

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

Meeting: 27 February 2024
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

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

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 16 January 2024 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.

No declarations of interest were made.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. TREASURY MANAGEMENT Q3 REPORT 2023/24

The Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the operation and effectiveness of the Council's Treasury Management function for quarter three of 2023/24 and included progress on the treasury and capital position of the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) attended the meeting to respond to councillor's questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members queried whether the announcement that the UK was in recession and that interest rates were to remain at the same levels affected the contents of the report.
- In response it was stated that the two fiscal announcements did not materially affect the contents of the report. The recession was predicted to be a mild, technical recession and the council was not considering borrowing at longer term maturity.
- Members commented on the government's handling of the economy.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. 2023/24 QUARTER 3 BUDGET MONITORING UPDATE

The Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) submitted report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the revenue budget forecast outturn for the period to the end of December 2023 (Quarter 3). The report also provided an update on the council's Dedicated Schools Grant, Housing Revenue Account (HRA), Collection Fund and Capital Programme.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) attended the meeting to respond to councillor's questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- It was reported that there had been no unexpected additional costs at the end of the financial year. The council had exercised discipline in its financial management and the pressures faced during quarter 1 and quarter 2 had been mitigated throughout the year which led to the expectation that the council expected to be in line with the quarter 3 position.
- It was further reported that the reserves position at the end of the financial year was healthy in comparison to other Greater Manchester authorities.
- In relation to reserves, it was stated that risk was in spending reserves in a reactionary way in order to plug significant financial gaps. The reserves were held for specific reasons and earmarked for specific purposes including regeneration, vehicles and infrastructure investments. Reserve spending was planned, approved and used for intended purposes.
- Members noted that there was a surplus in the communities budget and income pressures in other areas of council spending. In response it was stated that the 2024-25 budget was designed to ensure that there was no reliance on one-off variations. Whilst there was no guarantee that further financial pressures would not emerge in 2024-25, the budget was designed to take account of pressures such as inflation and income risk.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. ANNUAL PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/25

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) on the Pay Policy Statement (the 'statement') which set out the Council's approach to pay policy in accordance with the requirements of Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011. The statement also had due regard for the associated statutory guidance including supplementary guidance issued in February 2013 and the Local Government Transparency code 2014. The statement also incorporated the Council's Gender Pay Gap (GPG) information in order to fulfil the Council's obligation to publish this on an annual basis under the GPG reporting requirements.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resource (Councillor Jilly Julian) attended the meeting to respond to councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members welcomed the report, in particular the encouraging figures related to gender pay. Figures related to pay in terms of seniority and type of role would be circulated to Members.
- Members also welcomed the inclusion of the apprenticeship programme and details related to the real living wage.
- There were challenges related to recruitment of social care roles. The council was working with authorities across Greater Manchester on agency rates to prevent employment agencies from pitting councils against one another. The council had also used creative methods for recruiting to social care roles including pop-up recruitment sessions at Central Library where applicants had the opportunity to be interviewed and offered a job on the same day, avoiding the need to complete a lengthy application form.
- Recruitment was also focussed on demonstrating that Stockport Council was a great place to work; it had a people plan, an HR strategy and its employees were passionate about the people of Stockport.
- Members commented that the staff working within Children's Services and the council's social workers were committed and skilled.
- Members of staff were on a salary scale, commenced employment at the bottom of the scale and moved one increment up the scale annually. The increase for each scale was between 1.5 and 1.8 per cent.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2025

A representative of the Director of Development & Regeneration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the progress of the 2023/24 Asset Management Plan (AMP) capital programme, and outlined the programme of work for inclusion in the 2024/25 financial year and the indicative programme up to 2028/29.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resource (Councillor Jilly Julian) attended the meeting to respond to councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members queried the expenditure and increased capacity within the borough for children's homes and what potential savings might be made as a result of that increased capacity.
- In response it was reported that the expansion of the capacity of children's homes within the borough sat within its own business case and that, therefore, the expansion was already accounted for within the capital programme. The council had recently purchased a third children's home and had plans to purchase a fourth and fifth home. Additional funds for maintenance and decoration were incorporated within the budget.
- Members commented that investment in children's homes and the council's capacity to house looked after children within the borough would benefit the budget elsewhere.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. ONE STOCKPORT: ONE FUTURE UPDATE

The Director of Strategy submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the ambitions and vision for Stockport to be one of the best places to live a happy, healthy life. It set out the council's commitment to working together with partners to create opportunities for everyone across the borough.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) attended the meeting to respond to councillor's questions.

Members welcomed the report and noted all the work which had gone into its production.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. RADICALLY DIGITAL STOCKPORT STRATEGY UPDATE

The Director of Strategy submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the award winning Radically Digital Stockport programme 2022-25, restating the council's ambitions, key deliverables of the last 12 months and priorities for the year ahead. It also showed the programmes positioning as a key enabler in relation to the Borough Plan and Council Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) attended the meeting to respond to councillor's questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- The method used to target individuals and groups who required access to digital services was to rooted within communities using local places, trusted faces and ensuring that council staff had the opportunity to build a relationships with community members.
- It was further reported that the council undertook work through its partnerships and used data to target its communications. One example was the use of the council tax bill to advertise online support and advice for residents.
- Starting Point was a Woodley based community organisation which was beginning to expand across the borough with a new hub in Edgeley.
- Referrals to council support service came from a range of sources including adult social care.
- Members emphasised the need to reach Stockport's residents, particularly parents of Special Educational Needs (SEND) children, to ensure that they were aware of the facilities provided by the council.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

10. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE SCHEME OF DELEGATION FOR DETERMINING PLANNING APPLICATIONS AND THE PLANNING PROTOCOL

A representative of the Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) related to significant changes to the planning system in England over recent years. During this time multiple new types of applications had been introduced and

most recently an increased focus was being placed on the importance of making timely decisions.

In light of the changes to the planning system and the increased emphasis placed on the speed and quality of planning decisions it was considered necessary to consider the need to make a number of changes to the scheme of delegation for the determination of planning applications. In parallel it was also considered appropriate to review the Planning Protocol to ensure that it reflected accurately long-standing custom and practice in how the council exercised its planning powers.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members asked about consultations undertaken with properties neighbouring a proposed development and queried whether those properties with a diagonal view of a proposed development were consulted.
- In response it was stated that properties with shared boundaries to a proposed development were consulted and additional consultations were carried out at the discretion of the planning officer. Notifications of development applications were placed on site and advertised in the local press allowing for further objections to be submitted.
- It was noted that, under the proposals, councillors were advised to engage with the planning team in relation to any concerns related to a development application. In those circumstances officers would provide the councillor with further details of the proposal and inform them about whether the application would be supported or refused.
- Members were supportive of the proposal that householder applications would be decided by officers and that the number of objections triggering consideration of a development application by an Area Committee would rise from four to six.
- Members noted that Area Committees retained the right to call-up development applications.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11. DISCLOSURE AND BARRING SERVICE CHECKS FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

The Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing a proposal for the Council to undertake enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for elected members undertaking specified duties.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) attended the meeting to respond to councillor's questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members noted that DBS checks were only proposed for a limited group of Members. In the light of the substituting system, it was suggested that an opt-in system for DBS checks be implemented to create a pool of potential substitutes for Committee meetings.
- It was further suggested that all councillors could be subject to DBS checks.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

12. AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACQUISITION: VINE STREET, HAZEL GROVE

A representative of the Director of Place Management submitted a joint report of the Director and the Director of Development and Regeneration (copies of which had been circulated) requesting the authorisation for the purchase of twelve recently constructed residential units at Vine Street, Hazel Grove, SK7 4JS to be used for shared ownership affordable housing.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) attended the meeting to respond to councillor's questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members expressed support for this scheme.
- It was reported that these properties would be shared ownership and not subject to the right to buy scheme.
- The shared ownership scheme was set up by Homes England allowing people to buy a share of the property and rent the remainder. Prices were set for incomes below the median for a Stockport household income thereby meeting the need for affordable housing in that area.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

13. STOCKPORT COUNTY FC - MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) requesting the approval of the revised terms for the grant of a 250 year lease to Stockport County Football Club.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) attended the meeting to respond to councillor's questions.

It was noted that the acquisition cost of Edgeley Park was reported to be circa £2.1 million with the rental income being circa £80,000 annually.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

14. UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO REINFORCED AUTOCLAVED AERATED CONCRETE (RAAC)

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a joint report of the Director and Director of Education, Work and Skills (copies of which had been circulated) providing information and updates on:

- Background information on RAAC, as well as updates on guidance issued to Local Authorities and responsible bodies relating to the potential risks surrounding the use of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) within the construction of school buildings.

- Survey and investigations work the Council has undertaken to establish the presence of RAAC within our estate.
- The Council's response to the discovery of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) within three of its buildings.
- The impact on the two affected schools in the borough: St Thomas Church of England Primary School, Marriot Street and Bramhall High School, including updates on actions taken and costs incurred to date.
- The impact on Romiley Forum Theatre.
- The decisions which have been taken and by whom in line with the council's constitution and scheme of delegation.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Jilly Julian) attended the meeting to respond to councillor's questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Members requested a report on the rebuilding of the two affected schools.
- It was for the Department for Education to prioritise school repair and rebuilding projects, however the council had in-house specialists for RAAC repair, along with contacts outside of the council. The council would undertake feasibility studies for both schools.
- The RAAC at St Thomas Church of England Primary School had been fully mitigated with a timber rack to support the RAAC within the building; the school was no longer using temporary accommodation. Long term repair of the school was still awaited.
- At Bramhall High School, temporary accommodation was still in use and the next stage was to undertake mitigation work to allow for reoccupation of the school building.
- It was reported that funds had been identified to carry out repairs at Romiley Forum. An onsite meeting had recently taken place involving experts and engineers to determine what mitigation work was required. The outcome of that meeting would be shared with Romiley Forum's tenants.
- The Chair reported that Members of the Committee had received an email related to Romiley Forum from an interested party. Members undertook to provide a written response to the correspondent.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

15. AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Assistant Director – Legal & Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out planned agenda items for the Scrutiny Committee's next meeting and Forward Plan items that fall within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee.

A further report on the impact of voter ID would be submitted to the June meeting of this Committee which would enable comparison with the effect of voter ID at the 2023 local elections.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.17 pm