

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 27 November 2020 as a virtual webex meeting.

PRESENT:

Cllr Rob Bird	Cllr Nigel Robbins
Cllr Kevin Cromwell	Cllr Stephen Hirst
Cllr Iain Dobie	Cllr Shaun Parsons (Chair)
Cllr Kate Haigh	Cllr Brian Robinson
Cllr Lesley Williams	Cllr Ray Theodoulou

Substitutes:

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

Apologies: Cllr Eva Ward
Cllr Joe Harris

1. APOLOGIES

See above.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting on 30 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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. Members would discuss the next meeting on 7 January 2021 at the relevant item later in the meeting.

5. STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT 2ND QUARTER 2020/21

- 5.1 Rob Ayliffe introduced the performance report for the second quarter of 2020/21 detailing the indicators where the Council was on or ahead of target, within tolerance range or behind target. 69% were on or ahead of target.
- 5.2 Members noted the indicators for Children's Service and the initial response to risk. This detailed, initial decisions, initial visit, single assessments and Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC). Targets were based on outstanding local authorities, which was a high bar to reach but performance was improving in this area. ICPCs was still an area that needed further improvement but there had been positive signs so there was optimism that this would be back on track.
- 5.3 There was discussion around placement stability in Children's Services with the Council performing less well than statistical neighbours. Timeliness was expected to be the first area of improvement and quality would follow with stability of placements likely to then follow. In addition the Council was below target on re-referrals, repeat Children's Protection Plans and readmissions to care. These were long-term indicators for quality and would take time to turn around as they often reflected historical practice, but it was disappointing that improvement was not yet being shown here. There had been other signs of improvements as demonstrated in the low number of case audits being judged as inadequate..
- 5.4 One member asked if detail could be provided on the length of time children were staying on plans. In response it was stated that there had been significant improvement and provided assurances that there were small numbers on plans for two years or more.
- 5.5 There was a discussion around how indicators were selected as part of the presentation for this item. It was explained that indicators were flagged up to the Committee where there were fluctuations. Members received more performance indicators in the papers for Corporate Scrutiny and more still for Children and Families Scrutiny.
- 5.6 One member asked about the number of social workers that an individual child in care had, emphasising how crucial the relationship between the social worker and the child was. The member wanted to ensure that issues were being picked up in the suite of indicators members were provided with. The data on number of social workers was provided at the Improvement Board but would be included in future for Corporate Scrutiny.
- ACTION Rob Ayliffe**
- 5.7 Members were shown a slide that demonstrated the balance of care across Adult Services. This demonstrated reduced demand for long term residential and nursing care, although the reasons for this may have changed from initially being a result of the work the Council was carrying out to now also including the impact of Covid-19 where individuals were choosing a different type of care than residential. Another factor was that community care was also being provided from Covid-19 budgets to

avoid admission to hospital or to help support people leaving hospital sooner. In future versions of the chart Covid-19 impact would be shown separately.

- 5.8 One member suggested that the number of clients in community care at a high cost was going up significantly and asked whether in some cases keeping people in their own home cost more than putting them in residential care due to the complex needs. It was explained that the most significant factor leading to this rise was those clients funded through Covid-19 funding who otherwise would have been admitted into hospital. For the next quarter this data would be separated out. There was a discussion on the potential long-term legacy of Covid-19 for the health requirements of clients and this would need to be monitored. There would be situations where individuals would have high costs in their own home but this was regularly reviewed to ensure this was the best solution. Overall the adult social care budget aside from the Covid-19 spending, which was being funded, was forecast to be on track.
- 5.9 The second quarter had shown improved performance for the percentage of service users in adult services who had a review or reassessment of their needs within the last 12 months, but it was still below the same quarter of 2019/20. With regards to reablement the Council was showing strong performance but there was more fluctuation on repeat reablement episodes. There was service redesign going on in this area.
- 5.10 The Committee noted the strong performance for alcohol, opiate and non-opiate treatment although understood that there had been some slippage against the percentage of opiate users not representing within 6 months. Covid-19 was taking up more of the Public Health team's time and these had been challenging time for individuals. One member asked whether there had been engagement with those people who had addictions and asked whether there was an impact of gathering those who had addiction and mental health problems by acting as an opportunity for people to get worse rather than better. In response it was explained that wrap around support was provided to those most in need of support. More information would be provided to the member in relation to the impact of bringing those with addictions together.
- ACTION Sarah Scott**
- 5.11 Members were shown charts displaying renewable energy from the Council estate (excluding schools) over 12 months as well as Council carbon emissions, buildings and transport (tonnes of CO₂e). At end of quarter 1 the council had generated as much energy as we had done since the end of quarter 3 of the previous year. For carbon emissions the Council was significantly lower than the same quarter in the previous year.
- 5.12 Highways performance in regards to timeliness of repairs had been strong at 99% at the end of quarter 2.
- 5.13 Quarter 1 figures showed that the number of killed and seriously injured people had reduced. One member asked for benchmarking information so that comparisons

could be made with other counties. This would be provided.

ACTION Rob Ayliffe

- 5.14 The rate of safe and well visits per 1,000 population had been affected by lockdown and the targets for the year would not be hit. There had been a backlog from the previous financial year, and the team had managed to reduce that. Anecdotal evidence from other services showed similar issues.
- 5.15 The Committee recognised the continued strong performance for days lost to sickness absence, which was significantly lower than the national average. In response to questions it was suggested that working from home had had a positive effect on this indicator giving more flexibility. It was important to understand the work life balance of staff and future corporate planning needed to allow for this.
- 5.16 Members also noted performance on official requests for information released within the legal time limit. The first lockdown resulted in a backlog of requests, and there had also been a significant increase in the number of requests and complexity affecting performance
- 5.17 The Committee noted the risk register contained within the papers and were shown a slide that explained how risk was calculated.
- 5.18 In response to questions it was explained that the data was only providing one picture of what was happening in service areas and wider performance management and information gathering that went beyond just numerical data supplemented this.

6. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

- 6.1 Steve Mawson, Executive Director of Corporate Resources, introduced the report which detailed that the current forecast of the year end revenue position against a budget of £468.183 million, based on actual expenditure at the end of August 2020 and forecasts in September was a £7.649 million overspend.
- 6.2 Members noted that the largest non-COVID budget variance was the £7.422 million forecast overspend in Children and Families. This was an improvement on the previous month's forecast of £1.988 million which was largely due to the reclassification of costs which had previous been regarded as non-COVID.
- 6.3 The Children and Families position was being robustly monitored, a sizeable amount had been added to the budget at budget setting time and it was recognised that this there was still an overspend. Despite this, the overspend position was stable rather than exponentially growing.
- 6.4 One member asked how confident officers were that the additional impact of Covid-19 and the economical consequences would not threaten the budget position. In response it was stated that the Directors and Finance partners met regularly to

continue to monitor the position but there was confidence that the risks were understood and being mitigated.

- 6.5 In response to a question it was explained that there was a number of funds that were being provided in relation to Covid-19 spending and this was a complex picture with ringfenced and unringfenced grants. Members felt it would be helpful to see a more consolidated picture of what the total funding was available to cover Covid-19 expenditure.
- 6.6 One member asked whether the County Council was involved in allocation of funding to cultural institutions to support them during the Covid-19 pandemic. In response it was stated that the Council was not involved in these allocations.
- 6.7 In response to a question on Trevone House, it was stated that it was an impressive facility and it was important that it was used in the way it had been modelled for with the right cases. One of the challenges was to ensure individuals did not become reliant on the resource. Already included within capital budget discussions was the possibility of additional similar facilities.
- 6.8 One member noted that in the first wave of Covid-19, grants had been provided to districts to help support community activity, she asked, was there any intention to do that now in the second wave? In response it was explained that there was a fine balance between how much to give and no provision had been made at this stage. Some thought needed to be given related to the latest grant funding and how districts could be involved in that discussion. Community help hub calls had reduced since the first wave but had recently seen a slight increase in demand. There was a discussion around the vibrant community networks and the relationships that had built up over this period; this was an important area to continue to develop in the future.

7. PERFORMANCE REPORT - CORPORATE RESOURCES 2ND QUARTER 2020/21

- 7.1 Steve Mawson introduced the performance report for the second quarter outlining how impressed he had been in terms of the flexibility of the teams and that he was aware of it being important to guard against 'burnout' for staff. During the Christmas period he was encouraging staff to take a break.
- 7.2 With regards to Legal Services it was explained that there was sufficient staff to meet the ambition for a caseload of 12. There was access to additional resource at Warwickshire County Council. Pressure was created by one or two key members of staff off work due for various reasons that led to less resilience within the team. There had recently been a recruitment drive for paralegals as a long-term strategy to add this level of resilience.
- 7.3 One member expressed concern about the low performance in relation to the holding of PDRs with staff. In particular it was noted that PDRs in Children's Services were not being completed and that there was high staff turnover in this

area. The members sought assurances that this would be improved. In response it was recognised that this was one of the things that had slipped during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was emphasised that this did not mean that managers weren't speaking to staff and supporting them, but that they weren't formalising this as part of a review. This would be tolerated for a while but it was expected that performance would improve in this area going forward. In relation to Children's services, some of the turnover was due to the movement from agency staff towards the recruitment of permanent staff.

- 7.4 It was explained that a new head of Internal Audit had been recruited and overall no concerns around resourcing had been raised.

8. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SCRUTINY TASK GROUP

- 8.1 The Committee noted the task group report. The ambitions for the review had been to understand what the County Council did at present in terms of improving public participation; explore how effective those processes were; to learn from relevant outside sources and to make recommendations to enhance public engagement with the Council.
- 8.2 The report outlined that the group had met three times from November 2019 to February 2020 before pausing due to the COVID-19 pandemic and then reconvening in September. The group reflected on the changes working practices over that time and the lessons that had been learnt.
- 8.3 The group had discussed the importance of promoting the current mechanisms of public engage on the website and through social media as well as asking for a review to be carried out on consultation processes. In addition a recommendation had been made to review the County's Community Charter which set out the way engagement was carried out between the County Council and communities.
- 8.4 The Committee recognised that the group had asked that the public representation pilot which had been carried out by Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee be made a standing item going forward and be expanded to all other scrutiny committees. The Chair of the Committee provided some feedback of how successful the pilot had been discussing the range of topics and representations that had been discussed.
- 8.5 There was discussion around the use of YouTube and ensuring the public were able to listen in and view the committee meetings. It was important that this continued in the future. Members welcomed all scrutiny meetings being webcast.
- 8.6 One member made suggestions for an additional recommendation detailing a facility for supplementary questions to be provided in writing or on an individual's

behalf. Members felt that this needed significant discussion and it was agreed that an additional meeting of the task group would be held to discuss in more detail.

ACTION **Stephen Bace**

9. ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT

- 9.1 Cllr Shaun Parsons introduced the Annual Scrutiny Report. The report provided details on Scrutiny activity 2019-20, as well as the responses to scrutiny task group recommendations. Simon Harper, Statutory Scrutiny Officer, explained that following a peer review in 2018, the scrutiny structure had been evaluated and restructured. Scrutiny in Gloucestershire was well regarded nationally and he highlighted the significant amount of activity that had taken place over the period including task groups, joint meetings, and member development activity.
- 9.2 Members were invited to provide feedback and express their views reflecting on what had worked well and what needed to be addressed going forward. Members were informed that views would also be sought from district colleagues and partners to help form the shape of scrutiny following the next election.
- 9.3 One member outlined his concerns regarding the split between Health Scrutiny and Adult Social care scrutiny and felt that this 'disintegration' left duplication in some areas and gaps in others. He stated that a review had been due in the Spring 2020 as per the original motion. He proposed that Democratic Services lead a review that involved county and district members and officers, and produce a report by the March 2021 committee meeting and subsequent Council meeting.
- 9.4 Other members discussed the benefits of the separation of health scrutiny and adult social care scrutiny and the ability to devote more time to focus on adult social care particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. One member emphasised the importance of finding a place for scrutiny of Public Health that would allow district members to discuss this which wasn't catered for in the current arrangements. It was explained that at the moment there was duplication to try and enable both committees to look at Public Health.
- 9.5 Some members felt that it would be better for a new Council to carry out a scrutiny review rather than let the current Council try and dictate a structure going forward.
- 9.6 One member outlined that some of the responses to recommendations and outcomes from committees had not been picked up. It was suggested that there be a process for Chairs and vice chairs to receive monitoring of these.
- 9.7 It was suggested that Economic Growth Scrutiny meetings should not be held on the same day as the Joint Economic Growth Committee meeting. Some members suggested that there was a lack of clarity over the role of the scrutiny committee and felt that the Committee's remit could do with a 'tidy up'. It was acknowledged that there had been some joint work planning with the committees to ensure there

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

was no duplication. The Chair of the Committee emphasised that work was being carried out to improve the effectiveness of the scrutiny activity.

9.8 Members concluded their discussion by revisiting the proposal for a review to be undertaken. It was explained that any review should be Member led.

9.9 It was agreed that a review of scrutiny would be undertaken following the election with a range of views and comments on scrutiny sought over the coming months in preparation. The comments made by members during the discussion, particularly relating to Health Scrutiny, Adult Social Care and Communities Scrutiny and Economic Growth Scrutiny would be included.

ACTION Democratic Services

10. ARRANGEMENTS FOR BUDGET SCRUTINY

10.1 The Committee agreed the arrangements for the meeting on 7 January 2021. Members of the other scrutiny committees would be invited to attend the relevant discussion with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers.

10.2 The Draft report of MTFS was due to be published for the December Cabinet Meeting so that would be available to members for this meeting.

10.3 One member noted that this would be a virtual meeting and explained that virtual meetings alongside physical meetings should be explored in the future. A procurement process was underway for the technology to allow for this kind of solution going forward, but this would also depend of legislation allowing for this. It was suggested that the LGA Improvement and Innovation Board who was doing some work on this be consulted.

CHAIRMAN

Meeting concluded at 12:35