

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

Meeting: 15 October 2024
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Carole McCann (Vice-Chair) in the chair; Councillors Jake Austin, Dickie Davies, Helen Foster-Grime, Mark Jones, Jeremy Meal, David Meller, Paul Wright and Alex Wynne.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 3 September 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. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2023-2024

The Executive Director for 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 complaints in 2023-24. The report included complaints received by the local authority which were managed by the 'Complaints Service'.

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 a significant increase in the numbers of complaints to Children's Services related to SEN and EHCP. Members acknowledged that this was a trend across the country and asked what percentage of the complaints related to EHCP were completed by the council within the 20 week deadline. In response it was stated that those numbers would be reported through the Children and Families Portfolio Performance & Resources Report.
- It was also reported that the Director of Children's Services had made concerted efforts to bring about improvements, particularly in terms of streamlining the approach for processing EHCPs.

- EHCPs had been viewed as a way of unlocking support for children and the service was moving towards ensuring that children were supported in the absence of an EHCP.
- The numbers of complaints related to EHCPs continued to rise as the project to streamline the EHCP process was ongoing.
- Members were pleased to note positive trends within the report; it appeared that there were fewer escalations of complaints from stage one to stage two; this indicated that complaints were being dealt with effectively.
- The numbers of complaints from 2022/23 to now showed with significant increases. Members queried whether the baseline should be set from years preceding 2022/23.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. ANNUAL WORKFORCE REPORT 2023-24

The Executive Director for Corporate and Support Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) demonstrating the council's unwavering commitment to transparency in workforce data and highlighting its dedication to ensuring the best outcomes for our residents, workforce and the broader communities which the council proudly serves.

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:

- In terms of succession planning and organisational resilience, the council had emphasised progression from colleagues' early careers onwards. Using tools such as 'my conversation', the council ensured its staff's ambitions aligned with its planned objectives. Staff were offered training and development opportunities, including academic offers, along with shadowing, coaching and mentoring.
- The apprenticeship levy was used to further the skills not just of newly appointed staff but those who had been with the council for many years.
- The council was able to extract data to determine whether it had the resources to meet the developmental requirements of its staff, or whether it needed to outsource in some instances.
- Members noted the success of the reverse mentoring programme which had led to an extension of the trial.
- Overall, about one third of sickness absences were related to mental health which was consistent with figures from other local authorities and other sectors.
- In terms of absences related to mental health, there had been a focus on wellbeing and, in particular, creating a psychologically safe environment which allowed staff to talk about their mental health and wellbeing. This enabled staff to give genuine reasons for their absences and, in turn, allowed the council to provide relevant support.
- Examples of employee health benefits included Mind, Body and Bank Account events and a therapy dog event on the piazza.
- Conversations were happening within the workplace about managing stress and reasonable adjustments. One example was that, following the community tensions

experienced over the summer months, wellbeing check ins had taken place with hundreds of colleagues across the council.

- Approximately 11 per cent of sickness absences were caused by coughs, colds and flu. The council undertook an annual vaccination programme, offering flu vaccines to staff at the town hall.
- Members noted the positive culture within the council, for example senior executives met regularly with apprentices and female colleagues were well supported.
- The next annual workforce report would include comparitors of staff turnover within social care with other local authorities and the private sector.
- The work of the Equality and Diversity Networks was highlighted. That had helped to shape the development of the organisation and was driving the evolution of the network model. The council was keen to develop creative ways in which to engage with colleagues including the intersection of areas of interest for network groups.

RESOLVED – (1) That the considerable progress in launching key initiatives within the One Team People Plan be noted.

(2) That the hard work and ongoing commitment of the Human Resources (HR), Organisational Development (OD) and Health and Safety team Formally be formally acknowledged.

(3) That the Cabinet Member for Finance be recommended to approve the strategic focus for the next twelve months as detailed within the report, which emphasises key areas crucial for driving future growth and success.

6. STOCKPORT COUNCIL MODERN SLAVERY STATEMENT 2024/25 ANNUAL REVIEW

The Executive Director for Corporate and Support Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) summarising the Modern Slavery Statement review process and presenting the fifth iteration (2024/25) of the Stockport Council Modern Slavery Statement to cover the period up to 30 September 2025.

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 commended the council for its work on the Modern Day Slavery Statement.
- The procurement focus of the report was noted, which aligned with legislation on slavery. Through its STAR procurement processes, the council had a responsibility to ensure that the council's money was not spent on the exploitation of people
- Members suggested that council staff working within Adult and Children's Social Care and others who worked within the community on a daily basis were well placed to highlight the work undertaken to prevent modern slavery.
- It was reported that there were now more people living in indentured slavery than there had been at the height of the transatlantic slave trade.

RESOLVED – (1) That the draft updated statement, which will run to 30 September 2025, be noted.

(2) That the Modern Slavery Statement be progressed to Cabinet for approval and adoption.

7. ANNUAL INSURANCE REPORT 2023-24

The Assistant Director for Finance (Interim 151 Officer) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing a summary of insurance performance for the financial year April 2023 to March 2024.

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 reduction in claims related to the Totally Local Company (TLC) was noted. The majority of claims related to TLC were motor claims and the audit team had worked with TLC on managing risks with their fleet.
- In addition there was an incentive fund for both TLC and Stockport Homes to reduce the overall number of claims.
- A number of the claims for Stockport Homes related to fleet vehicles or public liability trips and injuries on Stockport Homes properties or land. A full breakdown of claims related to Stockport Homes would be provided within the next report.
- In terms of highways claims, a significant number were caused by potholes. Other causes included drainage and issues linked to climate change. Those claims could be difficult to manage, however the highways investment plan had impacted positively on a reduction in the number of claims.
- There was a clear, proactive approach to risk management which ultimately created savings for council tax payers. The team deserved credit for its work.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. ANNUAL REPORT REGARDING COUNCILLOR CONDUCT

The Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) updating the Scrutiny Committee on complaints received about the conduct of members during the 2023/24 municipal year.

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 members were encouraged to take the recommendations of the Monitoring Officer on board but as a matter of law they were not obliged so to do.
- The reduction in numbers of complaints about councillor conduct was a tribute to good working relationships and the dedication of officers in supporting members.
- Members acknowledged that officers always acted fairly in dealing with councillors' conduct.

- Members noted that there had been no complaints escalated to the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A representative of the Assistant Director for 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.

Following last year's Scrutiny Review on the topic of bus franchising, members requested a review of the planned minimum bus fare and associated budgetary issues.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.22 pm