

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Corporate and Resources held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Wednesday, 19 June 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Bob Filmer (Chair)
Cllr Henry Hobhouse (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Tony Lock
Cllr Peter Seib
Cllr Andy Soughton
Cllr Sue Osborne

Cllr Martin Lovell
Cllr Brian Smedley
Cllr Barry Clarke

In attendance:

Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Frances Nicholson

Cllr Liz Leyshon
Cllr Richard Wilkins

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr Gill Slocombe

Cllr Andy Kendall

17 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillors Philip Ham (substituted by Councillor Barry Clarke), Lucy Trimnell (substituted by Councillor Sue Osborne) Mike Murphy, Nick Cottle and Diogo Rodrigues, also Councillor Theo Butt Philip.

18 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

There were no additional declarations of Interest.

19 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 3

No members of the public had submitted any questions.

20 Forward Plan 2024/25 - Agenda Item 4

The committee noted the Forward Plans for the Executive and this committee but had no additional items to add or comments to make on the items listed.

21 Provisional revenue outturn and emerging issues 2024/25 - Agenda Item 5

The Executive Director for Resources and Corporate Services presented his report detailing the Provisional Revenue Outturn and the emerging issues for 2024/25. He highlighted a typo on page 5, paragraph 6 which should say £16.3m rather than £19.3m (as reflected in the graphs above).

The committee will receive monthly budget monitoring reports and the quarterly reports will contain more detail. It was explained that the draft final accounts were hoped to be ready for September, however this was acknowledged they were later than previous years but it explained that the delay was due to a number of factors including the new finance system which was bedding in but some areas still needed to be worked through, staffing still in temporary positions, there had also been 10 sets of final accounts to be completed this year from the previous councils as they were outstanding.

It was explained that page 4 of the report included the trends and showed the spend. Month 10 was awaited for each service so that the accounts can be “closed down”; finalised accounts will be part of the Statement of Accounts produced. Each service area were detailed, some areas have done better than predicted and the deficit was not as bad. It was noted that the real threat to the budget and reserves is the Dedicated Schools Grant and it was agreed that further work would be undertaken and provided to this committee and was listed on the Forward Plan. For 2024/25, the report gave a high level overview and highlighted key area as significant concerns, these included Adults, Looked after Children and Kerbside collections. It was confirmed that due to the number of new managers, further training will be given on managing budgets and monitoring, although the process of monthly monitoring has been a success as it provides a good overview of all areas.

Members of the committee and other Councillors that were attending the meeting asked the officers a number of questions and these included:

Various budgets including the Waste Contract, Dedicated Schools Grant, LCNs and Children and Adult Social Care, Newton savings, use of reserves, overspends and patterns of spend for comparison. It was noted that other Scrutiny Committees were also looking at Adult and Childrens Social Care as part of their work programmes.

It was agreed that further information and written responses will be provided as follows:

LCN funding – breakdown needed with details – Alyn Jones to provide.

Use of Consultants for Newton savings – Councillor Leyshon will respond.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their reports and for taking part in the discussion; it was agreed that Costs and Savings to be detailed, the Draft Outturn for 2023/24 and further information on the Dedicated Schools Grant to come to the next Scrutiny

committee.

22 Productivity Plan - Agenda Item 6

The committee were informed that the Productivity Plan, which had been requested by DLUHC to be produced and needed to set out how Councils will improve service performance and reduce wasteful expenditure. The Plan was still a requirement despite the election, therefore the plan detailed the current situation, proposals and key barriers. Key barriers included the change to a Unitary Council, budgets and financial emergency, and transformation projections.

The Executive Director highlighted the top risks: these being:

- Local Government Finance
- Adult Social Care
- Childrens Services and Education
- Devolution
- Levelling Up and Local Growth
- Housing Infrastructure and Transport
- Climate change and Net Zero.

In response to questions from the Members, Officers responded as follows:

There was no indication when any feedback will be made or even if anything will be sent from the Panel, however it had been confirmed that the Council needed to submit the Plan.

KPIs and monitoring has been factored in and will be part of the Monitoring regime for the Audit and Executive committees.

It was noted that the Council currently deal with over 200 grant applications and so Government need to amend the way funding and bids are administered.

The Chair thanked the Officers for attending the meeting and their report.

23 LGR Benefits Update - Agenda Item 7

The report had been brought to committee for an update on the project and to detail the planned way forward. It was highlighted that the LGR Business Case included savings of £18.5m over 3 years and the report gave an update on the identification and delivery of LGR financial benefits to date and also sets out how the remaining savings will be achieved as a part of the Council's new Implementation and Transformation Programme.

It was noted that it has been difficult to separate the staff savings included within this project and those additional workforce savings required within the Improvement and Transformation Programme. The Executive Director confirmed that in view of comments made by Councillors, the report can be reshaped before it goes to Executive to ensure the details were clearer and what savings had been made. It was

also noted that there was work to be done but the information in the report covered Year 1 only.

The Chair thanked Officers and it was accepted that further update would be needed to clarify savings made.

24 Equalities Objectives for Somerset Council - Agenda Item 8

This report was for information only and was as a result of the Council taking part in an Equality Framework for Local Government Peer Challenge in October 2023 and as part of this participation, Chairs of Scrutiny met the Peer Team to establish how effectively equality, diversity and inclusion due regard was included within the Scrutiny process. A number of actions resulted and this paper and recommitment will be supported by a Scrutiny specific workshop around equality.

During discussion, it was noted that this was part of the Council's Values and Culture and behaviours and included within the reorganisation project. It was suggested that this should be a standing point for all agendas and meetings with an impact Assessment to be included in Chairs Schedules.

It was noted that training will be agreed shortly for all members.

25 5 C's Contract - Agenda Item 9

The committee received the confidential report and discussed the contents.

At the end of the discussion, the committee agreed with the recommendation to the Executive detailed within the confidential report.

(The meeting ended at 12.56 pm)

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CHAIR