

Minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 27 February 2023

Present: Colin Greatorex (Chair)

Attendance

Tina Clements	Bob Spencer
Mike Davies	Samantha Thompson (Vice-Chair (Overview))
John Francis	Mike Worthington
Gill Heath (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))	Nigel Yates
Jeremy Pert	

Apologies: Jeremy Oates, Kath Perry, MBE, Bernard Peters and John Tradewell

Also in attendance: Councillors Alan White and Ian Parry (virtual attendance).
Officers: Kate Loader, Katie Marshall, Chris Ebberley, Sarah Getley, and Wendy Tompson.

PART ONE

The Chairman informed the Committee that Councillor Charlotte Atkins had come off the Committee and had been replaced with Councillor Nigel Yates. Councillor Yates was welcomed to the Committee.

53. Declarations of Interest

None declared at the meeting.

54. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2023

Resolved: – That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

55. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 3 2022/23

The Leader of the Council introduced the Integrated Performance Report for Quarter 3 2022/23 which summarised the Council's performance and financial position against the Strategic and Delivery Plans.

The Cabinet Member for Finance explained that the report detailed the main challenges facing each of the four service areas, notably inflation; energy costs; payroll increases; and the transformation of Children's services which had not achieved expected savings during the quarter. It was also reported that there was a forecast overspend of approximately £16m reduced to £11.5m following the additional funding allocation from reserves.

The main issues discussed by members were:

- The number of children in care which was continuing to increase. This required specialist staff and family support.
- It had been expected that the number of Children in Care would reduce. This hadn't happened and the gap in funding was the result. However, it was anticipated that the recent investment in Children's services would show a change in services within the next financial year.
- The Cabinet was confident that the revised strategy for Children's services was deliverable and the previous gap in strategy was due to the resourcing plan for specialist staff to deliver the change. This was now in place and should deliver change.
- The number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) issued had continued to rise.
- Educational Psychologist had been recruited and this should ensure children get the support they need before they need additional care and have to come into the system.
- Future assessment of demand, particularly in relation to the pandemic and the budget forecast would be helpful so that the Cabinet could be held to account.
- Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee were looking at the transformation plan in detail and the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be looking at the financial implications at the April meeting. Safeguarding Committee had made recommendations to the Cabinet on measuring data.
- Information on historical data and employment and recruitment and retention would be helpful for the Committee. Members were directed to previous agendas when the yearend data was provided (normally May/ June).
- Information on apprenticeships (location and numbers) would be forwarded to the committee for information.
- A discussion on the funding challenges for category 3 highway defects took place and the need to address potholes in a particular area rather than just category 3 and then having to return later to address other holes which had become category 3. This was being referred to as "Whole Place Repair" and was being introduced.
- Highway inspectors had been recruited and were working alongside Amey to identify need and a programme of work.

Resolved:

- a) That the Quarter 3 2022/23 Integrated Performance Report be noted.
- b) Information on apprenticeships (location and numbers) to be forwarded to the committee for information

56. Refreshed People Strategy 2023 - 2027

The Committee was informed that the People strategy was before the Committee for pre-decision scrutiny and would be considered by Cabinet on the 15th March 2023. This was a refresh for 2023-2027

Officers gave a short presentation explaining the four pillars; priorities; key performance indicators used to monitor and assess the success of the strategy; and next steps.

The Committee welcomed the strategy and the approach to become an 'employer of choice'. Members asked if any sampling was carried out to ensure that what the authority was striving for was being achieved. It was felt that Exit interviews were a good way of assessing things from an employee viewpoint. Areas of concern were the employee age demographics; retaining older employees; and succession planning.

The Leader explained that in his view there were a number of areas of work that needed to be addressed:

- Innovation in the workplace
- Succession planning
- Calm when solving problems
- Employee empowerment – particular middle managers.

A capability policy was available to managers should a situation arise where employees were not performing well.

Members felt that Male mental health needed to be taken into account in any organisational development. More information would be forwarded to the Committee on the current support offer.

Key performance indicators and the detailed policies which would deliver this strategy were in place, but it was acknowledged that a number of key indicators would be useful for members to see if the strategy was delivering.

Resolved: That the report and the comments made by the committee be noted.

57. Electoral Review – Stage 1 Draft Council Size Submission

The Leader introduced the report and the Senior Change Manager and the Member and Democratic Services Manager provided a short presentation covering the following areas:

- The stages of the review and the criteria used by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
- Member engagement during the process.
- How the proposals had been developed.
- Key dates.

Members were reminded that their role was to scrutinise the review process and the detailed recommendations would be discussed at Council on 16 March 2023. The submission to the LGBCE would be made on the 20 March 2023 and consultation on their draft recommendations would then take place between the 27 June to 4 September 2023. The Council is a consultee in the process.

The boundary changes proposed and the request for 'single member' wards as part of the Submission was briefly mentioned. The Committee was reminded that there was no guarantee that single member divisions would be achievable and this had been requested as part of the last review in 2010, however two double divisions remained.

During the discussion, members asked questions and were provided with the following information:

- Any members who weren't happy with the recommendations and wanted to submit a counter proposal were offered support by the Senior Change Manager so that a personal submission could be made.
- Community identity was often more important to local people than the + or - 10 % criteria. Discussions had taken place with the LGBCE on this point and community identity was always a priority, but unfortunately in an area as large as Staffordshire, variations and compromise would always be needed.

The Committee:

- Expressed their satisfaction with the engagement process and opportunity to put forward their views.
- Supported the single ward request.
- Felt that this was an opportunity to provide coterminous boundaries where possible.
- Acknowledged the use of local knowledge and understanding of local geography.

Officers were thanked for their help and support during the process.

Resolved:

- a) That the progress on the County's Electoral Review be noted.
- b) That the comments and suggestions from the Committee as listed above be referred to Council for consideration

58. Work Programme and MTFS Cabinet response

The following changes had been made to the work programme since the last meeting:

- The 9 May meeting had been changed from a reserved for call-in meeting to a formal meeting.

- The Children's Transformation Programme – Budget implications item had been moved from the April to May 2023 due to officer availability.
- The Corporate Delivery Plan had been added to the May meeting.
- Councillor Yates had replaced Councillor Atkins on the Committee and it was requested that the same change be made to the Climate Change Working Group.
- The MTFS Cabinet response had been added to the work programme for information.

Resolved:

- a) That the Work Programme and changes made since the last meeting be noted.
- b) That Councillor Nigel Yates replace Councillor Charlotte Atkins on the Climate Change Working Group
- c) That the MTFS Cabinet response be noted

Chairman