

Minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 16 November 2021

Present: Colin Greatorex (Chairman)

Attendance

Charlotte Atkins	Jeremy Pert
Tina Clements	Bob Spencer
Mike Davies	Samantha Thompson
Gill Heath (Vice-Chairman (Scrutiny))	Conor Wileman (Vice-Chairman (Overview))

Apologies: Jeremy Oates, Bernard Peters and James Salisbury

PART ONE

20. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

21. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 2, 2021/22

The Committee considered a joint report of the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources informing them of progress in achieving their Strategic and Delivery Plans for Quarter 2 2021/21 (schedule 1 to the signed minutes).

The overall assessment of the council's performance and financial position at the end of the Quarter was AMBER which reflected the significant progress made whilst recognising that further attention was needed in order to resume a satisfactory 'on target' position. Challenges remained in respect of capacity and demand across all service areas and there continued to be areas of significant financial risk in the Adult Social Care and Families and Communities service areas.

The latest revenue forecast outturn position indicated a saving of £1.992m would be achieved compared to the previous forecast (at the end of Quarter 1) of £8.119.

In presenting their report, the Leader and Cabinet Member highlighted that the Authority's focus would continue to be the on-going Covid-19 Pandemic and they referred to the various measures being implemented to keep people safe and the economy moving during this time. In addition, they spoke of the need to manage demand and capacity issues in the adult social

care and children's social services arenas, whilst maximising existing and identifying new sources of streams.

During the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to the progress and performance outlined in the report, asking questions and seeking clarification where necessary, including:- (i) the total number of vacancies which had resulted from a national change in the Covid-19 immunisation status required of care workers; (ii) the increase in the numbers of Children in Care in Staffordshire which had risen since their previous meeting; (iii) instances of 'digital exclusion' in the County and the measures being implemented to distribute IT equipment to those groups most effected; (iv) recovery of outstanding debt owed to the Authority; (v) the financial shortfalls currently being met by vacant posts and the implications for the Council's budgets following recruitment; (vi) outcomes relating to Care Leavers; (vii) capital receipts from the sale of assets and the Authority's policy with regard to their County Farms Estate.

In response to further questions from Members, the Leader undertook to write to them regarding:- (i) the percentage of adult social care assessments in Staffordshire which had resulted in refusals; (ii) a clarification of the costs referred to in Appendix 2 to the report in relation to transformation of the Families and Communities Directorate and; (iii) the target date for completion of work to power all street lights and traffic signals in the County using renewable energy.

Another Member requested that the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee be given an opportunity to scrutinise the work being undertaken by the Authority to review the Care Home market in Staffordshire with a view to ensuring continuity, quality and value for money, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (as referred to in paragraph 4 of the report). In response to a further question from the Member, the Leader explained that a review into the Home to School Transport Temporary Vacant Seat Scheme would be completed shortly with a report on the outcome being submitted to Cabinet for consideration at their meeting in December 2021. Acknowledging a point from another Member regarding the Scheme, the Leader undertook to give consideration to the inclusion of an appropriate appeals mechanism in the revised arrangements, as necessary.

In response to requests from Members, the Leader undertook to include additional data in his Performance report for Quarter 3 2021/22 covering receipts and allocation of Covid-19 grant aid.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the County Council's performance against their Strategic and Delivery Plans be monitored closely and that a further report be brought to their meeting in March 2022.

(c) That the various undertakings given by the Leader as set out above be noted, progress against which be reviewed at their next meeting.

22. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion - Principles, Objectives and Action Plan

The Committee considered a report of the Leader of the Council requesting pre-decision scrutiny of a draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Principles, Objectives and Action Plan for Staffordshire County Council to be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 15 December 2021 (schedule 2 to the signed minutes).

The County Council had made a commitment that tackling inequalities was at the core of everything they did. In order to strengthen this commitment across the organisation and County as a whole, the following three draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Principles had been identified:- (i) "Staffordshire is a place where there is equality of opportunity for all, regardless of circumstances"; (ii) "Staffordshire County Council is an inclusive and diverse employer, where our people feel they have the opportunity to succeed and progress"; (iii) "Staffordshire County Council develops and delivers services that are inclusive and accessible to all".

In addition, the following four draft objectives had been identified to help the Authority deliver against the above-mentioned principles:- (i) "Review and strengthen our recruitment and retention processes and Practices"; (ii) "Review and strengthen our diversity and inclusion training offer to employees"; (iii) Strengthen our approach to engaging and collaborating with our workforce and communities on diversity and inclusion issues" and; (iv) Raise awareness of, and celebrate diversity.

An initial Action Plan had been developed to take forward the proposed Objectives attached at Appendix 1 to the report. Members noted that it was intended the Action Plan would continue to evolve and develop over time following engagement and collaboration with stakeholders. Progress against the Principles and Objectives was to be overseen by the Director of Corporate Services and Leader of the Council with an evidence based annual monitoring report being brought to the Committee for Scrutiny.

During the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to the Principles, Objectives and Action Plan, asking questions and seeking clarification where necessary, including:- (i) the application of the County Council's Principles and Objectives by Partners eg contractors, schools etc; (ii) the impact of home-working on productivity and the equalities agenda; (iii) the importance of monitoring progress against the Principles and Objectives; (iv) the need for evidence based monitoring and the importance of staff engagement; (v) the need to identify key performance indicators (KPIs) and; (vi) implementation of the Principles and objectives through organisational recruitment and selection processes.

In response to request from the Chairman, the Leader agreed to delay finalising the draft report to Cabinet by one week in order to give Members of the Committee an opportunity to submit further comments etc, having regard to the late publication of the Agenda and papers for the meeting. In addition, the Leader undertook to:- (i) investigate the feasibility of promoting the Authority's Principles and Objectives through their external commissioning processes and careers advise role and; (ii) include relevant KPIs for Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion in the performance monitoring process and future update reports to the Committee.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted;

(b) That owing to the late publication of the Report, any further questions, comments and suggestions on the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion – Principles, Objectives and Action Plan be forwarded to the Leader (or Director of Corporate Services) by no later than 23 November 2021 to enable consideration of the matter by Cabinet at their meeting on 15 December 2021.

(c) That consideration be given to the feasibility of promoting the Authority's Principles and Objectives through their external commissioning processes and careers advise role.

(d) That relevant KPIs for Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion be included in the performance monitoring process and future update reports to the Committee.

23. VCSE Capacity Building Recommission

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture requesting pre-decision scrutiny of a proposed new Voluntary, Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) Capacity Building Framework for Staffordshire to be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 15 December 2021 (schedule 4 to the signed minutes).

Working with communities to ensure residents could help themselves and others was central to everything the County did and was a key principle of the Strategic Plan 2018-22. Since 2016, the existing Strategic Capacity Building Partnership Contract had enabled the Authority to:- (i) build capacity in the VCSE sector in a targeted way, focusing on prevention, early help and local need; (ii) support the local VCSE sector to be sustainable and lead on attracting additional funding to the County; (iii) deliver their priorities through strong leadership and; (iv) work effectively with the VCSE sector to co-design commissioning strategies and community based approaches.

However, the County Council's current VCSE sector capacity building contract was due to end on 31 July 2022. Therefore, work had commenced earlier in

2021 on procuring new arrangements, which included three stakeholder surveys held during May and June. An analysis of the responses received, highlighted the following priorities:- (i) ensure the VCSE sector was sustainable and had sufficient capacity to support Staffordshire's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic; (ii) promote a refreshed relationship with the VCSE sector to allow the Authority to build on the lessons learned since 2016 (particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic) and; (iii) continue to invest in VCSE capacity building to provide stability during a critical period.

It was proposed that the new VCSE Capacity Building Framework should:- (i) ensure sustainability in the VCSE sector as communities continued to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic; (ii) build capacity in communities to support the Authority to deliver their strategic priorities; (iii) provide a flexible, responsive and transparent method of commissioning additional work with the VCSE sector and partners and; (iv) provide an effective way of contract managing VCSE capacity building activity that was efficient to both commissioners and providers. It was also proposed that the new arrangements be implemented for a minimum three-year period with the option to extend for a further year, if required, subject to satisfactory performance and budgetary provision.

During the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, Members gave detailed scrutiny to the proposals set out in the report, asking questions and seeking clarification where necessary, including:- (i) feedback received from the existing contract provider; (ii) the valuable support provided by the existing contractor during the height of the 2020/21 Covid-19 pandemic; (iii) the need to ensure any new contract provider could fully align themselves to the Authority's values and principles and objectives; (iv) performance management arrangements over the course of the contract; (v) the role of Staffordshire's new Integrated Care System in joint working with the VCSE sector including provision of additional funding.

The Chairman highlighted various priority areas he hoped the new contract provider could assist with, including:- (i) facilitating the establishment of community and social groups and encouraging more people to volunteer; (ii) providing assistance to community groups in applying for grant aid; (iii) promoting digital inclusion and; (iv) encouraging communities to support measures aimed at tackling climate change.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the proposals to recommission Voluntary, Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) Capacity Building support for Staffordshire from 31 July 2022, as set out in the draft Cabinet Report to their meeting on 15 December 2021, be supported.

(b) That the draft Cabinet report be updated to reflect the above-mentioned discussion and various issues raised by the Committee as priority areas for attention by the new Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Capacity Building framework contract provider.

24. Impact of Covid-19 on SCC Communities, Economy and Organisation and Recovery Progress - Update October 2021 and Way Forward

The Committee considered a report of the Leader of the Council updating them on the impact of Covid-19 on Staffordshire's Communities, Economy and Council together with progress made towards recovery (Schedule 3 to the signed minutes).

Members noted the detailed progress made against the priorities which had previously been identified for each Directorate and Corporate Principles (ie (i) Communities; (ii) Digital; (iii) People and; (iv) Climate Change), as set out in Appendices 1-8 to the report.

They heard that work was underway to develop a new Strategic Plan covering the period 2022-26. The Plan was being informed by both the response to Covid-19 and the recovery process and it was anticipated a draft together with accompanying Financial Strategy would be submitted to Cabinet and County Council for consideration in early 2022.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the Authority's approach to leadership and influencing and monitoring the recovery process, be endorsed.

25. Work Programme

RESOLVED – That their updated Work Programme (schedule 5 to the signed minutes) be approved.

Chairman