

Minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 1 August 2023

Present: Mike Wilcox (Chair)

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

Also in attendance: Cabinet Members: Councillors Alan White and Ian Parry.

Officers: Kate Loader, John Tradewell and Lyndsey Bissell

Apologies: Councillors John Francis and Kath Perry, MBE

Part One

9. Declarations of Interest

None declared at the meeting.

10. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023

Resolved: – That, the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11. Integrated Performance Report, Quarter 1 2023/24

The Leader of the Council introduced the Integrated Performance and Financial Outturn Report for the first quarter of 2023/24 which summarised the Council's performance and financial position against the Strategic and Delivery Plans.

It was reported that the main challenges to the budget were; Children in Care pressures; SEND service; and Adult Social Care demands. The estimated revenue forecast outturn overspend was £9.5m (£1.39%).

The main issues discussed by members were:

- Children and Families service remained an area of concern with costs and the number of Children in Care (CIC) continuing to rise.
- The data on infrastructure investment; social care numbers and unemployment figures was positive.

- There was still no evidence to suggest that numbers of children requiring services was due to the pandemic and any stress and anxiety caused during that time.
- Benchmarking against other local authorities showed that the County was lower than the regional rate but higher than national. It was explained that regional neighbours with higher rates affected the figures locally and the county was keen to get the numbers down to below the national average. However, the service was driven by the child's need, not numbers.
- The number of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCP) issued had continued to rise. Additional funding to ensure plans were carried out within timescales and reviewed appropriately, to meet individual need, had been allocated.
- When CIC were placed outside the County area, it was due to the placement being specialist care and the most appropriate for the child. Value for money was always assessed and contracts managed and monitored. Organisations were also inspected and rated by Ofsted.
- Child re-referrals rates remained at 20%. It was explained at the meeting that when a child had been referred into the system and had been moved on to specialist support the case was referred to as 'closed'. If there was then a need for a new service within 12 months, this was classed as a re-referral. Information on the national benchmarking figures for re-referrals and where Staffordshire fell against that would be sent to the Committee for information.
- Unallocated Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), would be allocated by the end of the year to mitigate the effects of Covid.
- The number of startup business supported by the council in Staffordshire showed robust growth higher than the national average.
- The overspend in Childrens Services continued to increase despite additional funding. It was explained that early intervention was key and there were potential signs that the new working arrangements were working but it was still too early to tell. Cabinet members were due to meet to evaluate the transformation strategy to see if it remained the right approach.
- In the financial summary it stated that there were £6.118m savings classed as low confidence which mainly related to placement costs. It was explained that there was always an element of risk when trying to achieve savings, but if savings were not met, they would be looked for elsewhere or funded through reserves if necessary.
- The High Needs Block (under the Dedicated Schools Grant), which was forecast to £18m overspent was another area of concern which would affect the councils' finances if it had to be funded from main budgets. This was also a national concern for most authorities.
- There were challenges but also opportunities in developing services

such as Libraires.

- Information on the SEND transport review, which was recommended under the MTFS working group 2022/23, was requested.
- Recycling rates seem to have plateaued and there was a concern over the use of wood fuels (paragraph 102 of the report). It was explained that the district councils had an influence over recycling rates, and this was different in different areas and at times of year. Information on wood burning use would be forwarded to the Committee after the meeting.
- It was suggested that the key areas of concern as listed in the report, should include Highways as this was one of the main complaints from local residents in most areas. Members were encouraged to work closely with their local Highways team to identify local need.
- A review of the way that the Divisional Highway Programmes (DHP) was allocated, and the processes involved in identifying and progressing schemes was suggested. Members felt that once an issue had been identified and a feasibility study had been carried out, there was insufficient fund left to carry out the work. It was suggested that this would be considered by the O&S Chairs forum to allocate to the correct Committee. The Chair of Prosperous O&S Committee and the Leader agreed to look at this area prior to any review.

Resolved:

- a) That the information contained in the Integrated Performance and Financial Outturn Report be noted as the position as at the end of quarter one 2023/24.
- b) That the following information, which was not available at the meeting, be sent to Committee members:
 - Information on the national bench marking figures for re-referrals and where Staffordshire fell against that would be sent to the Committee for information.
 - Information on Wood burning use (paragraph 102 of the report).
 - Results of the SEND transport review as recommended by the MTFS working group 2022/23.
- c) That Highway repairs be added to the key areas of concern as listed in the report, as this was one of the main complaints from local residents in most areas.
- d) That the O&S Chairs forum to asked to consider a review of the way that the Divisional Highway Programmes (DHP) funding is allocated, and the processes involved in identifying and progressing schemes. Members felt that once an issue had been identified and a feasibility study had been carried out, there was insufficient fund left to carry out the work.

12. Work Programme

The Committee considered the work programme for 2023/24.

The Chair requested that the 24 October meeting be changed to the 6 November 2023.

Resolved: That the work programme be approved and the 24 October meeting be moved to the 6 November 2023.

Chair