

**CORPORATE, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Meeting: 9 June 2020
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Lisa Smart (Chair) in the chair; Councillor John McGahan (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Malcolm Allan, Lou Ankers, Carole McCann, Iain Roberts, Charlie Stewart,
Wendy Wild and Matt Wynne.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 3 March 2020 were approved as a correct record.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

The following interests were declared:-

Personal and Prejudicial Interest

<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Interest</u>
Wendy Wild	That part of agenda item 4 'Portfolio Performance and Resources – Annual Reports 2019/20' relating to foodbanks as a trustee of Chelwood Foodbank.

Personal Interest

<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Interest</u>
Lisa Smart	That part of agenda item 5 'Responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic' relating to representations made to the Government by the Local Government Association as she undertakes work for the association.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST TEST

RESOLVED – That in order to prevent the disclosure of information which was not for publication relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority), the disclosure of which would not be in the public interest, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the exempt information in the ‘not for publication’ appendix to agenda Item 8 ‘Write Off of Business Rates Debt’ should it be necessary for the Scrutiny Committee to consider and comment on this aspect of the report.

5. PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES - ANNUAL REPORTS 2019/20

The Corporate Director, Corporate and Support Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the annual Portfolio Performance and Resource Reports (PPRR) for the Citizen Focus & Engagement and Resources, Commissioning & Governance Portfolios. Given the unprecedented circumstances, it had been agreed that it focussed on the financial and performance out-turn data for 2019/20 rather the usual more comprehensive summary of progress against priorities.

The PPRR was based on the 2019/20 Portfolio Performance and Resource Agreement which had been considered by the Committee on 9 July and approved by the Cabinet on 23 July 2019. Out-turn performance data was reported where available. Provisional data was included in some cases, and the latest data was shown where the full-year figure was not yet available. Exception commentary was also included to provide context to the data.

The Cabinet Members for Citizen Focus & Engagement (Councillor Kate Butler) and Resources, Commissioning and Governance (Councillor Tom McGee) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

Citizen Focus & Engagement Portfolio

- An increase in the number of complaints upheld was partly as a result of training for Officers on complaint handling and Officers being advised to apologise if a particular service fell below the standards expected by complainants. There had been ongoing improvements to the complaints management process including Officer development in relation to good complaint handling principles, improvements made to the online complaints form, and the roll-out of the Council’s case management system (Verint) for complaint management. The aim was to distinguish between a service request and a complaint. Feedback would be given to the service area more quickly so that service improvements could be made.
- A Member felt that a complaint either had justification or did not, and should not be investigated at source. The way complaints were handled would not make a difference. There was also a distinction between handling complaints and solving them.
- A Member felt that there was still a significant number of telephone calls to the Contact Centre which were not answered. However, the introduction at busy times of a system when customers could request a call back for later the same day was

an important improvement. The Cabinet Member agreed to send further information on the call back system to the Member.

Resources, Commissioning and Governance Portfolio

- An average of 9.56 FTE days per employee were lost due to sickness absence in the rolling twelve months' period up to 31 March 2020. The Cabinet Member agreed to provide more information to Members on the types of sickness absence to see if it demonstrated any trends and how it compared with the public sector as a whole. The Bradford factor, a formula used by Human Resources staff to calculate the impact of employees' absences on organisations, allowed comparisons to be made between short term absences and long term absences.
- The £0.20m for increasing the provision of personal assistant/ business support to a wider group of senior Officers across the Council was highlighted. The Corporate Director advised that this was to ensure the optimal use of Officer time, ensuring senior Officers spent less time on administrative tasks and ensuring there was appropriate business support to senior managers.
- Members highlighted the Council Plan measures that were not improving or maintaining high performance and the percentage of targeted Council Plan measures on or ahead of target, and felt that it needed to be identified where the difficulties lay and what issues should be examined. The performance measures would be examined as part of the review of the Portfolio Agreement and any proposed changes included in the report to the Scrutiny Committee.
- Of the current performance measures for the Portfolio, four were improving and five were getting worse. It would be opportune for the Committee to look at how certain service areas had changed the way they work in attempt to improve their performance.
- It was maybe the case that the performance issues which the Committee examined in the future would change as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Government had issued guidance on what local authorities should be investing in. The Corporate Director advised that as part of the Treasury Management report, one of the aims was to ensure that the Council did not take any undue risks. HM Treasury had recently issued consultation regarding proposed changes to limit borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board to purely commercial reasons. This would not hinder what the Council had previously done or wished to do in the future with regard to its regeneration strategy.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A representative of the Corporate Director, Corporate and Support Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an overview of the Council's response to date to the Covid-19 pandemic, building on regular updates received directly by Members and would include detail relating to the remit of this Committee, and a view of how this response would be developed over the coming weeks and months.

The Cabinet Members for Resources, Commissioning & Governance (Councillor Tom McGee) and Citizen Focus & Engagement (Councillor Kate Butler) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- The Committee offered its thanks to all the work carried out by the workforce in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, often at very short notice.
- In response to a Member's question, the Committee was advised that the Council had made representations to the Government with regard to the anticipated funding via the Leader of the Council, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, at least one of Stockport's MPs, the Society of Municipal Treasurers and the Local Government Association.
- The Reserves Policy was being reviewed in the light of expenditure pressures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and would be the subject of a future report to the Scrutiny Committee.
- An issue was raised as to how the increase in the number of those claiming Job Seekers allowance and Universal Credit in May was being considered in the Council's planning and recovery initiatives. An economic needs assessment and a joint strategic needs assessment were being carried out to inform the Council's recovery plans.
- How the Council communicated with its citizens, not all of whom had digital skills, had again been apparent during the pandemic, for example with regard to changes to the refuse collection schedule.
- It was felt that possibly residents' perceptions of the work carried out by the Council may have improved as a result of the pandemic.
- With regard to democratic governance, the Monitoring Officer clarified that a temporary delegation had been put in place for the Corporate Director for Place Management and Regeneration to determine planning applications, and Group leaders had agreed that this would be in consultation with representatives of the four political groups on the Council.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report and the response to date to the Covid-19 pandemic be noted.

(2) That this Scrutiny Committee requests that it be involved with future phases of the response prior to its submission to the Committee.

7. WORK PROGRAMME AND AGENDA PLANNING

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) inviting the Scrutiny Committee to give consideration to possible topics for further consideration during the 2020/21 municipal year. At its next meeting the Scrutiny Committee would be invited to make a formal recommendation to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee as part of the Scrutiny Work Programme.

The Committee was reminded that at its last meeting it had agreed that the following items be included in the Work Programme for the Scrutiny Committee for this Municipal Year:-

- Partnership Working
- Updated RIPA Policy
- Scrutiny of Council Wholly Owned Companies

- Armed Forces Covenant Update
- Progress with the Greater Manchester White Paper
- Stockport Local Fund – update on fund, monitoring, evaluation and impact of money being spent.

A preliminary discussion took place regarding topics for a Scrutiny Review during this Municipal Year and the following were put forward as possibilities:-

- A continuation of the review of the Council's relationship with Manchester Airport.
- The Council's relationship with its health partners, particularly Stockport Clinical Commissioning Group and Stockport NHS Foundation Trust – possibly a joint review with the Adult Social Care & Health Scrutiny Committee.
- The relationship between the Council and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Deputy Chief Executive be recommended to include the following items in the Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the 2020/21 Municipal Year:-

- Partnership Working
- Updated RIPA Policy
- Scrutiny of Council Wholly Owned Companies
- Armed Forces Covenant Update
- Progress with the Greater Manchester White Paper
- Stockport Local Fund – update on fund, monitoring, evaluation and impact of money being spent.

8. WRITE OFF OF BUSINESS RATES DEBT

The Corporate Director, Corporate and Support Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out a business rate debt which was considered irrecoverable as no further recovery action could be taken. All available methods had been considered and it was clear from the action taken that there was no recourse to obtain further payment.

The Cabinet Member for Resources, Commissioning and Governance (Councillor Tom McGee) attended the meeting to respond to Members' questions.

(NOTE: This item include a 'not for publication' appendix that had been circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Committee only).

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet be recommended to write off the business rates debt as irrecoverable.

The meeting closed at 7.46 pm