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CORPORATE, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 18 January 2022
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 23 November 2021 were approved as 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

Councillors

Interest

Lisa Smart and
Carole McCann

Agenda Item 13 'Active Communities: Update on transition to new arrangements for the operation of Council-owned leisure centres and the delivery of Active Communities programmes' as members of Life Leisure.

Officers

Paul Richards, Jennifer
Connolly and Jonathan
Davies

Agenda Item 13 'Active Communities: Update on transition to new arrangements for the operation of Council-owned leisure centres and the delivery of Active Communities programmes' as members of the Board of Stockport Active CIC.

3. 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RESOLVED – That in order to prevent the disclosure of information which was not for publication relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority), the disclosure of which would not be in the public interest,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 13 'Active Communities: Update on Transition to New Arrangements for Operation of Council-Owned Leisure Centres and Delivery of Active Communities Programmes'.

4. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

5. DRAFT COUNCIL PLAN 2022/23

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the Council Plan which accompanied the budget and provided a high-level framework for decision making throughout the financial year. It was a public-facing summary document that sat above annual detailed Portfolio Agreements.

The plan had been developed by the Cabinet, supported by Officers, and was an opportunity to reflect on performance to date and policy priorities for the future. Priorities in the plan were included by exception. The plan did not attempt to describe everything the Council did, only those things that were of crucial importance in a specific year.

The 2022/23 Council Plan had been aligned with the key themes and ambitions from the Council's new ONE Stockport Borough Plan framework, namely ONE Heart, ONE Home and ONE Future.

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

The following comments were made/issue raised:-

- There were elements of repetition in the plan with some of the earlier comments superfluous as a result of comments made later on in the document.
- In the section on page 29 of the Plan with regard to 'Ambitions and Priorities', there should be greater reference to school admissions and places. Under the reference to empowering families under 'enhance our early help offer', there should be reference to how this was being achieved.
- The ambition to increase the number of publicly accessible electric charging points under 'A climate friendly and sustainable borough' should be amended to rapid electric charging points.
- The inclusion of an Environmental Impact Assessment for the Plan (with key links to the Stockport Climate Action Now (CAN) Strategy and Digital Strategy) was welcomed, but it was felt that that the Committee should explore at a future meeting how to get the best use from such assessments.
- The importance of working with local communities was emphasised, for example Friends of Parks groups.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. RESPONDING TO OUR MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the Cabinet's proposed approach to responding to the opportunities, challenges and uncertainty outlined within the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan presented at the Cabinet meeting on the 21 September 2021. The Scrutiny Committee had been provided with an opportunity to make initial comments on the proposals at its meeting in October 2021. Following these discussions further development of the proposals had been undertaken and these were now being shared again with the Committee for comment and consideration.

The Cabinet Member 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:-

- Concern was expressed in relation to the proposal to remove the Area Committee's delegated budgets which currently allowed local Members the opportunity to determine spending priorities for their own wards.
- In response, it was stated that there remained significant underspends within the budget which may demonstrate that the current process might not represent the most efficient way of allocating funding for minor projects. It was acknowledged that in some instances wards had accrued funds in order to be able to fund a larger project in the subsequent financial year, but further work was required to identify why some wards had accrued more funding than others within their budgets.
- With regard to adult social care funding, it was disappointing that there had not been a multi-year settlement from the Government to help the Council manage future demand.
- Following a request from Members, the Cabinet Member agreed to provide information setting out the changes to the proposals from the previous time they had been considered by the Scrutiny Committee in October 2021.
- The reduction in AGMA fees were supported.
- The removal of the provision for tea and coffee for officer meetings in the Town Hall complex seemed a minor saving which could make staff feel undervalued.

MOVED AND SECONDED – That the Cabinet be recommended to not put forward a proposal to cut the Area Committee's Delegated Budget (Highways Discretionary Budget) to zero, plus savings on related staffing.

For the motion 6, abstentions 3

MOTION CARRIED

It was then

RESOLVED – (6 for, 3 abstentions) That the Cabinet be recommended to not put forward a proposal to cut the Area Committee's Delegated Budget (Highways Discretionary Budget) to zero, plus savings on related staffing.

7. 2021/22 QUARTER 2+ BUDGET MONITORING UPDATE

The Corporate Director (Corporate and Support Services) & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on variations to the revenue budget forecast outturn and the Capital Programme since the Quarter 2 Mid-Year Update Report. The report also included an update on the Dedicated Schools Grant, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Collection Fund.

The report acted as an intermediary to the Quarter 3 Update reports that would be presented to scrutiny committees at the end of February and beginning of March. As these reports followed the Budget Council meeting on 24 February 2022, it would be necessary to provide a Quarter 2+ update to help inform the budget setting process.

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:-

- More details were requested on the Council's arrangements with its current energy providers.
- Concern was expressed that there was a surplus within the Social Care Locality Team staffing budgets of £0.154m as a result of the service currently carrying approximately twenty vacancies, a combination of social worker and senior practitioner posts. The Scrutiny Committee was advised that work on proposals to ensure robustness and retention of social work staff was continuing.
- In response to a Member's question, the Scrutiny Committee was advised that the vacant posts in the Social Care Locality Team had been vacant for some time and were not necessarily frontline staff, and that the Council had invested in targeted, preventative social care measures aimed at promoting independence.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. RADICALLY DIGITAL STOCKPORT: DEVELOPING OUR STRATEGY

The Corporate Director (Corporate & Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining how the Council was developing its ambitions for the next phase of its digital journey, including an overview of its priorities for the year ahead and how the Council intended to develop an inclusive, robust and ambitious digital strategy.

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

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- The growth of Stockport Jobs Match, with 55,000 jobs advertised since August 2021 and 1,500 new jobseekers registered in November, required a measurement of how effective it had been and what it had achieved.

- With regard to the proposal to establish a pilot for Robotic Process Automation (RPA) in the early part of this year, a request was made for more information on the aims and budget for the pilot, and the technology that was being used.
- The work on digital literacy needed to be considered alongside work on general literacy levels so that people who were illiterate were not disadvantaged in accessing services.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. WORKFORCE PLANNING AND WELLBEING

The Corporate Director (Corporate and Support Services) & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update to the Scrutiny Committee on the One Team People Plan and the underpinning work to ensure an engaged, resilient and productive workforce.

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 fact that 25% of the workforce had attended wellbeing sessions was welcomed.
- A request was made to extend the provision of the employee telephone support line to Members.
- More information was requested on how the appointment of graduates and apprentices extended into succession planning.
- A Member enquired how exit interviews had led to improvements in the Workforce Plan.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

10. SICKNESS ABSENCE YEAR END REPORT 2020/21

The Corporate Director (Corporate and Support Services) & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) highlighting the Council's (excluding Schools) sickness absence performance at the year-end point (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021). Given the time of the reporting cycle, the mid-year position of 2021/2022 was also included.

The actions being taken to support colleagues and address sickness absence were also outlined along with an overview of future plans.

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:-

- Members noted that the short-term absence average days lost had reduced from 5.71 FTE days lost in 2019/20 to 4.03 days in 2020/21 and the long absence figure had increased slightly from 3.88 FTE days lost in 2019/20 to 4.10 days in 2020/21.

However, by the mid-point of 2021/22 the long term absence had decreased to 3.64 FTE days. The top reason for sickness absence continued to be mental health reasons (stress, depression, anxiety).

- A Member enquired whether any patterns had emerged from sickness taken for one or two days by members of staff.
- The issue was raised with regard to how the recording of absences for a bereavement aligned with formal absences following a bereavement as permitted under the Council's procedures.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

11. PORTFOLIO DASHBOARDS

Members considered the portfolio dashboards for the Corporate Performance and Resources, Citizen Focus & Engagement, and Resources, Commissioning & Governance Portfolios, the link to which was provided on the agenda front sheet.

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

RESOLVED – That further learning and refresher sessions be arranged on how to use the dashboard for both new Councillors and existing Councillors.

12. 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.

It was reported that the Scrutiny Review Panel on 'The Council's Property Portfolio – The next 5/10 Years' aimed to conclude its review by the end of April 2022 and report to the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet in June.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

13. ACTIVE COMMUNITIES: UPDATE ON TRANSITION TO NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR OPERATION OF COUNCIL-OWNED LEISURE CENTRES AND DELIVERY OF ACTIVE COMMUNITIES PROGRAMMES

The Director of Development & Regeneration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the transition to new arrangements for the operation of Council-owned leisure centres and delivery of programmes to improve physical activity amongst the least active in the Borough from Stockport Sports Trust (trading as Life Leisure) to Stockport Active CIC, who would retain the trading name Life Leisure.

The report provided updates on how the different areas of Life Leisure's work would be monitored by the Council in future, how they would be scrutinised by Members and the governance structures which would be in place between Life Leisure and the Council.

The report provided an indication of the level of management fee which was likely to be required to support Life Leisure in 2022/23 and in the following two years (2023/24 and 2024/25), subject to its trading performance.

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

(NOTE: The report contained a confidential appendix that has been circulated to members of the Scrutiny Committee only).

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- It was pleasing to see the progress on the transition to the new arrangements for the operation of Council-owned leisure centres and delivery of programmes.
- The Scrutiny Committee had previously recommended that there should be an independent director on the Board of Stockport Active CIC and Members were given assurances that this was still the intention. Members requested an update on this issue next time a report on the transition to new arrangements for the operation of Council-owned leisure centres and the delivery of active communities programmes was considered by the Scrutiny Committee.
- Members expressed concern about the number of Scrutiny Committees who would still need to consider reports under the proposed monitoring and reporting arrangement for Life Leisure, and the associated costs in terms of senior Officer time. It was requested that other possibilities be considered, for example submitting the report to fewer Scrutiny Committees or submitting an overarching report to this Scrutiny Committee and a tailored report to other Scrutiny Committees.
- It was felt that financial reports should be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee on a more regular basis than proposed, for example quarterly reports with regard to expenditure against budget and that the Board of Stockport Active CIC be requested to produce half yearly accounts.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.56 pm