Wolicki (Assistant Director People), Wendy Smith (Head of Environmental Health), Gareth Youlden (Head of Technology and Information Services), Leanne Costello (Senior Scrutiny and Democratic Services Officer) and Tracey Smith (Democratic Services Assistant)

68 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor M Bailey, R Claymore and B Price.

The Chair noted that apologies had been received from the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health and Community Partnerships, Councillor Summers in respect of item 7.

69 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20th December 2023 were approved and signed as a correct record.

(Moved by Councillor C Bain and seconded by Councillor L Smith)

70 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

71 CHAIR'S UPDATE

There was no update from the Chair.

72 RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair advised the Committee that further to Committee meeting on the 20th December 2023 the recommendations moved by the Committee were taken to Cabinet for consideration on the 25th January 2024.

All three recommendations were agreed however it was noted that for recommendation 3 they would need to think about criteria of what constitute a vulnerable people.

The Assistant Director Assets, Paul Weston highlighted that since the meeting the Government has announced Awaabs Law, within which there is provision around addressing those with health vulnerabilities within 24 hours so this will need to be considered as well.

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

There were none.

74 QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chair handed over to the Leader of the Council to introduce the report to provide the Committee with an overview of Council performance for the third quarter of the 2023-24 financial year (October to December 2023). It reports 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, with a recommendation to endorse the contents of the report, before it is considered by Cabinet on the 22nd February 2024.

The Section 151 Officer highlighted that from the General Fund Revenue summary of expenditure (Page 33) the outturn variance for the end of the year has increased to 1.9 million compared to almost 1.6 million in the quarter two report which increased balances held to 10.3 million which will feed back into the budget report.

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

1. The improved layout of the report was noted.
2. More information was requested around the launch of the Home Hub mentioned in the report and whether any service users would be attending the event?

Officers confirmed that the event was an open day to launch the multi-agency Homelessness Hub which is being introduced, to enable partners and Members to look at the offer and talk to those who will be delivering the service. Service users were not expected to be attending.

It was highlighted that there was an update and invite to all Members on Memberzone.

It was noted that it would be useful for Members to be given information around how service users will get to know about the service but that this could be shared out of the meeting.

3. With regards to the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan due to be reported to Cabinet in February is there an update on the 30-year projection of the plan?

Officers confirmed that the financial forecast has been undertaken and would be reporting a deficit baseline position over the 30-year period, however they would be working on the mitigations and to put in place an action plan to help balance the business plan over that period of time. One of the biggest pressures is the achievement of NetZero and social housing providers are still awaiting clarity on this.

4. With regards to the Asset management Strategy, as per previous comments by the committee has depreciation now been built into the report?

Officers confirmed that this has now been factored in the report – it was noted that this would be coming back to Scrutiny (Infrastructure, Safety and Growth) in the future.

5. Clarification on the position of the Future High Street Fund (If it was not considered too commercially sensitive)?

The Leader of the Council confirmed that up to date costings had been received and these would be shared before Full Council as decisions need to be made.

6. In addition to Damp and Mould, trees seem to be a problem in the Borough and could Members be briefed on the policy relating to trees? The Leader of the Council confirmed that there is currently an issue with a backlog of work meaning that where tree work is identified as required, this can take up to 9 months to be actioned. They confirmed that the budget allows for a new arborist, three street scene team members and a new van to help address the problem.

The Committee then expressed an interest in reviewing the policy relating to trees and the budget allocation as well as Members being briefed on how to use Terra Nova. They considered whether this could be added an agenda item for an upcoming meeting?

The Chair agreed to discuss bringing this to a future Committee meeting offline and reporting back to the Committee.

Resolved that the Committee:

Endorsed the content of this report for consideration by Cabinet.

(Moved by Councillor D Cook and seconded by Councillor S Doyle)

75 UPDATE ON ASSURE IMPLEMENTATION

The Chair welcomed the Assistant Director, People, Zoe Wolicki to introduce the report of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health and Community Partnerships to update Corporate Scrutiny on progress made in implementing the

Assure corporate project, who highlighted that the report was only in the name of the Portfolio for Environmental Health and Community Partnerships, and not the Portfolio holder for Housing and Planning, before passing over to the Head of Environmental Health, Wendy Smith and the Head of technology and Information, Gareth Youlden to summarise the report.

Officers highlighted the following -

- From an Environmental Health point of view the project was progressing well.
- There is an Officer dedicated to systems administration working three days a week progressing the transition from M3 to assure.
- Setting up the configurations for licenses with enquiries, licences and inspections working the test system is well underway
- Training from NEC on the reporting side of the system is pending
- It is anticipated that the Licensing workload will be ready for transition by the end of March.
- Document usage has been analysed and culled allowing the removal of any documents no longer use.
- Licensing represent about 75% of the current EH workload that needs to transition and the aim is to ensure the transition is before the de-support date and the remaining 25% will flow from the Licensing transition the risk of which is much lower.
- From an ICT perspective at the end of last year the M3 and Assure Environment has been brought up to date including application versions so that users have all of the latest functionality.
- There is some work due next week to further improve the security of the system which an aspiration of making the system available externally when Officers go out on site.

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

1. Are we on top of implementing the system?
Officers confirmed that they were.
2. What happens if we don't meet the end of March deadline?
Officers confirmed that this is just a de-support deadline, that the Council can continue to use the system but that if there were any technical issues with the M3 system, NEC would no longer provide support. The aim is to move Licensing over first but Environmental Health will continue using the system beyond that date but transitions as soon as is possible.
3. Are there any insurance implications?
Officers confirmed that the Council will continue to be licensed to use the system after the end of March.

4. Is there a plan in place for if any support was needed?
Officers confirmed that they think support will still be available at a cost, this would no longer be included in their package.
5. Will the two systems run in parallel initially to ensure that things work in the new system?
It was confirmed that Environmental Health are currently working in a test system. Licensing will transition first whilst other operations will continue in the M3 system until they transition, so there will be two systems operational for a period.
6. A briefing note was requested for the meeting on the 7th March just to keep the Committee up to date as the cut off date for removal of support gets closer, no Officer attendance was requested,

Resolved that the Committee

Endorsed the report.

(Moved by Councillor D Cook and seconded by Councillor C Bain)

The Chair thanked the Officers for attending and invited them to leave the meeting.

76 WORKING GROUP UPDATES

The Chair asked that now that the Damp and Mould part of the Housing Repairs working group was being addressed that the group move on to look at the repairs side with a view to a larger item being on the agenda at the meeting on the 7th March 2024.

The Chair confirmed that a briefing note had been circulated and the Executive Director, Communities, Rob Barnes and the Assistant Director, Assets, Paul Weston were here to answer any initial questions on the data.

1. The Committee ask the Officers if they were happy with the KPI data around housing repairs in particular around the 'complete within 24 hours'?

The Assistant Director confirmed that –

- the data had been provided at short notice and no filtering or explanations had been applied. There would be instances where the nature of the work meant that it is not possible to complete a job within 24 hours but that does not mean the job was not attended with 24 hours. There is a similar issue around first-time fix data and given more time, a more detailed report would include explanations and exceptions.

- the scaling of the report needs to be considered and on average approximately 97% of repairs are completed within 24 hours and this is without the exceptions being taken out.
- jobs completed within 5 and 26 days were broadly on target.
- there is always room for improvement, and the aim was to lower recall visits and they were working with the contractor to ensure improvements are made in the form of an improvement plan.

The Executive Director added –

- whilst there are only a small number of cases where the system did not work, that Officers recognised these can have a high impact on the customer.
 - there are areas where the contractor needs to improve that they are working proactively with the contractors to develop an improvement plan and improve the service across all areas.
 - the improvement plan will look at all opportunities for improving processes including in areas administered by TBC.
2. The Committee welcome the improvement plan and asked that communication be a part of that, and whether the plan could be shared with the committee?
- It was confirmed that often problems are around communication rather than quality of work.
 - Officers were happy to engage with the Committee over the improvement plan as were the contractors.

The Chair acknowledged that 97% was a good percentage and that in reality this represent 48 repairs per ward (out of a total of 16000) that were not dealt with, within 24 hours but that there is always room for improvement.

The Chair confirmed that they would invite the Officers to the March meeting.

77 FORWARD PLAN

There were no new items identified from the Forward Plan.

78 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Chair confirmed that the next meeting was on the 7th March and that they would aim to bring the Housing Repairs as the main item and the briefing note for the Assure Implementation.

Chair