

CORPORATE, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 13 June 2023
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Christine Carrigan (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Carole McCann (Vice-Chair); Councillors Dickie Davies, Ian Hunter, Mark Jones, Jeremy Meal, Sharp, Charlie Stewart and Alex Wynne.

1. MINUTES

The minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 28 February 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES YEAR-END/ QUARTER 4 REPORT

The Deputy Chief Executive and the Corporate Director (Corporate and Support Services) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing a summary of progress in delivering the council's priority outcomes up to 31 March 2023, with a particular focus on the final quarter of 2022/23 (January to March 2023).

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- Members queried the vacancy numbers for the council and in response it was reported there were 2,900 job roles across the council and that it always carried vacancies, some of which were difficult to fill. Two recruitment fairs had recently taken place, one at the Town Hall and one in Brinnington which had proven to be successful in providing roles to local residents and filling vacancies.
- In relation to fly tipping, it was reported that, whilst there had been a number of successful prosecutions, the figure was not felt to be sufficiently high and it was a council target to ensure offenders were prosecuted.
- Members queried the SEND transport budget for those claiming transport to school and those with a disability car and whether there might be a doubling of provision.
- In response to a query about the rising cost of borrowing, it was reported that, going forward, many of this committee's meetings will be dedicated to reviewing the treasury management and strategy. The Local Authority can only borrow for capital purposes. The cost of borrowing for Local Authorities has increased significantly. The current strategy is to borrow short-term and wait for long-term rates to reduce.

- Members queried how the differences between cash limits and non-cash limits worked, whether the non-cash limit budgets were ring-fenced and how much discretion the treasury had over those budget heads to cover deficiencies in the year.
- In response it was reported that non-cash limits were made up of the less controllable elements of the council's spending such as the waste disposal levy, transport levy and debt management costs. Where there were unallocated contingency budgets there was an element of flexibility.
- It was reported that explanatory papers would be put to the Committee during the course of the municipal year on topics such as the Collection Fund.
- Members noted the budgetary challenges referred to in the report, including pressures on housing, education, especially those with special educational needs, the young and looked after residents as well as that on health and social care.
- The council was doing what it could to assist hard-pressed residents, noting that the Borough has many areas of deprivation. It was reported that the balance between protecting front-line services and delivering a council tax that people can afford to pay had become more difficult over the years.
- Members queried the figures contained in the report relating to reserves.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. FINANCE AND RESOURCES PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES REPORT: YEAR-END/ QUARTER 4

The Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Corporate and Support Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing a comprehensive summary of progress against portfolio priorities, performance indicators and budgets during 2022/23, but with a specific focus on the fourth quarter (January to March 2023).

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- Member queried the capital finance outlook and update, in particular whether the budgetary provision for the Dialstone facility had been rolled over from the last financial year. Members asked, in the event of a permanent closure of the Dialstone facility, what would happen to the capital finance designated for that site. In response, it was stated that capital finance updates provided an assurance that the budget remained in order to provide a sustainable facility in that area, although it was acknowledged that finding a sustainable solution was a challenge.
- In relation to social value reporting, members queried how bids were awarded using the social value score. In response it was reported that when asking for tender, the social value portal was used and bidding companies were required to submit details of the social value offered. Approximately 20 to 25 per cent of a contract was awarded against social value which afforded the council the opportunity to get more for every pound spent.
- Members queried the target for the payment of council invoices which stood at 85 per cent paid within 30 days. It was reported that, where a discrepancy arose, the council operated a policy of not paying until an order was in place.
- It was reported that a further staff satisfaction survey would take place in order to set a benchmark measure for staff satisfaction.

- Members queried the reserve level and asked whether it was justified, prudent and sustainable. In response, it was stated that reserves played an important part of the financial role of the council, allowing it to invest, improve its technology and develop its workforce. The reserve also gave the council a degree of control and an ability to manage risk. The overall allocation and holding of reserves was set out in the reserve policy, of which a key aspect was not to use it to cover ongoing expenditure, only for specific reasons and investments.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES - DRAFT 2023/24 PORTFOLIO AGREEMENT

The Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Corporate and Support Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which set out the draft 2023/24 Agreement for the Finance and Resource Portfolio for consideration and comment by the Committee.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- Members commented that the economic uncertainty referred to within the report would lead to a continual reduction of the council's budget and subsequent difficulties for all.
- Members referred to the £10,000 allocation of ward funding. It was reported that the money was within the budget but not visible within the portfolio. Similar to other discretionary funding, it would be dealt with by Area Committees.
- It was reported that there was no previous data relating to social value commitments as this was a new target.
- In relation to other targets within the report, members noted that they had remained static and commented that they had expected a minor increase to those targets.
- It was reported that there was an expectation that certain targets, for example, those relating to the collection of council tax and business rates, were likely to become more difficult to achieve in 2023 - 2024 because of the cost of living crisis. The aim had been to set realistic and achievable targets.
- Members requested further information on the coming challenges related to the cost of living crisis.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. STAR PROCUREMENT COLLABORATION AND EXECUTIVE JOINT COMMITTEE

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing information on the strategic proposal to expand the current STAR Shared Procurement service ("STAR") from four partner councils to six partner councils and to outline the rationale for STAR's growth strategy, provide details of proposed commercial arrangements, governance arrangements and implementation strategies.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- Members welcomed the report, particularly in relation to economies of scale for procurement.
- The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources assured the committee that she would attend all STAR meetings and ensure that Stockport priorities would be taken into account.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCES FOR MEMBERS APPOINTED TO THE GMCA OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing the recommendations of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) following the receipt of a report detailing the recommendations of the Greater Manchester Independent Remuneration Panel in relation to payments to members of the GMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the following be endorsed for approval:

- the adoption and incorporation of the proposed schedule of allowances within Stockport's Members' Allowances Scheme;
- the backdating of the payment of any such allowances to 24 June 2022 when the new scrutiny arrangements were put in place; and
- the amendment of the Members' Allowances Scheme to permit the payment of two Special Responsibility Allowances to a member of the GMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

9. COST AND IMPACT OF VOTER ID LEGISLATION ON THE COUNCIL

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) in response to the motion made at the council meeting on 30 March 2023 which was to:

1) utilise all existing channels and means of communication to supplement the publicity campaign by the Electoral Commission to make more voters aware of the need to show photo ID at polling stations in the May 2023 local elections and beyond; and

2) bring a report to the Corporate, Resource Management & Governance Scrutiny Committee, on the cost and impact this unnecessary legislation had on Stockport.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- Officers were thanked for producing such a detailed report and members commented that the Electoral Office and its staff had done an impressive job in relation to the challenges presented by voter ID and boundary changes.
- It was noted that the depth of the report included areas which could not be quantified such as those people who might have been put off voting altogether due to the voter ID regulations.

- It was intended that the report would combine with others in a joint response to Government on the impact of these measures.
- Members expressed their deep concern about the voter ID policy, in particular the way it had been introduced. There was anecdotal evidence of a voter having been turned away for having incorrect ID.
- Members expressed concern that the agenda for this policy had been to purposely disenfranchise voters.
- At this stage, the effect of the policy on turnout was unknown and further research was required.
- There had been a financial impact upon the council in terms of providing ID to voters.
- Members queried why the council had expected 4,000 applications for voter ID but had received only 478. In response, it was stated that the granularity of data had not yet been obtained and it was not known what had put people off from applying for ID, however it was the government who had come up with the figure of 4,000 and it was felt that Stockport had carried out an effective campaign relating to voter ID and it had expected a lot of applications.
- Further research was intended to take place on the impact upon individual wards to determine whether some had been more affected than others.
- The ambition of the council was to ensure as much engagement as possible and fewer disenfranchised voters.
- Members queried the impact of boundary changes upon voter turnout; at present data on that subject was limited but it was intended that the matter be explored further.
- Members queried the future provision of postal voting, and it was stated that the promotion of postal voting was a decision for Cabinet.
- Members commented that the system of counting votes the day after polling had worked well.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

10. TLC TRANSFORMATION UPDATE

The Director of Place Management submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) updating members of the Communities and Transport and CRMG Scrutiny Committees on the progress to increase the resilience of the council's key public realm services through its wholly owned company, Totally Local Company (TLC).

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- It was intended that quarterly monitoring reports of TLC would be considered by the committee.
- Members requested background papers relating to the organisational structure and work of the TLC.
- In terms of the structure going forward, it was intended that TLC board would consist of the two existing executive directors. The four non-executive directors on the TLC board would be replaced by four council directors. This arrangement would allow the council to have a greater influence over the company in the future.

- It was not intended for individual terms and conditions to be scrutinised by this committee, but company business plans would be.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11. MARPLE ACTIVE COMMUNITIES HUB

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Development & Regeneration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which updated members on the progress being made on the delivery of the new Marple Active Communities Hub, and on the status of the existing Marple Swimming Pool and the next steps for that asset.

It was stated that the project had been fully costed to account for inflation, and that risk contingencies had been built into the project.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

12. SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPIC SELECTION

A representative of the Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Governance (Monitoring Officer) invited the Scrutiny Committee to choose a Scrutiny Review topic for inclusion in the 2023/24 scrutiny work programme.

The following comments were made/ issued raised:

- A review of Life Leisure was suggested as a scrutiny review topic;
- A review of bus service with a focus on covid recovery and carbon neutrality was also suggested as a scrutiny review topic;

RESOLVED – (1) That Councillor Carole McCann be nominated to Chair the proposed scrutiny review panel with authority being delegated to the Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Governance (Monitoring Officer) in consultation with the Chair, to appoint other such members to the Panel as necessary.

(2) That one of the following topics for the scrutiny review panel for the 2023/24 Scrutiny Work Programme be determined by Members via email:

- A review of Life Leisure;
- A review of bus services.

13. AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Governance (Monitoring Officer) 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 – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Governance (Monitoring Officer) be recommended to programme the following item into the Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the 2023/24 Municipal Year:

- Explanatory papers on topics such as the Collection Fund;
- A further report related to the impact of Voter ID, in particular its effect on individual wards;
- Quarterly monitoring reports of the Totally Local Company.

The meeting closed at 7.27 pm