

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

Meeting: 23 November 2021
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor John McGahan (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Lisa Smart (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Lou Ankers, Philip Harding, 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 12 October 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>Councillor</u>	<u>Interest</u>
Lisa Smart	Agenda Item 12 'School Sufficiency Investment Plan' as her partner is a Governor at Brookside Primary School, High Lane.
John Taylor	Agenda Item 12 'School Sufficiency Investment Plan' as a Governor at the Heaton School, Stockport.

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RESOLVED – That in order to prevent the disclosure of information which was not for publication relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority), the disclosure of which would not be in the public interest, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the exempt information in the 'not for publication' appendices to agenda item 17 'Final Business Case – Review of the Town Centre Operational Office Portfolio and New Ways of Working'.

5. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES - MID-YEAR REPORT 2021/22

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) on the Mid-Year Corporate Performance and Resource Report (CPRR) which provided a summary of progress in delivering the Council's priority outcomes and budget in the first half of the financial year, with a particular focus on the second quarter of 2021/22 (July-September 2021).

The report was the first CPRR to be produced for 2021/22 reflecting the 2021/22 Council Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan and new Portfolio priorities. It also reflected progress against partnership priorities set out in the new One Stockport Borough Plan. A short Budget Monitoring update for the period to July 2021 had been submitted to this Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet in September.

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 to date.

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:-

- There were different base inflation rates in different sectors and Officers used a sophisticated approach based around the consumer price index in preparing the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- The vacancies in the Neighbourhoods and Network Assets teams were highlighted and this would be referred to in the report to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Recruitment, Remuneration and Retention/Workforce Planning and Wellbeing.
- The surplus in waste collection costs was highlighted due to this being funded temporarily by non-recurrent Covid-19 grants and a surplus budget due to changes in the waste disposal levy. Staff absences in the service as a result of the pandemic had been reported on a number of occasions and there had also been difficulties in recruiting drivers.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES - MID-YEAR REPORTS 2021/22

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing the Mid-Year Portfolio Performance and Resource Report (PPRR) for the Citizen Focus & Engagement and Resources, Commissioning & Governance Portfolios. The report provided a summary of progress in delivering the portfolio priorities, reform programme and other key projects in the first half of the year, with a particular focus on the second quarter (July to September). The report also included a forecast on performance and financial data (where this was available) for the Portfolio, along with an update on the portfolio savings programme.

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

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

Resources, Commissioning & Governance Portfolio

- Although the average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per employee was reducing, it still seemed high. A Member enquire how sickness absence had been affected whilst more members of staff has been working at home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Citizen Focus & Engagement Portfolio

- A Member enquired what was being carried out to promote digital usage in libraries and how this was being communicated to residents. Members requested additional information about how the library service marketed its offer and detail of related spend.
- With regard to performance indicator CFE1.5 on the percentage and number of Stage 2 complaints responded to on time, concern was expressed that the target was not being met.
- With regard to performance indicator CFE1.1 on the percentage and number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests responded to on time, concern was expressed that the forecast was below the target.
- Feedback had been positive to the trial at Marple Library to offer office space to Council officers to pre-book desk space for individual work or small meetings, allowing colleagues too work in their local area rather than having to return to offices in Stockport or return to work from home.
- Reference was made to the work on developing and delivering a digital strategy for Stockport, focussing around three core pillars of Digital Communities, Digital Place and Digital Council. A report would be submitted to a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in the New Year.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. IMPROVING THE CITIZEN EXPERIENCE THROUGH DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the information about the current channels that were used by citizens to contact the Council, including the current level of demand across each channel and how this had changed over the last three years.

The report also included information about the performance of the AMI chatbot as previously requested by the Scrutiny Committee, and also set out opportunities for the future development and application of digital solutions in improving the citizen experience and explained what this would mean for citizens contacting the Council.

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:-

- With regard to the proposed 'citizen promise', it was suggested that a service level agreement was required setting out the standards citizens could expect when interacting with the Council.
- The success of the Ami chatbot in providing up to date, accurate information and advice was welcomed.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. COMPLAINTS - MID-YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out an update on progress on the complaints service following the amalgamation of all the complaints functions within the Council in April 2021 into one team. The new service was responsible for Statutory Adult Social Care, Statutory Children's Social Care, Corporate Complaints and School Complaints within one central complaints team within Citizen Focus in the Corporate and Support Services Directorate.

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

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. GREATER MANCHESTER STRATEGY REFRESH

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) presenting the final draft of the Greater Manchester Strategy, which had undergone a refresh, alongside a covering report which set out the strategic links to the One Stockport Borough Plan and the Council Plan. The report to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority also highlighted the proposed approach to the development of a detailed delivery plan and its implementation.

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

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- The wording in the report needed to be checked to ensure that the style was consistent.

RESOLVED – (1) That the draft Greater Manchester Strategy and proposed approach to the development of the supporting delivery plan be noted.

(2) That the alignment of the new Greater Manchester Strategy to the One Stockport Borough Plan and Stockport Council Plan be noted.

10. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY MID-YEAR REVIEW REPORT 2021/22

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out a mid-year review of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy for 2021/22.

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:-

- Officers were thanked for the work carried out in this area.
- Reference was made to the extension of the roles of the Section 151 Officer in 2019/20 to include a series of new roles in respect of the Capital Strategy and also a specific role in respect of investment in non-financial assets.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11. CONSULTATION REPORT 2022/23 TREASURY STRATEGY

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive 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 2022/23, to be considered for approval at the Cabinet Meeting on 1 February 2022 and the Council Meeting on 24 February 2022.

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:-

- With regard to the questions for consideration in the Borrowing Strategy, as set out in paragraph 9.19 of the report, Members were generally in agreement that the borrowing strategy outlined in Section 9 of the report was reasonable. Members felt that the strategy was 'risk appropriate'.
- With regard to the question for consideration in paragraph 11.5 of the report, Members were in general agreement that the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision Policy was sufficiently prudent.
- The Council could consider ethical investments as part of its investment portfolio. However, investment guidance, both statutory and from CIPFA, made clear that all investments must adopt the principles of Security, Liquidity and Yield. As such, ethical issues, i.e. the green agenda, must play a subordinate role in these priorities. The Council would set out more fully its approach to such investments in the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2022/23 with regard to Environmental, Social and Governance issues. Climate change needed to be embedded in everything the Council did, including treasury management.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

12. BUSINESS RATES AND COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS ANNUAL REVIEW

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulate) setting out the outcome of the annual review of the local scheme of discounts and exemptions which were available in respect of Business Rates and Council Tax.

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:-

- A Member requested further information on what ‘exceptional circumstances’ were as referred to in paragraph 3.8 of the report and in what situations they would be applied.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

13. FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND - STOCKROOM

Consideration was given to a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on progress with Stockport’s High Street Fund project, Stockroom, and updating Members on the recent consultation which had been undertaken.

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

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- Some Members felt that the Scrutiny Committee should oppose the closure of library services at Central Library as this was the view of the majority of the people who had responded to the consultation. They were not opposed to the principle of developing Stockroom, but considered that the Council needed to look again at which services were provided at Central Library and which at Stockroom.
- The Scrutiny Committee needed to distinguish between the building and the service. It was not possible to provide a twenty first century library in a building that had been built in the early part of the twentieth century.
- The need for people to regularly visit the reference library had been overtaken by technological advancements such as the development of tablets and mobile phones. Stockroom offered the opportunity to develop alternative uses for the library.
- Reference was made to the differences in the consultation responses between those which were on-line and those which were face-to-face with a majority of residents who completed the online self completion questionnaire disagreeing with the proposal to move library services from Central Library to Stockroom.
- Concern was expressed that respondents had not been advised of the possible alternative uses for the Central Library at the time of the consultation.

- Stockroom would give people more reason to come into the town centre at a time when there had been a decline in the number of retail units.

MOVED AND SECONDED – That the Cabinet be recommended to not proceed with the relocation of library services from Central Library.

For the motion 5, against 4

MOTION CARRIED

It was then

RESOLVED – (5 for, 4 against) That the Cabinet be recommended to not proceed with the relocation of library services from Central Library.

14. SCHOOL SUFFICIENCY INVESTMENT PLAN

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out how the Council would carry out its responsibility, in line with the commitments made in the One Stockport Borough Plan, to ensure that there were sufficient school places in good and improving local inclusive schools at the heart of the community that children and families wanted to go to. This meant having the right number and type of school places, in the right place, at the right time to meet demand. The School Sufficiency Plan aimed to secure an education estate that provided a safe, accessible, secure and stimulating learning environment, which was sustainable and provided value for money, was fit for current and future needs, and reduced environmental impact.

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:-

- There was a balance between resourced schools and special schools, and arriving at the right balance of resourced school places and specialist school places was important. Officers were requested to involve Ward Members at an early stage in the planning.
- The standard of specialist schools in Stockport was commended.
- Young people's needs were becoming increasingly complex making forward planning of paramount importance.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

15. SOCIAL VALUE PROGRESS UPDATE

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update in relation to work that had been undertaken to strengthen social value arrangements across Stockport. In addition, the report described engagement work that had led to proposals for specific

social value priority themes and cohorts, to facilitate a more co-ordinated, consistent and impactful approach.

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.

16. 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.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

17. FINAL BUSINESS CASE - REVIEW OF THE TOWN CENTRE OPERATIONAL OFFICE PORTFOLIO AND NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Consideration was given to a report of the Corporate Director (Place) and Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) (copies of which had been circulated) presenting the final business case which had examined in detail the Council's operational town centre estate and the current and future business needs following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and as the Council moved towards a new hybrid working model.

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:-

- The approach to reviewing the town centre operational office portfolio was welcomed.
- Workforce engagement was an important part of the process and it was pleasing that a number of measures had already taken place.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.42 pm