

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 30 September 2022 at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Phil Awford (Chair)	Cllr Colin Hay
Cllr John Bloxson	Cllr Jeremy Hilton
Cllr Stephan Fifield	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller
Cllr Andrew Gravells MBE	Cllr Lisa Spivey
Cllr Terry Hale	Cllr Chloe Turner

Officers in attendance: Rob Ayliffe, Paul Blacker, Steve Mawson and Mandy Quayle

Apologies: Cllr Matt Babbage, Cllr Ben Evans and Cllr Vernon Smith

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes from the meeting held on 25 May 2022 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

On reviewing the action notes, members highlighted the following:

- The action regarding a briefing on the forthcoming decision list remained outstanding.
- The action at 5.12 remained incomplete, the member agreed to speak with officers about what else needed to be changed.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

3. WORK PLAN

- 3.1 The Committee had a further discussion regarding the forthcoming executive decision list. A member raised that they did not feel the list was comprehensive enough to allow scrutiny to become usefully involved.
- 3.2 Officers explained that any decision being considered by Cabinet had to be published 28 days in advance of the Cabinet meeting date. There was no requirement for any forthcoming decision to go through scrutiny prior to the decision being taken. Scrutiny in its nature was usually retrospective.
- 3.4 Some members raised examples of individual scrutiny committees being involved in pre-decision scrutiny and stressed that it would likely be less political and more constructive for scrutiny to be undertaken before rather than post-decision.

- 3.5 It was agreed that officers would put together a list of decisions that had been through scrutiny prior to the decision being taken in the last couple of years. This would help the Committee form a balanced view on which scrutiny committees were active in pre-decision scrutiny, and which could do more.

ACTION: DSU/Rob Ayliffe/Steve Mawson

- 3.6 The Chair also offered to raise this conversation with the Leader.

4. FINANCIAL UPDATE

- 4.1 The Committee noted the update on the County Council's revenue and capital outturn expenditure for 2022/23 which had been considered at Cabinet on 21 September 2022.
- 4.2 The current forecast of the year end revenue position was an overspend of £7.029 million against the revenue budget of £521.330 million, based on forecasts in July 2022 (Period 4) after utilising grants for Covid-19 expenditure. The majority of this overspend was within Children and Families, plus a £1.35 million forecast overspend In Economy, Environment & Infrastructure (EE&I) in relation to road investment and reduced parking income.
- 4.3 This overspend was slightly offset by an underspend in corporate budgets, £1.4m income from investments and a £1.2m savings contingency.
- 4.4 Looking at the reserves outlined in Annex 1, it was queried that the vulnerable children's reserve had increased despite the level of overspend. Members were advised that some of the underspend at year end from Adults had been moved to help mitigate future pressures. This was specifically around transitioning, the Council had a responsibility of care for a vulnerable child until the age of 25, which would see a transition of need from Childrens to Adults social services. The Ash Die Back Reserve had now been allocated as EE&I had a specific programme of works to begin.
- 4.5 Members discussed the overspend within the Children's budget, noting the work being carried out by Children and Families Scrutiny Committee to understand the pressures in this area. There was concern that this was a reoccurring issue which showed a lack of sufficient forecasting and future planning in this area during budget setting.
- 4.6 Officers acknowledged these points but stressed that there simply was not enough resource in the budget to allocate additional funding each year. It would mean very tough decisions as to what departments would go without. The numbers of children in care were going up, as well as the complexity of cases. Officers were constantly working to ensure the right children were being brought into our care, and also ensuring when appropriate, children were being moved back out of the system. In addition, inflation continued to

be a problem and trying to predict the impact of inflation 12 months in advance was a challenge.

- 4.7 Members discussed the cost of complex care, noting there were currently 5 care plans forecast to cost £3.235m. It was explained that these children needed 1:1 24/7 care from highly qualified medical staff within external accommodation. Children services was a demand led service, it was impossible to manage the number and complexity of children coming into care, therefore the only possible variable that could be explored was whether we getting the best value for money from providers.
- 4.8 A benchmarking exercise had been carried out to compare these costs with other local authorities. It was found that in terms of volume we were above our statistical neighbours but similar to the Southwest and on price, we were now at the top end.
- 4.9 A member suggested that the Council needed to consider the possibility of borrowing money and investing in some council owned facilities to help manage this issue in the future, potentially even working with other local authorities to share the costs. There was also an issue as to how much preventative work was taking place to stop children coming into care in the first place.
- 4.10 The Committee suggested that Children and Families Scrutiny should consider an item on value for money of external providers and feasibility of future investment on internal provision.

5. STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE REPORT 1ST QUARTER

- 5.1 Rob Ayliffe presented the report which provided an overview of performance at the end of Quarter 1 2022-23.
- 5.2 The Committee were informed that going forward, the performance data would begin to measure against the headline priorities and objectives from within the council strategy. This would include RAG rating and narrative from the Director which would give members a better understanding as to whether the strategy was being implemented, and overtime would allow better long-term scrutiny.
- 5.3 Members noted that there were a number of challenges affecting the council's performance as a whole. The ongoing recruitment challenge in many of the service areas meant there were a number of outstanding vacancies, this coupled with increased demand and budget pressures, the Council was currently operating in an extremely challenging environment.
- 5.6 Overall, 58% of corporate performance indicators were either on or within target, which left 31 indicators off target, 12 of which were within children and young peoples and 10 which had gone off track within this first quarter.

- 5.7 The Committee noted the reduction in reviews and re-assessments in the last 12 months within adult services. This was due to the level of unfilled vacancies within the teams and increased demand.
- 5.8 There continued to be a long-term issue in relation to the timeliness of initial decisions and visits for children and issues around children in care persistently absent from school. This showed again the challenge of keeping up with increased demand and staff vacancies.
- 5.9 Children's services had however begun to see a steady improvement, through the previous three quarters, on case audits meeting good or outstanding. This was really significant for social workers to see what good and outstanding case management looked like, in order to bring about long-term improvement as a whole.
- 5.10 It had been identified that there were two main factors contributing to higher number of children in care for Gloucestershire: an increase of readmissions to care, as well as the length of time children were staying in care.
- 5.11 The Committee noted that 7 new risks were being tracked at a strategic level this quarter, which were:
- Insufficient resources to deliver procurement and re-procurement activity. This was due to the high level of big procurement projects identified in the near future and the need to ensure the Council were getting best value for money on contracts.
 - Corporate health and safety.
 - Contract management and quality assurance. There were a number of services that the council outsourced, but that did not absolve responsibility or accountability for those services.
 - Compliance with the Equality Act in decision making – this was identified as a possible future item for the committee to review progress on.
 - Various resettlement and immigration programmes which meant unplanned for demand on Council services.
 - The potential financial impact of the implementation of the Care Act, which was the only new high risk.
 - Staff fatigue and burn out.
- 5.12 Finally, the Committee noted that the majority of risks remained stable. Stability was something officers were challenging however as it was only a good thing if within the right levels. There would therefore now be a target score for each risk to measure this.
- 5.13 It was raised that there was an ongoing issue of securing social care packages for elderly residents wanting to remain in their own homes. Figures were requested on the number of clients the brokerage team were dealing with and the time it was taking to secure appropriate care packages.

ACTION: Rob Ayliffe

- 5.14 Members noted that Adults was a very different provider market, it was very difficult for care operators to operate and remain competitive, whilst offering prices that local authorities were able to pay. It was suggested that this could be future item for Adult Social Care Scrutiny to look into in more depth.
- 5.15 There remained a frustration that a number of the indicators did not have targets or a narrative to accompany the RAG ratings. Whilst it was explained that there would always be some indicators where it was not appropriate to set targets, this should be in the minority.

ACTION: Rob Ayliffe

- Request an update on the Fastershire rollout (progress and timescales)
 - Raise the possibility of the Local Transport Plan being added to the Strategic Risk Register (due to the very strict targets it included particularly around public transport use)
 - Raise issue of missing targets/narratives
- 5.16 There was a discussion as to whether the current economic crisis needed to be added as a new risk which would have an effect on every department. Officers explained that time needed to allow for the market to settle before reviewing the risk register, it may be that there will be some positives for the Council in terms of interest rates remaining high. Inflation was also something that was constantly measured through everything the Council did and therefore did not necessarily require a separate risk.

6. CORPORATE RESOURCES PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 6.1 Steve Mawson introduced the performance report which included a specific report on staff recruitment and retention.
- 6.2 Members were informed that while overall sickness levels across the Council had decreased in the quarter, sickness was at its highest level recorded between April-June in 3 years.
- 6.3 It was noted that the risk level relating to 'reductions and changes to funding for future financial years potential to impact core services' had increased from High (15) to High (2). There continued to be a considerable amount of uncertainty on future funding levels.
- 6.4 The Committee considered the report on recruitment and retention across the Council noting the work around increasing the numbers of rewards and signing on bonuses. The Council had seen lower levels of applications for roles than prior to the pandemic.
- 6.5 Service areas reported high levels of vacancies which impacts on service delivery and increased pressure on colleagues.

6.6 In terms of responding the challenge, the Council was developing an employee value proposition which would provide a consistent positive message backed by personal stories and data about what it is like to work at the Council. Alongside this, the Council was looking to improve the job site to align with that EVP and promote the benefits of working at the Council including promoting agile and hybrid working. Two recruitment advisers had been recruited on a fixed term basis to trial additional support for managers.

6.7 Specifically on appraisals, the recent staff survey results suggested that a higher number of staff were receiving their 12-month appraisal compared to what was being reported so this was being investigated. There was an online appraisal system coming down the line which would provide a much better performance monitoring output. A member wanted to follow up on a suggestion of adding an acceptable window of time into the appraisal performance data to allow a better indicator.

ACTION: Rob Ayliffe

6.8 There was a query around the conversion rates of offer to turn out, particularly within Childrens, and how this compared to other local authorities. It was noted that there were no issues within the recruitment system itself, it was more about ensuring managers that were using the system were well trained and supported throughout the process. Officers would look into the data but suggested it may not be a bench markable indicator.

ACTION: Steve Mawson

7. ICT UPDATE

7.1 Mandy Quayle provided an update on the ICT improvement plan. This outlined what had been achieved during 2022 and what was still to come. Members noted the rollout of phase one of Microsoft 365 including teams and the work on the network within Shire Hall and county buildings. The introduction of OneDrive and SharePoint removed the need to connect to on premise servers and improved collaboration.

7.2 The Committee were also informed that there was improved 'security posture' with PSN accreditation achieved in September 2022. The exposure score graphic on slide 3 showed very good improvement.

7.3 Figures provided on slide 4 in relation to council wide outages were updated. Members noted that Q1 22/23 Priority One Incidents were 5 (and none of these were whole system outages) compared to 17 in the previous quarter (with the majority being council wide outages with outlook etc.)

7.4 The importance of training and communication was raised. Officers were aware that staff needed better access to more continuous training to allow them to make the best use of the new technology rollouts, it was not simply a

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

case of rolling out the systems. Microsoft 365 training had started in early July and was running to plan, there had been a GCC Digital and ICT Conference on 29 September and a staff pulse survey regarding current ICT experience would go out in October.

- 7.5 The switch over to Liquid Logic for Adult's and Children's services continued. Officers wanted to be absolutely certain that all aspects of the new system were tested before making the final move over. A member stressed the importance of continued communication with all staff affected to ensure they were fully up to date and aware of the journey.
- 7.6 Slide 7 showed members the Microsoft 365 programme update, the red highlighted sections showed where timeframes had slipped from the original commitment. This would continue to be monitored with this Committee and with Cabinet.
- 7.7 By the end of 2022 members were to expect further improvements to the network and a new quicker more stable connection from home.
- 7.8 The Committee requested that the 3-year strategy being produced for IT improvements was brought as an item at the earliest possibility.

ACTION: DSU/Mandy Quayle

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 16:35.