

CORPORATE, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 5 December 2017
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor John McGahan (Chair) in the chair; Councillor June Somekh (Vice-Chair); Councillors Stuart Corris, Mike Hurleston, Anna Charles-Jones, Roy Driver, Philip Harding, Chris Murphy and Iain Roberts.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 31 October 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interests they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-ins to consider.

4. SAFER STOCKPORT PARTNERSHIP PRIORITIES

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) seeking the views of the Scrutiny Committee on proposed priority areas for the Safer Stockport Partnership to focus on in a new Safer Stockport Partnership Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Reform & Governance (Councillor David Sedgwick) supported by Superintendent Emma Taylor (Greater Manchester Police) attended the meeting to present the report and respond to councillors' questions.

It was commented that the Scrutiny Committee had previously received a number of updates on the development of the Plan.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Efforts by GMP to improve the 101 contact number were recognised and welcomed, but there remained scope to improve communication with the public and with councillors, such as attendance at area committees and using the Council website to disseminate information. Other councillors echoed these comments in relation to attendance at area committees. In response the benefits of attendance were acknowledged but the realities of the demands on police resources prevented a commitment being given to attend every meeting although period attendance would be

encouraged. Councillors were also encouraged to follow the Police on social media as work was ongoing to improve communication through these channels.

- The regeneration of the Town Centre and the opening of Redrock was likely to increase the demand on partnership resources in this area.
- Recent partnership operations to tackle illegal workers and counterfeit tobacco were welcomed.
- Clarification was sought on whether the increase in recorded crime in 2017 represented a genuine increase in crime or a reporting increase. In response it was the number of incidents had actually decreased slightly on previous years but because GMP had been criticised by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for underreporting crimes there had been a Force wide effort to improve and that this would account for much of the increase in the figures.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and Supt. Taylor be thanked for her attendance.

5. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES - MID-YEAR REPORTS 2017/18

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted the mid-year update Corporate Performance and Resources Report (CPRR) 2017/18 and the mid-year update Leader's Report 2017/18 (copies of which had been circulated).

The Mid-Year Update Corporate Performance and Resource Report (CPRR) provided an update on progress in delivering the Council's Priority Outcomes and budget during the first half of 2017/18 with particular focus on activity in the second quarter.

Updates were included on delivery of policy priorities, alongside Reform Projects. The report also included early forecasts of budget and performance data where this was available, along with an update on the refreshed Corporate Risk Register. It was supported by seven Portfolio Performance and Resource Reports which were being considered by scrutiny committees in the current Scrutiny cycle.

The Leader's Annual Report reflected on recent national and local events, along with key areas of progress in delivering the vision for Inclusive Growth during the second quarter.

It was reported that the reports had been considered and approved by Cabinet on 14 November 2017.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Alex Ganotis) and the Cabinet Member for Reform & Governance (Councillor David Sedgwick) attended the meeting to present the report and answer councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- Comment was made about the challenge of fly-tipping. In response the scale of the challenge was acknowledged and it was stated that the Cabinet would be bringing forward measures to address this in the future.
- The proposals to support the redevelopment of mills were welcomed.
- Further information was sought on the impact and operation of the pooling Business Rates with neighbouring local authorities. In response it was commented that that model was evolving, but that approximately half of business rates growth will be

retained by individual councils, and the other half would be used to compensate councils that may have lost funding. A portion would also be retained by the Combined Authority to avoid the need to have a Levy. It was anticipated that Stockport would benefit from this scheme and the level of growth was projected to be greater than the loss to the Revenue Support Grant. Nevertheless the complexity of the scheme and the volatility of business rates was emphasised, particular when seeking to calculate the collection base.

- Clarification was sought on what options the Cabinet had considered before proposing a Council Tax increase of 4.99% given the report acknowledges that this was not the fairest approach. In response it was stated that this was a reference to the fact that Council Tax was not based on the ability to pay, but that in reality the Council had no other option without cuts to services. The proposed increase would mean a reduction of £7m in the Council's budget saving requirements. The Cabinet was exploring option to increase income and making increased use of business rates, but there were not without challenge and risk.

RESOLVED – (1) That the reports be noted.

(2) That the Borough Treasurer be requested to submit a report to the next meeting on the operation of the Business Rates Pooling scheme.

6. COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES DISCOUNTS ANNUAL REVIEW

The Borough Treasurer submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the annual review of the Council's local scheme of Council Tax discounts and exemptions, and detailing recommended changes to the Scheme.

The Cabinet Member for Reform & Governance (Councillor David Sedgwick) attended the meeting to response to councillor's questions.

Concerns were expressed that providing full relief to young people leaving care may create a 'cliff edge' when such relief ceased if there were no other support provided. In response it was stated that care leavers were provided with a package of support that included support to help them budget.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the Council Meeting be recommended to approve the revised Council Tax and Business Rates Discount and Exemption Scheme.

7. Q2 2017-18 COMPLAINTS REPORT

A representative of the Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an overview of complaints, at the 2nd quarter (July - September) 2017/18.

The Cabinet had received and noted this report at its meeting on 14 November 2017.

The Cabinet Member for Reform & Governance (Councillor David Sedgwick) attended the meeting to answer councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- Clarification was sought on the decrease in the number of responses being provided on time for stage 1 complaints. In response it was stated that the Council had a timescale of 20 working days within which to respond to both stage 1 and stage 2 complaints, as opposed to the 12 week period maximum stipulated by the government, and in most cases this target was met. Where this was not going to be met because of the complexity of the complaint every effort was made to notify this to the complainant. The Council had recently introduced new software to underpin the complaints handling process and this should reinforce the message to staff to ensure these deadlines were met.
- The quality of the data provided in the report and the information about lessons learnt was commended.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. SICKNESS ABSENCE HALF YEAR REPORT (2017)

A representative of the Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) updating the Scrutiny Committee on the mid-year position (April - September) in terms of sickness absence.

The Cabinet Member for Reform & Governance (Councillor David Sedgwick) attended the meeting to answer councillors' questions.

Councillors welcomed improved levels of absence and efforts to ensure compliance with mandatory training for managers.

It was also commented that additional priority needed to be given to address mental health/ wellbeing, including ensuring the definition was sufficiently drawn to differentiate diagnosable mental ill-health from unhappiness. Ensuring there were quick referrals to support services were important to avoid prolonged absences that may exacerbate difficulties for the employee. In response, the points raised were acknowledged and assurance was given that steps had been taken to refine the stress management toolkit, to educate and encourage managers to respond promptly and to develop self-referral services to help employees with stress.

RESOLVED – That the half year outturn of 4.59 days per FTE, anticipating a year end outturn within the Council target of 9.5 to 10.5 days, be noted.

9. REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000: STOCKPORT COUNCIL'S USE OF DIRECTED SURVEILLANCE AND COVERT HUMAN INTELLIGENCE SOURCES (CHIS)

A representative of the Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update in relation to the second quarter of the 2017-2018 financial year.

The Council's Code of Practice for carrying out surveillance under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) required that quarterly reports be submitted to this

Scrutiny Committee to demonstrate to councillors that the Council was complying with its own Code of Practice when using RIPA.

There had been no authorisations during the second quarter to use directed surveillance and covert human intelligence sources.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

10. INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND REFORM PROGRAMME: ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH BUDGET PROPOSALS

A joint report of the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Reform & Governance was submitted (copies of which had been circulated) inviting the Scrutiny Committee to consider further proposals from the Cabinet to address budget pressures for 2018/19 onwards, including proposals relating to adult social care and public health.

The Director of Public Health and a representative of the Corporate Director for People attended the meeting to respond to questions.

A concern was expressed that budget reprofiling should no longer be needed in the context of pressures on budgets. In response assurance was given that this had arisen from a particular set of circumstances and now that this particular element of the budget had been reprofiled there would be no similar exercise in the future.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11. INFORMATION ADVICE AND GUIDANCE REVIEW

The Cabinet Member for Reform & Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing the Scrutiny Committee with an updated Business Case for the reconfiguration of Information, Advice and Guidance services following a consultation with stakeholders.

The Cabinet Member highlighted the following:

- Successful relocation of the advice services into Reddish Library, and it was proposed to move ahead with similar mergers elsewhere in the borough to provide greater flexibility in the deployment of staff resources.
- The existing Citizen's Advice Bureau contract had been extended by 1 year to allow for consideration of Greater Manchester opportunities.
- The proposals continued to provide a commitment to the Contact Centre for vulnerable residents.
- The public consultation had elicited a largely supportive response.

The Scrutiny Committee made the following comments/raised the following issues:-

- A number of councillors welcomed the commitment given to maintaining telephone contact provision and home visits for those vulnerable residents, as well as continuing to provide face-to-face contact through libraries.

- Support for residents to ensure they were able to claim those benefits they were entitled to was an invaluable service to some of the most vulnerable, and helped prevent more costly interventions while ensuring resources were available to spend in the local economy. The roll-out of Universal Credit was likely to put more demand on advice services.

It was reported that the increased use of 'Better off Stockport' website had reduced demand on services in relation to benefits advice, which had meant that the waiting times for support had reduced from 10 to 2 weeks. Councillors welcomed this improvement.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

12. CONSULTATION REPORT 2018/19 TREASURY STRATEGY

The Borough Treasurer submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) seeking the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the development of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for 2018/19, to be considered for approval at the Cabinet Meeting on 6 February 2018 and the Council Meeting on 22 February 2018.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Alexander Ganotis) attended the meeting to answer councillor's questions.

On behalf of the Scrutiny Committee the chair commended the Borough Treasurer and his team for their positive efforts in managing the Council's Treasury Management functions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- In light of recent and expected rises in interest rates, further information was sought on what triggers there were within the Strategy that might prompt in borrowing practices. In response it was confirmed that there were a series of triggers and examples of recent changes were given. Assurance was given that borrowing rates were kept under review to seek best value.
- Concerns were expressed that recent consultations from government and accounting bodies may impact on the Council's Strategy and were potentially in conflict. In response it was stated that the drivers for some of the changes being consulted on were not relevant to Stockport Council's practices, but that officers were confident policies could be adapted to any new requirements.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Council Meeting be recommended to approve the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for 2018/19.

(2) That the Borough Treasurer and the Treasury Management Team be commended for their hard work in the stewardship of the Council's Treasury Management functions.

(3) That the Borough Treasurer be requested to circulate a copy to members of the Scrutiny Committee of the Council's response to the Department for Communities and Local Government consultation on regulations in relation to investments and Minimum Revenue Provision.

13. 2017 GREATER MANCHESTER STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A representative of the Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) updating the Scrutiny Committee on the refreshed Greater Manchester Strategy and Implementation Plan agreed by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in July and officially launched in October 2017.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Alexander Ganotis) attended the meeting to answer councillor's questions.

Councillors welcomed the refreshed documents, though expressed disappointment that this Scrutiny Committee and the Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees had not been consulted on the Strategy in advance of its approval.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report and the launch of the new Greater Manchester Strategy be noted.

(2) That the publication of the Greater Manchester Strategy Implementation Plan, including the intention to update the Plan 6-monthly and monitor progress against the performance dashboard be noted.

(3) That support be given to the Scrutiny Committee receiving regular updates on the Implementation Plan in light of the Council's role in delivering the actions set out in this document.

14. CLOSURE OF THE SECTION 48 AGMA GRANTS SCHEME

A representative of the Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) inviting the Scrutiny Committee to consider the outcome of a consultation on closing the AGMA Section 48 Grant scheme and its replacement with a new funding programme for culture to be managed by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Alexander Ganotis) attended the meeting to answer councillor's questions.

Councillors welcomed the general principals, and expressed the hope that the new approach would complement Stockport's own cultural strategic objectives and provide greater support for initiatives in the Borough.

RESOLVED – (1) That the outcome and mitigating actions of the completed consultation on the proposed closure of the AGMA-run Section 48 grants programme be noted;

(2) That the Cabinet be recommended to authorise the closure of the Section 48 Grants scheme, noting that it will be replaced by the GMCA Culture and Social Impact Programme.

15. MANAGING INFORMATION RISK

A representative of the Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) updating the Scrutiny Committee on the steps taken by the Council to manage information risk, including providing details of the findings of a review into these risks. This report had been requested by the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Further information was requested on what steps were taken to ensure staff were implementing security measures. In response it was clarified that instructions relating to security were part of the staff induction and the subject of regular reminders.
- Concern was expressed about the increased number of data breaches. In response it was stated that this was in part attributable to efforts to encourage reporting of such incidents. Where there were repeated incidents or patterns then these were given greater focus to address underlying issues.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

16. INFORMATION GOVERNANCE AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

(Note: the Chair was of the opinion that this item, although not included on the agenda, should be considered as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) in order to allow the Scrutiny Committee to consider the matter promptly).

A representative of the Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the work undertaken by the Information Governance Team and steps taken to improve the Freedom of Information (FOI) request handling.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Concerns were expressed that the Council was not meeting its obligation to provide a response to an FOI within 20 days, and clarification was sought on whether the figures quoted in the report were reflective of an exemptions to this requirement where the response required was particularly complex. In response it was accepted that the Council was not fully compliant with the requirements. It was further commented that the Information Commissioner had strengthened the target from 80% to 90% of responses within 20 days. Notwithstanding the performance data in the report the Council was aiming, and expecting to, achieve this target by year end. Assurance was given that a breakdown of compliance data would be included in Quarter 3.
- Concerns were also expressed about compliance with Subject Access Requests deadlines and a further report on compliance was requested at year end. In response the issues with performance was again acknowledged and it was commented that while steps were being put in place to improve this, there was less confidence that full compliance with the target would be achieved.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Deputy Chief Executive be requested to ensure that performance data in relation to Freedom of Information Request responses in future Portfolio Performance and Resources Reports include an indication of the number of requests that were exempt from the 20 day target by virtue of their complexity.

(3) That the Deputy Chief Executive be requested to report back to the Scrutiny Committee following year-end to provide a further update on compliance with Subject Access Requests response targets.

17. INTERIM AMENDMENT TO THE COUNCIL'S CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES TO PERMIT IMPLEMENTATION OF A RISK-BASED SOURCING TRIAL

(Note: the Chair was of the opinion that this item, although not included on the agenda, should be considered as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) in order to allow the Scrutiny Committee to consider the matter promptly).

The Borough Treasurer submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) inviting the Scrutiny Committee to consider a proposal to amend temporarily the Council's Contract Procedure Rules to allow the Council to take part in a pilot of risk-based sourcing for procurement in conjunction with STAR partners.

The Cabinet Member for Reform & Governance (Councillor David Sedgwick) attended the meeting to respond to any questions councillors may have had.

Councillors welcomed the potential cost savings this approach may realise.

RESOLVED – That the Council Meeting be recommended to approve the necessary changes to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules as set out in the report, to allow it to take part in the risk-based sourcing procurement pilot being undertaken by STAR Procurement, and that the Borough Treasurer be requested to submit a report back to this Scrutiny Committee after 12 months of its operation detailing any savings or efficiencies this had realised.

18. AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Democratic Services Manager submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out planned items for the Scrutiny Committee's next meeting and Forward Plan items that fell within its remit.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm