

MEETING OF MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATE, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 15 June 2021
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Lisa Smart (Vice-Chair, in the Chair) in the chair; Councillors Lou Ankers, Philip Harding, Mike Hurleston, Jilly Julian, Carole McCann, Iain Roberts, Charlie Stewart and John Taylor.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 13 April 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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 Interests

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Interest</u>
Lisa Smart	Agenda Item 12 'Governance Arrangements for Stockport Active CIC' as a member of Life Leisure.
John Taylor	Agenda Item 5 'Portfolio Performance and Resources – Annual Reports 2020/21' as a Governor at the Heaton School, Stockport.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES - ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Corporate Director (Corporate and Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the Annual Corporate Performance and Resource Report (CPRR) which provided a summary of progress in delivering the Council's priority outcomes and budget in the second half of the financial year, with a particular focus on the fourth quarter of 2020/21 (January – March 2021) and up to the end of May where possible.

The report reflected the 2020/21 Council Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan and Portfolio priorities. It included additional priorities and delivery plans developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. A short Budget Monitoring update had been produced for Quarter 3 and presented to Cabinet in February and this Scrutiny Committee in April.

The CPRR included an executive summary and performance analysis, along with the out-turn position on revenue and capital, and a focus on highlights and exceptions during the year.

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Elise Wilson) and the Cabinet Member for 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:-

- It was queried whether the Cabinet would be decoupling where performance had been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and where it was suffering anyhow, and whether there were some areas where the impact of the pandemic was greater than others.
- If it was not possible to decouple where performance had not been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, had any consideration been given to how the effect of the pandemic was represented in this report.
- The fact that there was £2,939,000 in the original budget for Pay Inflation and the revised budget was zero was due to a Government moratorium on pay last year.
- During the year the Council had continued to pilot the 100% retention of business rates income with the other Greater Manchester Pilot Authorities. Whether the pilot would continue in the future would be affected by the outcome of the expected reform of local government finance.
- A Member requested less text and more graphs and charts in the report, such as the infographics on pages 18 and 19 of the report.
- One of the reasons that the capital programme had been affected was that tradesmen and materials had been in short supply during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- A Member highlighted that General Fund Balances had increased from £10.013m at the start of the year to £16.205m, and that total earmarked reserves had increased by £57.432m to £133.795m during the year.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES - ANNUAL REPORTS 2020/21

The Corporate Director (Corporate and Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing a summary of progress in delivering the portfolio priorities, reform programme and other key projects since the final update report, with a focus on the fourth quarter of the year (January to March). The report included out-turn performance and financial data (where this was available) for the Portfolios, along with updates on the portfolio savings programme.

The Cabinet Members for Citizen Focus and Engagement (Councillor David Sedgwick) 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:-

Resources, Commissioning and Governance Portfolio

- A Member referred to the strategy to exit rented premises where possible and relocate services within the Council's owned estate which would continue to reduce the revenue burden on the Single Property Budget.
- More up to date information was requested on the Re-provision of the Dialstone Facility.
- A report on the Schools Capital Programme was requested for a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
- The red indicator for performance indicator RCG 2.1 in connection with the percentage of cumulative spend on Social Value delivered through contracts was highlighted. It was suggested that the indicator be reported over a longer timescale.
- With regard to Performance Indicator RCG 3.1 with regard to the average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per employee, a Member enquired what was being done to work with the members of staff.
- With regard to performance indicator RCG 3.2 regarding the percentage of children allocated their first choice school place for primary and secondary schools, it was noted that there were quite a lot of children who were not allocated their first choice school place. Members requested further consideration of this indicator at a future meeting.
- Members asked for more information on the purchase of the Nutanix based product to replace the hardware and software within the new data centre.
- With regard to commissioning school places, a Member enquired whether there was a timeline for the completion of the strategy for sufficient specialist provision which was being informed by a task and finish group.

Citizen Focus and Engagement Portfolio

- The old mapping software had been problematic and would be replaced by a new system in the next few months.
- A Member raised how effective AMI (an artificial intelligence 'chat bot') was in dealing with residents' queries on the Council's website and the Cabinet Member agreed to meet with her to discuss this further.
- With regard to Communications Planning and Training, Members welcomed the annual communications plan and revised style guide which had been rolled out across the Council, providing Officers with a consistent but adaptable approach to the visuals, language and tone used in all Council communications. In addition, the guides were being incorporated into relevant training for Officers.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES - DRAFT AGREEMENTS 2021/22

The Corporate Director, Corporate and Support Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) presenting the draft 2021/22 Agreements for the Resources, Commissioning & Governance and Citizen Focus & Engagement Portfolios for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee.

The agreements articulated the policy priorities for 2021/22 that were set out within the adopted Council Plan, incorporating the shared outcomes from the Borough Plan alongside specific priorities of the Cabinet. These priorities, re-shaped to take account of One Stockport and Building Back Better (building on Covid-19), were articulated within the Portfolio Agreements which formed the basis for regular in-year reporting.

The Cabinet Members for Citizen Focus and Engagement (Councillor David Sedgwick) 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 and Engagement Portfolio

- A Member highlighted under the section on 'Earmarked Reserves', the £130,000 Invest to Save Reserve to be used for Museum Projects and the £80,000 Double Running Reserve to support Library Savings. These savings related to library savings in the 2021 Medium Term Financial Plan and primarily related to management and other staffing costs.
- The Cabinet Member elaborated on the £0.050m allocated on cultural services to support residents.

Resources, Commissioning and Governance Portfolio

- The development of performance indicators around the number of Stockport Council employees undertaking apprenticeship qualifications and wellbeing measures from 'Let's Talk' surveys were welcomed, although the target for the latter should be reported more regularly than twice yearly.
- Whilst support was given to the 'Single Source of the Truth initiative', the view was expressed that it should be renamed.
- The importance of Social Value and the Procurement Bill was highlighted and it was felt that this was an issue that the Scrutiny Committee should consider later in the Municipal Year.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2020-2021

A representative of the Corporate Director, Corporate and Support Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an overview of complaints received by the Council and the lessons learnt from the complaints in 2020-21. The report included complaints received by the Council that were managed by the complaints service. The scope of complaints included in the report covered:-

- Corporate complaints
- Schools' complaints
- Adults social care complaints
- Children's social care complaints

The report also summarised complaints about Stockport Homes.

The Cabinet Member for Citizen Focus and Engagement (Councillor David Sedgwick) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- The number of complaints received by Stockport Homes was approximately 3% of its total number of properties.
- The One Team approach to complaints to ensure a more holistic and consistent approach to complaint handling across the Council was supported.
- It was queried whether there was any possibility of measuring the benefits of the One Team approach to complaints in the future.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Corporate Director, Corporate and Support Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the annual treasury report reviewing treasury management activities and the actual prudential and treasury indicators for 2020/21.

The Cabinet Member for 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:-

- Support was expressed for the work undertaken by the Council's treasury management team.
- A Member enquired whether the Cabinet Member and Officers were comfortable with the Council's level of borrowing.
- The issue was raised as to how the team had coped with the extremely volatile nature of their work during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- In view of the very low interest rates, a Member queried what the scope would be for converting some of the existing borrowing into lower rates.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. WOODFORD DEVELOPMENT - NEW SCHOOL GOVERNANCE DECISION

Representatives of the Corporate Director (Corporate and Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Education submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) regarding the two options available to the Council regarding the management and maintenance of the new school at the residential development at the former BAE systems site in Woodford. The options were to:-

- Build a one form entry new free school via Section 106 developer funds and retain Queensgate Primary School as it is; or
- Relocate and expand Queensgate Primary School into a two form entry school site, but manage the intake of pupils in line with increased sufficiency needs.

The appraisal of the options was based on the agreed common aim within the One Stockport Borough Plan that there were sufficient places in good local inclusive schools at the heart of the community that children and families wanted to go to.

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

The following comments/issues raised were made on behalf of the local Ward Councillors who supported Option 1 (build a new one form entry free school via Section 106 developer funds in Woodford and retain Queensgate Primary School as it is):-

- A one form entry school could be delivered at Woodford to open in September 2022 and Queensgate Primary School remained open. That would give certainty to parents in applying for places for their children.
- The report appeared to favour Option 2 (relocate and expand Queensgate Primary School into a two Form Entry school site but manage the intake of pupils in line with increased sufficiency needs) and an early draft of the report presented to Ward Councillors recommended this option.
- If Queensgate Primary School was closed, children who lived near the school, particularly on the 'little Australia' estate, would have a significant distance to travel to the new school in Woodford. To drive from Queensgate Primary School to the new housing estate in Woodford was 3.4 miles and to walk was 2.4 miles which was unreasonable given the age of the children involved.
- The original intention when the planning permission included provision for a new primary school in Woodford was to satisfy demand locally when the new residential development was built.
- If Queensgate Primary School was closed, the new school in Woodford would not open until September 2023 at the earliest.
- It had been known since 2014 that when the 450th house was occupied a new school would be available. The new school, as planned, was currently expected to be completed by May/June 2022.
- The space for a two form entry at Woodford was to potentially accommodate the additional 750 homes proposed under the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework.
- The closure of Queensgate Primary School would necessitate highway mitigation measures in the form of four additional pedestrian crossings. In addition, the number of car journeys would increase on already congested roads.
- More information was requested on the information presented to the Governing Body of Queensgate Primary School, and whether any consultation had been carried out with stakeholders such as teachers, parents or residents. The right solution needed to be for parents and children not just the Council.

These points and the issues in general were debated by Members of the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – That the comments made on behalf of the local Ward Councillors be referred to Cabinet Members for consideration.

10. OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE FOR THE REVIEW OF THE TOWN CENTRE OFFICE PORTFOLIO

A representative of the Corporate Director (Place) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) updating the Scrutiny Committee on the review work of the Council's operational office town centre estate following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the fundamental way in which this has changed the way the Council worked.

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

Members welcomed the refurbishment work which was planned for Stopford House and the Town Hall, but requested that income generation be considered as part of that work.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11. FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND - MERSEYWAY

Consideration was given to a report of the Corporate Director (Place) & Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director (Corporate and Support Services) & Deputy Chief Executive (copies of which had been circulated) which provided an update on progress with Stockport's Future High Street Fund project.

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

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- A Member queried whether it was prudent to take legal advice on the engagement and consultation process when it was more important to listen to the views of residents.
- People would be attracted to a community hub in Merseyway by a period of free parking on a daily basis in the town centre.
- The Scrutiny Committee felt that the timetable for the library engagement and consultation should be reconsidered to reflect that the Government has delayed the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions.
- Questions in the consultation with regard to support for a 21st Century library and closing the Central Library building as a library service should not be de-coupled.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Cabinet be recommended to reconsider the timetable for the library engagement and consultation to reflect that the Government has delayed the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions.

(2) That it be recommended that the questions in the consultation with regard to support for a 21st Century library in Merseyway and closing the Central Library as a library service be not de-coupled.

12. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR STOCKPORT ACTIVE CIC

A representative of the Corporate Director (Place) & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an outline of the specification and contractual arrangements for Stockport Active Community Interest Company (CIC) which had been established to operate Council leisure centres and deliver active communities programmes which help the most inactive people in Stockport to become physically active. Following finalisation of the transfer agreement with Stockport Sports Trust, the CIC would use the Life Leisure trading name.

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

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

13. WORK PROGRAMME AND AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Strategic Head of Service & Monitoring Officer (Legal & Democratic Governance) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the planned agenda items for the Scrutiny Committee's next meeting and any Forward Plan items.

That the following items be considered for inclusion in the Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme at the next meeting:-

- Social Value – work with STAR procurement
- Asset Management Programme
- Shared Services
- Partnership Working
- Neighbourhood Working

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.56 pm