

# **CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 19 March 2021 at the .

**PRESENT:**

Cllr Iain Dobie  
Cllr Kate Haigh  
Cllr Stephen Hirst

Cllr Shaun Parsons (Chair)  
Cllr Ray Theodoulou  
Cllr Lesley Williams MBE

**Substitutes:**

**Officers in attendance:**

Rob Ayliffe, Director of Policy Performance & Governance and Monitoring Officer  
Simon Harper, Head of Democratic Services  
Steve Mawson, Executive Director of Corporate Resources  
Stephen Bace, Lead Democratic Services Adviser  
Paul Blacker, Finance Director  
Darren Skinner Head of Planning, Performance and Improvement

**Apologies:** Cllr Robert Bird, Cllr Kevin John Cromwell, Cllr Joe Harris, Cllr Dr Andrew Miller, Cllr Nigel Robbins OBE and Cllr Eva Ward

**1. APOLOGIES**

See above.

**2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meetings on 27 November 2020 and 7 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No additional declarations were made.

**4. WORK PLAN**

Members noted the Forthcoming Executive Decision List and the Council Strategy when considering items for the work plan.

The Committee had seen the feedback from members and officers on the current scrutiny structure and working practices. These comments would be passed on to the new Council.

In the discussion, members made the following additional comments:

- One member outlined that she would like to see scrutiny involved in more policy work and with an increased dialogue between Cabinet and Scrutiny. She used Gloucester City as an example.
- The Member Development Group had outlined that they wished new members to see Scrutiny as a vital part of the work.
- Some Members outlined that they wished to see the public be more involved in scrutiny and highlighted the recommendations in the Public Participation Scrutiny Task group.
- One Member specifically outlined their wish for the ability for the public to continue to be able to engage with scrutiny and ask question remotely when physical meetings returned. Members understood that procurement was underway to allow a hybrid system should the legislation allow.

## **5. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 5.1 Darren Skinner, Head of Planning, Performance & Improvement, gave a presentation on the Risk Management Framework. Members were informed that Risk had moved into the Planning Performance & Improvement Service in November 2020. The presentation would outline the risk management approach of the Council, detailing the three lines of assurance model, roles and responsibilities, key documents and tools and the direction of the travel.
- 5.2 The three lines of assurances were, 'risks are owned and managed', 'functions that support & challenge' and 'independent assurance'.
- 5.3 Responsibility sat with services managers, directors, the Corporate Leadership Team and Member Oversight and Cabinet with support from the risk management group and external assurance through internal and external audit. Members noted that service managers reported monthly and quarterly. Cabinet members had quarterly oversight of risk and regular meetings with Directors.
- 5.4 The key documents included the Annual Governance Statement, Risk Strategy and Policy and Strategic Risk Register.
- 5.5 There was a improvement plan being followed which included better presentation of risk information to the Corporate Leadership team and Scrutiny as well as testing that the framework was working in practice alongside the Audit Plan for 2021/22. In addition the Risk Management Group had been developed chaired by the Monitoring Officer.
- 5.6 One member discussed officers working from home and how training of individual staff was harder, particularly to ensure the right ethos for new

starters. He asked whether working from home and its associated challenges was incorporated within the risk register. In response it was explained that it had been raised in the annual governance statement and there were collective efforts to manage those risks. Management training and further development opportunities had been raised at the Leadership Conference.

- 5.7 One member raised a query around external audit and asked what the triggers were for external audit to come in? In addition were service areas inviting external audit in? In response it was explained that there had been an audit of internal risk mechanisms at the end of 2019 and early 2020. Risk audits could be called in at any time and often Internal Audit would make their own recommendations of service areas to look at. External audit could be triggered by a variety of things and there were also routine inspections that would be followed. The big External Audit that took place was on the financial statements, which was an annual process.
- 5.8 In response to a question, it was explained that the Local Resilience Forum risk register included pandemics and was actively managed as part of that. The owner of that risk was the Executive Director of Public Health and Adults.
- 5.9 One member raised that there had been a reliance on internal whistle blowers. He stated that audit should be seen as a critical friend. It was explained that the whistle blowing policy was part of the governance framework and, while it would be hoped that other checks and balances were working, whistle blowing was an important part of that. A number of lessons had been learned from the GFRS issues and the improvements that had been put in place from that. External audit could not be solely relied on, other mechanisms had to also be in place.
- 5.10 Members had a discussion around the role of audit and scrutiny in relation to the issues previously with the Fire and Rescue Service. Members noted the subsequent Scrutiny Task Group that looked at this. Members understood the continuous improvement journey that was underway.
- 5.11 One member raised the importance of appropriate training for County Councillors with the example given around ICT. She suggested that there was a possible weakness there. Members were informed that there was a Member development group to ensure members felt they had appropriate training.
- 5.12 One member asked whether questions within the staff survey would help show and demonstrate a change in culture at the Council. The Audit and Governance Committee had responsibility of the oversight for the whistle blowing process. There was also professional advice provided by a Whistle blowing charity and that included benchmarking tools. Internal Audit would use that tool to make sure that best practice was being followed. The staff survey included questions on whistle blowing. Members suggested that there

should also be a question on this in the staff survey. Members understood that there had been a higher response rate from GFRS to the staff survey.

## **6. STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE REPORT - 3RD QUARTER 2020/21**

- 6.1 Rob Ayliffe introduced the performance report for the third quarter of 2020/21 detailing the indicators where the Council was on or ahead of target, within tolerance range or behind target. A significant amount of lower performance was the result of services being affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 6.2 Members noted the graphs showing performance in Children's Services, which outlined the response to risk and placement stability. There had been a dip in quarter 3 in timeliness of initial decisions. Some of this was due to IT issues that affected timeliness. The Council was below target in relation to repeat work such as re-referrals, repeat children's plans and readmissions into care. There had been significant improvement since the Ofsted visit, particularly around timeliness of response but slower improvement was around quality but we were started to see those areas also improve. In response to a question, it was explained that there had been a reduction in the number of social care contacts and referrals over the last year.
- 6.3 Members noted a consistent reduction in time children had been on a child protection plan, but there was now a backlog into the Children and Families Court as a result of the first lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic. This meant that the number of children on a child protection plan for a year or more had begun to increase.
- 6.4 The Committee viewed a slide showing the balance of care for older people and those with physical disabilities demonstrating high numbers receiving care within the community. There had been increased demand of safeguarding concerns and demands for mental health assessments, demonstrating the impact of the pandemic. Members noted that 62% of individuals in residential care were there with dementia. The Council was above target in relation to the percentage of users who had received a review or reassessment in the last 12 months. Fewer people were going through the reablement service currently.
- 6.5 The percentage of adult alcohol misusers leaving treatment successfully was above target but the Council had seen a reducing number of opiate users not representing in 6 months.
- 6.6 Renewable energy produced by the Council remained high and carbon emissions continued to reduce.
- 6.7 Performance indicators showed a high level of performance in highways, specifically around emergency repairs and 24 hour defects on time.

- 6.8 The number of killed and serious injured people on the County's road had reduced during lockdown but was back up between July-September. Compared to statistical neighbours the County had a slightly higher rate.
- 6.9 Members noted there was a backlog for Safe and Well visits by GFRS, again because of the impact of Covid-19.
- 6.10 Members were informed of the increased complexity of requests for information; this had led to reduced performance. Additional staffing was being put into the team.
- 6.11 The Committee noted the risk register within their paperwork and were specifically shown the high risks and changes to risk scores as part of the presentation.
- 6.12 One member asked whether the pandemic had been a factor in reducing demand for residential care and whether individuals who would have had support in their own home had been reluctant to risk people entering their home. In response it was stated that it was difficult to know for sure and the Council would have to monitor the situation. The trend had been falling prior to lockdown. With regards to Domiciliary Care there was confidence that those that needed that care had continued to receive it due to the Community Health Hub and support for those that had been shielding. The Council had been able to identify those that were struggling to live independently.
- 6.13 One member identified the risk outlined assigned to Community Infrastructure Levy and queried why it was so high. In response it was explained that this related to future infrastructure development not those with funding already obtained. This related to smaller schemes where there were challenges around discussions with partners and districts to secure funding. A separate report would come to a future committee meeting detailing this risk.
- ACTION**                      **Simon Excel**
- 6.14 Members wished to pay tribute to those staff members who were working on the frontline and putting themselves at risk.
- 6.15 In relation to staff sickness figures, one member asked how clear it was whether individuals were working or not and how confident could officers be in the figures? In response it was explained that for some people working in their own home has allowed greater flexibility and productivity. For some individuals they were happy to work from home when feeling slightly unwell where they would not have been able to go into the office. There were additional health complications that could be caused by working from home and this would need to be factored in moving forward.
- 6.16 Members discussed the challenges some officers had working from home and what support the County Council would provide to them.

## **7. FINANCE UPDATE**

- 7.1 Paul Blacker introduced the report which detailed that the current forecast of the year end revenue position against the revenue budget of £468.183 million, based on actual expenditure at the end of November 2020 and forecasts in December was a £1.730 million overspend relating to non Covid-19 expenditure. Members noted the overspend in Children and Families and the understand in Technical and Corporate budgets.
- 7.2 A significant amount of government funding had been received to meet Covid-19 expenditure, which had covered all spending in this area. The government had announced additional money for 2021/22 for adult social care.
- 7.3 One member raised concerns about the movement in Pupil Premium payments to schools from January to October and outlined the significant impact this would have on budgets. A written response outlining the situation would be provided.  
**ACTION Steve Mawson/ Chris Spencer**
- 7.4 There were a number of specific grants for Covid-19 as well as the general grant and the majority had gone into Children and Adults budgets. It was clarified that the non-covid pressures in children's budget had remained fairly stable and would continued to be monitored. Officers outlined some of the positive action that was taking place within the Children's Services areas such as Trevone House.

## **8. PERFORMANCE REPORT - CORPORATE RESOURCES**

- 8.1 Steve Mawson introduced the performance report for the third quarter outlining reduced sickness absence and that the current ICT arrangements would be changing at the end of March 2021, which would provide an opportunity for improvements.
- 8.2 In response to a question on Capital receipts it was explained that the total value of receipts set aside for the next four years could be met from the assumed receipts with potentially £2m spare by the end of that period. So far the Council was down in year but ahead of schedule due to previous years. Challenges in the future around setting a future programme related to a potential need for borrowing.
- 8.3 There was a discussion around alternative uses of buildings to allow flexible meeting spaces and adapt to increased home working. That could potentially lead to building being able to be released, but it was early in the planning process.

*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

- 8.4 One member asked what arrangements would be in place to help members to meet safely as restrictions started to be lifted, thinking specifically about the Member Induction process of the new Council. In response it was explained that officers would engage with members about how best to use the space in Shire Hall for Members' meetings. With regards to the induction programme this would be carried out virtually. It was understood more one to one support for Members would need to be in place and virtual drop in sessions would be arranged.

**CHAIRMAN**

Meeting concluded at 12.30 pm