

Minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 6 November 2023

Present: Mike Wilcox (Chair)

Attendance	
Tina Clements	Jeremy Pert
Mike Davies	Bernard Peters
John Francis	Samantha Thompson (Vice-Chair (Overview))
Gill Heath (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))	Mike Worthington
Kath Perry, MBE	Nigel Yates

Also in attendance: Jonathan Price, Simon Tagg and Alan White

Apologies: Bob Spencer and Cabinet members Ian Parry and Mark Deaville.

Part One

19. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

20. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023

It was noted that Councillor Heath was present at the meeting and that in Minute 16 paragraph 2, the spelling of 'process' should be corrected.

Resolved: – That subject to the amendments listed above, the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21. Integrated Performance report – quarter 2

The Leader of the Council introduced the Integrated Performance Report for Quarter 2 2023/24 which summarised the Council's performance and financial position against the Strategic and Delivery Plans.

The report detailed the main challenges facing each of the four service areas, notably Children in Care, SEND, Adult Social Care demand and Highway performance. The report also detailed the forecast overspend of £7.7m (1.1%) compared to the quarter 1 forecast overspend of £9.5m (1.39%).

The main issues discussed at the meeting were:

- The timeliness of sourcing social care brokerage was acknowledged as being the best performance for 3 years. The impact of this benefited clients and partner organisations.
- It was felt that the quality of the data was more informative, but the tolerance on some of the graph axis's could be changed so that it started at a number closer to the actual e.g. started at 90 if the data started at 94 and not zero. This would make the data more visible.
- There had been addition funding for Educational psychologists, with 7 new posts now filled. It was hoped that this would help to improve the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) delays.
- It was suggested that more narrative could be included on the unemployment section as this was a successful area.
- However, youth unemployment showed a gap of 2%. It was hoped that the changes to the LEP could help to focus efforts on specific areas.
- The full list of schemes which had applied for covid funding as well as the successful ones was requested.
- Early intervention with families would hopefully identify and support children with additional needs, which may lead to reduced need for support in later years.
- Preventative highway maintenance, such as gully clearing was priority to ensure that avoidable damage to roads was reduced.
- A Chatterley Valley slippage update would be sent to Councillor Yates directly.
- A piece of work was taking place on Special school places; demand; SEND transport; and working with mainstream schools. A report would be considered by Cabinet within the near future. Members were reminded that Cabinet had recently considered a report entitled "SEND Accelerated Progress Plan: Enhanced Assess-Plan, Review Pathway, Strategy for Special Provision and the Staffordshire Children and Young People's Framework" which addressed some of the committees concerns and this would be sent to members for information.
- Ofsted had been lobbied to look at SEND provision and inclusiveness as part of their inspection regime.
- School SENCO's qualifications and workload was highlighted as an area which was being worked on with schools to see if any support could be offered.
- High Needs Block funding needed to be addressed by Central Government.
- The family network pilot results would be reported to Safeguarding O&S Committee in due course.
- Disabled Facility Grants need a more sophisticated approach to distribution throughout the county.
- County council members needed to interact with their Highway managers to ensure that local issues are being appropriately addressed.

- Safeguarding contacts (paragraph 6 of the report) and the temporary extra resource to review its pathways was noted.
- Extra resources provided to carryout Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding (DOLS) orders was in place awaiting changes in legislation which will see new arrangements replacing DOLS.
- Volunteers provided a huge benefit to the social care offer and were much appreciated. A financial cost could not be estimated at the present time.
- The financial impact of the new online financial self-assessment portal, as mentioned in Paragraph 41 of the report, was requested.
- The Committee felt that Economic trends in the County were doing well.

Resolved:

- a) That the Quarter 2 2023/24 Integrated Performance Report be noted.
- b) The tolerance on graph axis's should be changed, wherever practical, so that it starts at a number closer to the actual e.g. started at 90 if the data started at 94 and not zero.
- c) That the following information be provided to the committee:
 - The full list of schemes which had applied for covid funding as well as the successful ones.
 - A copy of the Cabinet (20/09/23) report entitled "SEND Accelerated Progress Plan: Enhanced Assess-Plan, Review Pathway, Strategy for Special Provision and the Staffordshire Children and Young People's Framework".
 - The financial impact of the new online financial self-assessment portal, as mentioned in Paragraph 41 of the report.
- d) An update on the Chatterley valley scheme slippage be sent to Councillor Yates directly.

22. Entrust – Review of Changes

The Cabinet Member for Commercial Matters had sent his apologies to the meeting. The Cabinet Member for Education and the Assistant Director for Commercial and Assets presented the report.

The Committee was informed that the Entrust contract had been reviewed when it had reached the halfway point in its term. Due to a number of changes both to the service and the economy, the contract would now be reviewed every 3 years. Some services had come back into the provision of the council.

The Committee felt that the performance indicators appeared to be process lead, were not challenging and did not measure expected outcomes. It was suggested that a three-year development target would

be useful and the Committee was invited to help formulate this.

Resolved:

- a) That the update be noted.
- b) That the Committee hold an informal meeting to discuss the possible future targets for the service.

23. Climate change annual report and action plan

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change introduced the Climate Change Annual Report and Action Plan. The documents would be considered by the Cabinet on 15 November 2023.

A short presentation was provided to the Committee.

The following comments were made by the Committee on the Annual Report:

- The plan showed ambition and built on last year's plan. It demonstrated vision and direction of travel.
- There was a need for the council to bring together partners and develop guidance and approaches to help standardize delivery. It was felt that this was one of the Councils key roles in tackling climate change. Examples where this would be beneficial were given as:
 - planning legislation/guidance on solar panel farms and housing developments.
 - Influencing policy so that housing developers invest in properties prior to sale, requiring the buyer to then retrofit new technologies.
 - EV charging in both remote and urban settings.
 - Centralise knowledge and best practice.
 - Drainage.
 - Waste collection.
- HVO and hydrogen as fuels for fleet vehicles needed more development.
- The council needed to act as a consortium with partners to achieve greater savings and benefits through sharing infrastructure and services.
- The Members Climate Action Fund was valued by some members

and increasing the fund was suggested.

- There needed to be a mechanism for ensuring that all of the Members Climate Action Fund is spent, and that District and Borough councils be encouraged to identify similar funding could really show commitment to local communities who want to develop schemes.

The Committee currently had a working group which was looking at Climate Change. Their report was due to be considered later on this agenda.

It was reported that the Communications strategy and waste reduction were both areas which were being looked at.

The Committee looked forward to reviewing progress in the 2023/24 Climate Change Annual Report along with the action plan and reviewing the results of the recent Climate change consultation at a future meeting.

Resolved:

- a) That the update be noted.
- b) That the Committee receive an update in 12 months time.
- c) That the comments made by the Committee, listed above, be reported to the Cabinet on 15 November 2023.

24. Climate Change Working Group - Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation for Net Zero

The Chair of the Working Group, Councillor Thompson and the Scrutiny and Support Manager gave a short presentation summarising the findings and recommendations of the group.

The report would be referred to Cabinet for consideration and a response received within two months.

Resolved: That the draft report and the following recommendations to Cabinet be approved:

- a) That the Cabinet be requested to consider the amount of carbon sequestration that can be achieved on SCC land to mitigate residual carbon emissions from SCC's carbon footprint that will be present in 2050.
- b) That the Cabinet undertake to develop a delivery model to plant a Staffordshire Forest, not only to mitigate our carbon emissions but also to realise the wider benefits of woodland creation, such as, green economy, rural diversification, rural employment, tourism growth, landscape protection, biodiversity enhancement and provision of a local timber resource. To do this explore the wider

- benefits and partnership opportunities with organisations like Forestry Commission and National Forest Company (FC/NFC).
- c) That the Cabinet take advantage of Forestry Commission Funding identified by the working group which is available until March 2024 and apply for the planning, funding, establishing, growing and management of Woodlands at the earliest opportunity.
 - d) That Cabinet consider how to progress planning for tree planting, woodland creation and to shape the concept model to plant a Staffordshire Forest, we recommend:
 - i. Identify land in the SCC rural portfolio that sits within the Forestry Commission low sensitivity areas of Staffordshire and
 - ii. Complete an options appraisal for a given area of land use change, exploring options through agricultural diversification, woodland creation, and other alternatives to include financial value through carbon sequestration.
 - iii. All benefits to be identified to give a balanced financial appraisal over a timeframe 2030-2070.
 - e) That Cabinet be requested to consider cessation of disposal of Council owned land /Country farms on the asset disposal list until it has been considered for inclusion in the concept model.
 - f) That the Leader and Cabinet Members be requested to engage with the District and Borough Councils at the Leaders Board and Sustainability Board to consider the concept model for a Staffordshire Forest, to invest in woodlands as a way to tackle the dual crisis of climate change and biodiversity, and how woodlands offer multiple sustainable benefits (social, environmental, and economic) to Staffordshire residents and businesses.

25. Work Programme

The Chair informed members that the MTFs working group would be concluding its work shortly and would report to Committee on 18 December.

An additional meeting had been arranged for 8 March 2024 in order to consider the Corporate Plan.

Resolved: That the Work Programme be noted.

Chair