CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 29 September 2021 at the Council Chamber - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Phil Awford (Chair)	Cllr Stephen Hirst
Cllr Ben Evans	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller
Cllr Andrew Gravells (via webex)	Cllr Lisa Spivey (Via webex)
	Cllr Chloe Turner
Cllr Dominic Morris	Cllr Jeremy Hilton
Cllr Colin Hay	Cllr Matt Babbage (via webex)

Substitutes:

Officers in attendance:

Rob Ayliffe, Director of Policy Performance & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Steve Mawson, Executive Director of Corporate Resources
Paul Blacker, Director of Finance
Simon Harper (Via webex), Head of Democratic Services
Stephen Bace, Lead Democratic Services Advisor
Ian Mawdsley, (via Webex) Head of Strategic Procurement

Apologies: Cllr Terry Hale
              Cllr John Bloxsom

1.   APOLOGIES

See above.

2.   MINUTES

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meetings on 19 March, 24 June and 22 July as a correct record.

3.   DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No additional declarations were made.

4.   WORK PLAN

4.1   Members noted the work plan that had been circulated with the papers.

4.2　　As part of the discussion members suggested the following items for consideration by Lead Members to add to the work plan:

- A detailed breakdown and discussion around the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019. To include information on how the data was compiled and what factors were taken into consideration. – February 2022

- For the 6 January budget scrutiny session to include review of the Council Strategy and for the day to be titled as such.

- Review of upgrades and accommodation changes based on agile working requirements – potential April 2022

- Milestones and timeframe around IT infrastructure changes and roll out of Office 365, including discussion on IT performance and the effect on services.- for later in the year

5.　　UPDATE ON THE PROCUREMENT TOOLKIT

5.1　　Steve Mawson and Ian Mawdsley introduced the report which was an update on the procurement toolkit which as being developed and would be a resource for GCC staff reflecting a largely decentralised procurement function.

5.2　　The use of single use plastics was discussed with officers providing examples of the activities to reduce and remove this in Shire Hall and within services that had been contracted out.

5.3　　The toolkit would cover high value and complex procurements undertaken by the Strategic Procurement Service to low value and simple procurements undertaken by non procurement specialists.

5.4　　Members noted the vehicles for measuring social value within the toolkit which allowed individual procurements to select themes, outcomes and measures relevant to their area, for example single use plastics and than allocated a weighting to this.

5.5　　Members understood there would be pilots around the application of social value. A strategy would address the key elements of this. The Council would publish what measures were being taken so the public could go on and see how the Council was performing.

5.6　　The Committee recognised that the Single Use Plastic Scrutiny Task Group had met in the autumn of 2019 before the work was suspended due to the pandemic. An outline of the toolkit had been provided to that group.

5.7   It was clarified that the Council would make sure that every tool was available to enable the fulfilment of the Council motion.

5.8   One member asked for details on whether the actions from the single use plastics take group had been picked up. It was explained that there had been a previous update on the actions that had been taken forward and that could be sent to Committee members.
        ACTION   Steve Mawson

5.9   In response to a question it was explained that one the procurement toolkit was finished then members would have a training session on it. This would likely to be in 6 months time.

5.10   There was a discussion around how social value in a contract was decided. It was explained that themes outcomes and measures were set out and by law social value had to be considered. There was a portal which provided an advisor to help those procuring get the best social value from a contract. One member stated that it should be about driving forward social value and not just a box ticking exercise to signpost what was already there. Another member highlighted that programme management principles and processes needed to be front and centre of decision making and that there needed to be balance between value for money and social value. There was a concern that decision makers could be overwhelmed with too many factors to consider.

5.11   In response to question on considering single use plastic issues when purchasing, it was stated that there were industry standards that were followed. There was a personal responsibility around disposing of waste materials from packaging. There were also national frameworks in place. One member stated that the Council should be feeding in their requirements and influencing the content of the framework where possible.

5.12   One member emphasised the risk of taking conflicting legal advice and the implications of then making decisions based on that. It was explained that the Council's legal team provided advice and occasionally external advice was sought. A member commented on the importance of recognising the risks associated with legal advice. It was important to have an audit trail in place for decision makers.

6.   ANNUAL OVERVIEW OF NEED AND COUNCIL PERFORMANCE

6.1   Rob Ayliffe provided an overview of demand and performance key issues and trends.

6.2   Members noted the increase in the number of children in care in Gloucestershire and that 45% of care leavers aged 19-21 ended up as not in employment, education or training in 2020. The increase in children in care created a significant pressure on council resources. The Council also benchmarked high compared to peers for the rate of children in need and children on a child protection plan.

6.3   The Committee were shown the numbers packages of ongoing care for older
        people and those with a physical disability (including Covid-19 funded individuals),
        alongside the 2021/22 budget. Long term successes in preventing increased
        demand in this area could be affected by the challenges going forward such as
        Covid-19.

6.4   Members recognised that between 2018 and 2043 the projections showed a 16.6%
        growth in population as a whole with a 52.5% growth in over 65s. In line with this
        there were projected to be a significant increase in those over 65 with dementia by
        2043. One member queried the impact in medical advances that could affect the
        number of people with dementia.

6.5   There was discussion around the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service
        improvement journey since 2009.One member noted the introduction of additional
        fire safety inspections and then the recent drops in this due to the pandemic.

6.6   Members were informed of the transformational future infrastructure projects in
        Gloucestershire including the M5 Junction 10 improvements, M5 Junction 9 and
        A46 Improvement Scheme, the A417 Missing Link, Spherical Tokamak for Energy
        Production Fusion Project, the Mass Rapid Transit Scheme and B4063 Cheltenham
        – Gloucester Cycle Scheme. One member raised cyber central as an important
        scheme.

6.7   In relation to Housing growth, it was estimated there would be 32,000 new homes
        by 2031 and 97,000 by 2051. Members noted that housing needs could be different
        with household size projected to decrease and there being an older demographic.

6.8   Although the long term trend for new school places was relatively flat there were
        peaks and troughs over the short term with school capacity not necessarily in the
        right places.

6.9   Members were provided with the projected trajectory for carbon emissions showing
        continuing reductions, both in the County Council's own emissions and for the
        County. The latter would require a step change and acceleration in improvement to
        achieve target for 2045.

6.10   The Committee were shown details of the number of safety defects repaired on
        Gloucestershire highways since April 2019. One member raised concern about the
        highways indicators stating that they were not fit for purpose. One member noted
        the increase in 28 days defects on the graph in 2021. Officers outlined that the
        pattern of weather was a factor. Some members criticised the number of potholes
        on Gloucestershire's roads. Members were reminded that there had been a detailed
        discussion at Environment Scrutiny Committee on this. One member commented
        on the financial position of backlog of repairs as a good indicator.

6.11   Members noted the economic impact of Covid-19 with increased unemployment.
        The Committee recognised the implications of Covid and ongoing complications
        which were challenging for the health sector.

6.12   New data was provided relating to where people were spending their time and showed the changing lifestyle habits during the pandemic and where these may demonstrate long term trends. Members noted the continued high period of activity in parks and outdoor spaces. In response to a question about how the Council was taking account of these changing patterns, it was explained that the local resilience forum and it was important not to draw too many conclusions until things settled. Partners would be included in discussions around the implications of these changes and how that would feed into the wider strategies.

6.13   12 neighbourhoods in Gloucestershire were in 10% most deprived nationally with 3.1% of Gloucestershire's population living in those areas. One member asked whether deprivation factors could be compared to understand what was causing a particular area to be high. It was explained there was a large amount of data available to understand those drivers and this would be presented to the Committee under the item requested earlier in the meeting.

6.14   In summary consideration needed to be given to how the data provided would affect corporate resources and feed into the decisions being made. Members noted that the information provided would help form the basis of questions at the budget scrutiny session in January 2022.

7.   STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT - 1ST QUARTER 2021/22

7.1   Rob Ayliffe provided members with an overview of performance at the end of quarter 1 for 2021/22. This included areas of achievements and successes, areas of focus and concern and long term issues. In addition there were specific indicators which demonstrated the impact of Covid.

7.2   For Children's Services and initial response to risk, there had been a drop off in quarter 3 and 4 but was showing improvement in the 1st quarter in 2021/22. In terms of repeat work such as re-referrals and repeat children plans and readmissions into care there was signs of sustained improvement.

7.3   For Adult Services review and reassessments performance had dropped off in the first quarter and this was something they would be looking at in detail ahead of reporting to committee again.

7.4   Members noted the risk register attached to the report. The risk around adult social care independence sector had risen in light of instability in the market. In addition, the cumulative impact of service pressures due to the impact of Covid had also seen an increased risk.

7.5   One member felt there was a downward trend of the areas that were on target. In response it was stated that this was a similar position to the previous year and that for some indicators there was additional projections that suggested that they would move back on track over the course of the year.

7.6   One member expressed concern that highways measures were outlined as an achievement. In response it was explained that the measures suggested that for repairing those safety defects performance was good. It was acknowledged that this was not the only factor to consider in relation to highways and that the response from residents suggested performance was not at the level the indicators were showing. Members discussed the issues in highways, noting communication challenges and the need to manage expectations. It was suggested by one member that the focus of the team was on technical measures rather than customer service. One member raised concerns about the time taken for residents to have responses to the tickets raised. It was confirmed there was a satisfaction measure in the data set but the target needed reviewing.

7.7   In relation to renewable energy, one member asked that the targets be provided on the slides. In addition it was confirmed that the fluctuation of targets was due to seasonality.

8.   **CORPORATE RESOURCES PERFORMANCE REPORT**

8.1   Steve Mawson introduced the Corporate Resources Performance Report.

8.2   Members noted the details in the report around the activities being taken in ICT to modernise and stabilise critical infrastructure. Continual monitoring was showing that there had been fewer incidents.

8.3   There had been a number of projects related to agile working, such as the agile toolkit for managers to handle the key areas and questions for their teams. A pulse survey had been undertaken, specifically around returning to work, and the data was showing an overall position of staff wanting to return two to three days a week. One member highlighted the importance of measuring performance as agile working was being introduced. There was a discussion around children's social care workers and the requirements they had.

8.4   There was no statutory requirement for social distancing, but some measures have been kept in place because that is what staff had said they wanted. In addition consideration was being given to meeting rooms and what requirements were needed for hybrid meetings. Details were provided on the software that could be used in meeting rooms and keeping this as flexible as possible.

8.5   One member was concerned about the performance and financial costs of dispersed working and wanted to ensure that the right measures were in place to understand this. Officers explained that it was important to understand service needs when considering more agile working. It was also important to look after staff and have a discussion with them on what worked for the individual along with the requirements of the service.

8.6   One member suggested that when officers were employed who did not live in the County there were difficulties in not being able to meet face to face or show them

issues on the ground. It was important to find the right balance between this and remote working and to capture the benefits of more flexible working.

8.7   One member noted that schools were not included in the carbon emission figures, regardless of whether they were community schools under the responsibility of the Council, or Academy schools that were not. In response it was stated that all emissions data was based on a historic baseline, every time a school moved to become an academy it would be removed from the emissions data and that would show a reduction in overall emissions that would not have been under the Council's control. For that reason all were excluded so that changes in emissions were the result of action taken by the Council.

9.   FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

9.1   Paul Blacker introduced the financial monitoring report outlining that the current forecast of the year end revenue position against the revenue budget of £483.008 million based on forecasts in July 2021 was an overspend of £6.743 million.

9.2   The largest overspend was in Childrens and Families as detailed within the report. Regular meetings were held with the finance team to get this under control.

9.3   In relation to Covid-19 grants, they would be spent according to the terms of the grant.

9.4   The Council was on track to achieve over 80% of savings targets for 2021/22 with some slippage but they would still be achieved.

9.5   One member questioned the transfer of developer contribution to the cycle track to A435 project. It was explained that this was a reattribution of funding between two existing schemes. The schemes were interdependent – the cycleway would not be fully useable until the capacity project was completed. This was a matter of programme management and sequencing, rather than assigning priority to one scheme over the other.

9.6   One member queried the increase in the waste capital budget detailed in the report. A response would be provided.
        ACTION   Steve Mawson

9.7   One member noted the performance drop in supporting those people with alcohol or opium abuse and queried the underspend in the budget area. It was noted that the pandemic had caused challenges but that was more reason to provide them with as much support as possible. In response it was explained that the indicator was related to those who had received treatment but then had not completed and this was likely in relation to the challenges in the pandemic. It was suggested that this was not a resource related drop off in performance. In relation to the underspend, there would be some deliberate carry forward to future years.

9.8   There was a detailed discussion on the challenges in the Children and Families budget with it understood that demand was continuing to grow. Members noted the success of Trevone House but some expressed frustration over the same financial challenges. It was explained that there were plans to build more in house provision, but it was also important to put in place case and demand management. The point was raised about not having Covid funding in future years and the additional challenges that would pose. There was a discussion on all the factors that needed to be considered in relation to improving outcomes for children and moving the Council to a good Ofsted rating.

9.9   It was recognised that additional investment could pay for social workers and might reduce cases per social worker, but this alone would not solve issues around quality and consistency of practice. It was stated that a 'good' authority would see costs taken out of the system by reductions in demand through complex and high cost placements.

9.10   One member queried the £2.064 million loss of income from parking and asked whether projections were based on recovery in this area? In response it was stated that while improvements were being seen as the County 'opened up' more, this was unlikely to be back at earlier levels by the end of the financial year, if it was to return at all.

10.   SCRUTINY REVIEW FEEDBACK

10.1   Simon Harper explained to members that the feedback from the last Council's discussion around scrutiny and the structure of committee's was included for their information within the agenda pack.

10.2   It was noted that there had now been the introduction of the Fire Scrutiny Committee.

10.3   Members noted the extensive scrutiny work that was being carried out including a task group on restoring our rivers. It was acknowledged that there were links between the Health Scrutiny and Adult Social Care Committees and a significant volume of activity across those committees.

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 1:20pm