

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING Tuesday, 4th August 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Holly (in the Chair); Councillors Boriss, Joinson, Mir, Nola, O'Neill, O'Rourke, Rana, Robinson and Wraighte.

OFFICERS: M. Widdup (Director of Neighbourhoods), N. Thornton (Director of Resources), Samantha Smith (Deputy Chief Finance Officer), V. White (Neighbourhoods Directorate), M. Ashworth and P. Thompson (Resources Directorate).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bamford.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

3 MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held 13th January 2020 and 11th February 2020 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chair.

4 TOWNSHIPS PLAN 2020-2022

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Director of Neighbourhoods which outlined the Townships Plan for 2020-2022.

In line with the Council's Corporate Plan, the Townships Plan 2020–2022 has been developed around the following priorities: Prosperous People and Places. The Chairs and Vice Chairs of the five township Committees had worked with Officers and the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods, Community and Culture to produce the new Townships Plan.

The Townships Plan identified priorities to be determined by each Township's Councillors as a focus for action during the 2020 – 2022 period. The Plan gathered aspirations and ideas together as a focus for decision makers, Council Services, partner agencies and the voluntary and community sector active in the Borough. The Townships Plan identified priorities determined by each Township's Councillors as a focus for action over the period of the Plan. This plan gathers aspirations and ideas together as a focus for decision makers, Council Services, partner agencies and the voluntary and community sector active in the Rochdale Borough.

The Committee was advised that the Townships Plan formed part of the Council's Policy Framework. The Plan was a live document that could evolve and change to meet any new opportunities and initiatives which arose, and could therefore be updated to reflect changes moving forward.

The Chair suggested that the Committee consider establishing a short life study group, comprising members of the Committee, to examine the role of Township Committees within the organisation, including the delegation and responsibility of functions and services and the allocation of resources.

Resolved:

1. That the detail included in the Townships Plan 2020-2022 be noted.
2. That the establishment of a study group to examine the role of Township Committees, be delegated to the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee to consider in the first instance.

5 RESOURCES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS DIRECTORATE PLANS 2019-20 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Committee received a joint report of the Director of Resources and the Director of Neighbourhoods detailing the progress at the end of Quarter 4 2019/2020 (1st January 2020 – 31st March 2020) towards achievements of targets contained in the Resources Directorate Plan 2019/2020 and in the Neighbourhoods Directorate Plan 2019/2020.

In considering the Resources Directorate element of the report, Members were updated on the five actions that were still outstanding at 31st March 2020 and which had received an ‘amber’ rating. These included the Council’s governance arrangements, which had been addressed largely through a report that recommended changes to the authority’s Constitution that was approved by Council on 15th July 2020 and the roll-out of the I-Trent Human Resources software package.

In considering the Neighbourhoods Directorate element of the report, Members were updated on the five actions that were still outstanding at 31st March 2020.

With regards to the Neighbourhoods Directorate a Member referred to action R19008 (Implementation of the Risk Management Strategy), which noted that Cyber Insurance had been identified as a possible ‘Red-ranked’ technical security risk and in this regard the Director of Neighbourhoods undertook to submit a report to the next meeting of the Committee detailing the relevant issues surrounding Cyber Security including the potential threats and measures that were being taken to counter the threat.

A Member referred to action NDP1901.A (Domestic Abuse Strategy for the Borough) noting that the Strategy was still in its draft stage, with the final roll-out delayed due to the impact of Covid-19. The Director of Neighbourhoods undertook to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee regarding the roll-out of the Domestic Abuse Strategy.

A Member referred to action NDP1906.A (Determination of the Communications Priorities) and requested that a report on this matter be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Committee requested that the current Directorate Plans relating to the Resources and Neighbourhoods Directorates be submitted to the Committee's next meeting in September 2020, to help the Committee inform the Committee of its work programme for 2020/2021.

Resolved:

1. The Resources and Neighbourhoods Directorate Plans 2019-2020 - Quarter 4 Performance be noted.
2. The Director of Neighbourhoods be requested to submit a report to the next meeting of the Committee detailing the relevant issues surrounding Cyber Security, including the potential threats and any measures that were being taken to counter these potential threats.
3. The Director of Neighbourhoods be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of the Communities, Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the roll-out of the Domestic Abuse Strategy.
4. The Director of Neighbourhoods be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee detailing the Council's 'communications priorities' further to action NDP1906.A
5. The current Directorate Plans relating to the Resources and Neighbourhoods Directorates be submitted to the Committee's next meeting in September 2020, to help the Committee inform the Committee of its work programme for 2020/2021.

6 BUDGET 2021/22 TO 2023/24 GUIDELINES AND TIMETABLE

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Chief Finance Officer that had recommended to the Cabinet, at its meeting on 28th July 2020, approval of the budget guidelines, timetable and methods of public engagement to be used in preparing the budget and provisional budgets for 2021/22 and 2023/24.

The Council was legally obliged to set a balanced budget and the submitted report set out a planning process for the budget including details of the assumptions used in the preparation of the budget to ensure they were agreed, reasonable and consistently applied by all services. The Committee noted that the Council's Cabinet, at its meeting on 28th July 2020, had approved the recommendations that were set out in paragraph 2 of the submitted report.

Decision:

1. That the proposed budget timetable, as detailed at Appendix 1 of the submitted report, be noted.
2. That the revenue assumptions as detailed at Appendix 2 of the submitted and which the Cabinet had agreed be incorporated into the budget setting process, be noted.
3. That the revenue and capital budget principles referred to in Appendices 3 and 4 of the submitted report, be noted.
4. The proposed methods of public engagement that were outlined in the submitted report, to be included as part of the 2021/22 budget setting process, be noted.
5. The Committee notes the Revenue Budget update detailed in the submitted report.

7 FINANCE UPDATE REPORT PERIOD 2 2020/21

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Chief Finance Officer which had sought approval, from the Cabinet at its meeting held 28th July 2020, in respect of the Budget pressures requests, including £18,000 for Wardle and Smallbridge Football Club (as referred to Cabinet from the Pennines Township Committee), approval for the transfer of budget from the Equalisation Reserve to the five Township Committees, and which detailed the forecast 2020/21 financial positions for Revenue, Capital, and the Collection Fund as at the end of May 2020.

The Committee was informed that the forecast Revenue position, was providing a projected pressure of £17,639k. The budget pressures relating to Covid-19 were £29,059k, which had been partially offset by the use of government funding re Covid-19 of £13,616k. Non-Covid-19 pressures were reported as being £2,196k. Forecast Capital expenditure was £156,560k, after a re-phasing of £5,447k, budget returns of £2,065k, grant reductions of £2,640k and a grant increase of £192k. The Collection Fund position was indicating a deficit of £30,450k, which would be partially mitigated by increased government Section 31 grant of £20,950k, leaving a residual pressure of £9,500k.

A Member referred to the submission of discretionary fees and charges , which would be scrutinised at an upcoming meeting of this Committee and requested that the Cabinet be recommended that proposals for discretionary fees and charges in 2012/2022 and future years be rounded up or down, as appropriate, to the nearest multiple of £5.

Resolved:

1. That the forecast 2020/21 financial positions for Revenue, Capital, and the Collection Fund as at the end of May 2020 be noted.
2. The Cabinet be advised of this Committee's request that proposals for discretionary fees and charges in 2012/2022 and future years be rounded up or down as appropriate to the nearest multiple of £5.

8 TREASURY MANAGEMENT YEAR-END REPORT 2019/20

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Chief Finance Officer that summarised the Council's treasury management activity in the 2019/20 financial year and which also highlighted compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and with regulatory/legislative requirements. The report found that the Council had adhered to key prudential indicators during the year and that treasury activity had contributed a net underspend (excluding Airport activity) of £1,756M on its revised budget for the year.

The Committee was advised that the Council was required by regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 to produce an annual review of its treasury management activities together with the actual prudential and treasury indicators for the previous year. In considering the report, the Committee noted that the report had been considered by the Council's Cabinet at its meeting on 28th July 2020.

Resolved:
That the report be noted.

9 CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme for 2020/2021, which outlined the Committee's programme of reports during 2020/2021.

The Committee was asked to consider moving the dates of their scheduled meetings in September 2020, from Tuesday, 8th to Tuesday 22nd September 2020 to accommodate a timely consideration of proposals for the Council's 2021/2022 budgetary process.

Members expressed concerns about the lack of information relating to activities at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). As a partial means of addressing this and raising awareness of GMCA amongst Rochdale Borough Council Members, it was requested that the agendas for future meetings of this Committee include copies of the minutes of meetings of GMCA Scrutiny Committees.

A Member requested that a report relating School's Funding be included on the Health, Schools and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

Resolved:

1. The Committee's Work Programme 2020/2021 be noted.
2. The date of the meeting of the Committee in September 2020 be moved from Tuesday, 8th September 2020 to Tuesday, 22nd September 2020.
3. Agendas for future meetings of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee include copies of the minutes, of meetings of Greater Manchester Combined Authority Scrutiny Committees.
4. A report relating School's Funding be included on the Health, School and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

10 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

That the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business, in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

11 PROPERTY INVESTMENTS - PERFORMANCE AND RISK QUARTER 4:2019/2020

The Committee scrutinised a confidential report of the Director of Resources which informed Members of the performance of the Council's commercial property investments in financial year 2019/20, and highlight the associated risks. The report also demonstrated that the Commercial Investment Fund/Asset Development Fund investments had achieved the appropriate performance targets that had been established for this activity.

The report presented the balances remaining within the respective Property Growth Funds and had recommended that the Commercial Investment Fund and Direct Development Fund be amalgamated at the earliest opportunity in the 2020/2021 financial year.

Members were advised that this report had been considered previously by the Property Growth Fund Sub-Committee at its meeting held 7th July 2020.

Resolved:

1. The report be noted.
2. The Committee notes the decision of the Property Growth Fund Sub-Committee to approve the amalgamation of the Commercial Investment Fund and Direct Development Fund, with immediate effect.