

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,
on Thursday, 15th February, 2018 at 6.30 pm**

Present: Councillor John Knight in the Chair;

Councillors Rachel Madden, Cathy Mason,
Lauren Mitchell, Christine Quinn-Wilcox,
Paul Roberts, Mike Smith (as substitute for
Helen Hollis) and John Wilmott.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Lee Anderson and Helen Hollis.

Officers Present: Craig Bonar, Lynn Cain, Joanne Froggatt,
Mike Joy, Sharon Lynch, Alexia Massey and
Robert Mitchell.

In Attendance: Councillors Cheryl Butler, Jackie James,
Robert Sears-Piccavey, Helen-Ann Smith and
Jason Zadrozny.

OS.21 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non-Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest made.

OS.22 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 16th November and
12th December, 2017, be received and approved as a correct record.

OS.23 Presentation - Budget Update

Committee received a presentation from the Corporate Finance Manager (and
Section 151 Officer) outlining an update position on the Council's Budget
following the budget presentation previously given in October 2017.

An update was given in respect of the following:-

Revised Budget 2017/18

- Discretionary Rate Relief
- Business Rates – one-off return
- Reduced Capital Financing
- Section 31 Grant – potential for increase
- Earmarked Reserves
- General Fund Balance;

Updates from Provisional Settlement for 2018/19

- Council Tax
- Business Rates
- New Homes Bonus
- Revenue Support Grant;

Budget 2018/19 – Savings/Income Generation

- Commercial Property Update
- Pay
- Housing Benefits
- HRA IT Purchases
- Service Reviews and savings
- One-off budgets savings for 2017/18
- Service Reductions
- Recharges
- Borrowing and Capital Financing
- Total Expenditure
- Earmarked Reserves;

Housing Revenue Account

- Revised Budget 2017/18
- Budget – Net Income;

HRA Budget 2018/19

- Main Variances between 2017/18 and 2018/19
- Movement in Earmarked Reserves
- Overall Position.

RESOLVED

that the update position on the Council's Budget for 2017/18 and 2018/19, as presented, be received and duly noted.

OS.24 Review of Peer Challenge Recommendations

The Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager presented a progress report in relation to the implementation of key recommendations following the LGA Peer Challenge review in March 2017. The findings from the review were extremely positive and showed a significant improvement in Leadership and culture since the previous challenge in 2013.

Progress on the recommendations were outlined as follows:-

Annual Review of Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan was reviewed and published in June 2017 and the refresh included a Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) review of priority projects and Corporate Scorecard measures. The Council's Project Management Framework continued to manage key projects and activity against annual priorities for delivery and the 2018/19 review of the Corporate Plan was already in progress.

Strategic Opportunities and Partnership Working

The Council continued to exploit opportunities for collaborative working with partners including joint funding with D2N2 LEP, approved LEP investment through the Town Centres Programme for the Kirkby Leisure Centre, an incorporate set of 3 highway priorities in the County Council's Place Plan and effective project governance by the Regeneration Programme Board.

Senior Officer and Member time had been invested in key partnership meetings and the new Place Leadership Board (Ashfield Aspire) was progressing well engaging key businesses and community groups.

Prioritisation of New/Key Initiatives

A single transformation vision has been set out in the 'Strategic Direction' that was agreed by Cabinet in October 2017. Work was continuing to ensure alignment of the Council's strategic direction and the commercialism agenda has been further developed over the last 12 months with focus on commercial property investment.

The transformation and service review programme was currently being delivered by the Corporate Transformation and Efficiency Programme Board and external specialist support (Socitm) had recently been commissioned to enable the Council to further understand how new technology can be used to deliver transformation.

Agreement of Financial Targets

The Council's Corporate Savings Plan, linked to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), collates financial targets for key saving streams and performance against targets and is monitored by XLT, CLT and Cabinet. Potential savings streams were currently being considered for procurement opportunities.

Combination of MTFS, Budget and Capital Programme into a Comprehensive MTFS document

A review to consider the best approach for presenting the Council's financial position in a clear and consistent manner is due to be undertaken in 2018/19 with implementation envisaged for 2019.

Involvement of Opposition Members in Strategic Scrutiny Reviews

A recent service review has resulted in the creation of a dedicated scrutiny officer resource within the Democratic Services Team to undertake research and enable the development of a different approach to the scrutiny work programme. The scrutiny work programme continued to be aligned to the Corporate Plan.

Two non-voting tenant representatives have been appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for housing performance issues and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had also taken the opportunity to utilise social media (facebook Live Streaming and Twitter) to widen engagement in the meetings. Further use of social media is also being planned for selective future meetings.

Induction Programme for Councillors

It was agreed that Members should be involved in designing an Induction Programme for Councillors and a Cross Party Working Group was due to be established towards the end of 2018 to devise a suitable programme for the new Member intake following the 2019 District Elections.

Project Management, Performance Management and Area Committees

The Council was continuing to review its Project and Performance Management Frameworks to identify opportunities to reduce bureaucracy whilst improving governance and process. Performance Management had been further strengthened through the introduction of a new competency framework that would be incorporated into personal development reviews (PDR's) for employees.

A review of community engagement had also recently concluded with a decision taken to cease Area Committees with effect from December 2017.

Communication Channels and Member Access

The Cross Party Update Group continued to meet on a regular basis and the Members' Digest was produced and circulated on a monthly basis. The current access arrangements for Members had not changed.

Members' Code of Conduct Complaints Process Review

A Cross Party Working Group had been established and was currently considering changes to the Complaints Process and the Members' Social Media Policy. The revised process and policy would be reported to the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee in March 2018.

Following the presentation the Chairman thanked the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager for her presentation and requested that the Committee's thanks be passed onto the relevant officers for their hard work and continued commitment towards supporting improvements at the Council.

RESOLVED that

- a) the progress report in relation to the implementation of key recommendations following the LGA Peer Challenge review, as presented, be received and noted;
- b) it be agreed that progress is sufficient enough not to warrant further consideration and it be removed from the Scrutiny Workplan.

Reasons:

In June 2017 Cabinet endorsed the findings of the Local Government Association Peer Challenge, whilst seeking approval for Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor the implementation of approved actions arising from the peer challenge for the municipal year 2017/18.

The Peer Challenge Review undertaken by the Local Government Association in March 2017 was designed to support Councils and was part of a sector led improvement programme. There is an expectation from the LGA and Government that the findings will be used to support improvements. Cabinet sanctioned all actions arising from the LGA report.

OS.25 Corporate Scorecard – April to September 2017

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager presented the Quarter 2 Corporate Scorecard to enable Members to review the levels of performance achieved and assist with the delivery of the Corporate Plan.

The year-end figures for 2016/17 were very positive with an 80% improvement across the corporate scorecard and 91% achievement against targets. The outturn from Quarter 2, 2017/18 was also promising to date indicating a 65% improvement across the scorecard with 77% of measures achieving or exceeding their targets.

Improved Performance

Areas of improved performance were highlighted as follows:

- Rent collection levels were at the highest comparative Quarter 2 position;
- Processing of all types of planning applications were well above nationally prescribed standard targets and last year's performance outturns;
- Void turnaround was currently 5 days quicker than previous years;
- Tenants being assisted with money advice was increasing and greater than target;
- Homelessness levels due to domestic violence were two thirds less than Quarter 2 last year;
- Private sector enforcement activity nearly doubled to those achieved last year and also the year before, particularly for damp and mould;
- Service requests regarding dog fouling were 40% lower than last year and 68% lower than 2013/14 levels;
- A 10% reduction in levels of anti-social behaviour across the District;
- Direct debit payments increased by 4% with a continued review of payment channels and digital accessibility for customers.

Areas for Improvement

Outdoor Market Stall Occupation

Current market stall occupation levels were 6% lower than the same period in 2016/17. A slight reduction had been anticipated due to a change in market days offered but Sutton were particularly underperforming whilst Hucknall were improving following the town centre improvements. It was also noted that footfall was currently down in Sutton town centre by 11%. The Council however, were continuing to actively promote the market incentives currently on offer both within and outside the District.

Long Term Empty Properties

14% less long term empty properties had been brought back into use compared to the same period last year but this had now been turned around in Quarter 3 with a 22% improvement. Loss of capacity within the team had contributed to the dip in performance but due to proactive enforcement activity and exceptional work from the team this had enabled good outturn figures to be achieved. An imminent report to be considered by Cabinet in relation to an Enforced Sales Procedure would hopefully improve performance further.

Affordable Homes

The number of affordable homes within Ashfield was significantly lower than the previous year. It had been recognised that this was due to a lack of local registered provider development resulting from reduced access to grants and S106 opportunities.

Fly-Tipping Service Requests

Service requests for removal of fly-tipping had increased by 32% with indicators that the trend was due to worsen still further. It was acknowledged that the worsening trend was unfolding nationally and also being experienced by neighbouring authorities. A District Councils Network event had been run recently which had identified some proposals that would be submitted to Government top endeavour to tackle the issue more effectively.

The Scrutiny Manager informed the Committee that fly-tipping was also subject to a stand alone Scrutiny review following its addition onto the Workplan at the end of 2017.

Following presentation of the Corporate Scorecard outturn position, Members debated the Council's current performance and discussed the following:-

- concerns regarding the increase in fly-tipping service requests and the requirement for the Council to address this as a priority;
- acknowledgement that the increase in fly-tipping service requests was not particularly due to improved Council reporting mechanisms but more to do with increased concern from the public regarding the eyesores of fly-tipping;
- the local authorities included within the East Midlands District Council network;
- concerns regarding the number of empty homes within the District and the rising numbers of homeless people who could potentially benefit from these properties being brought back into use;
- concerns regarding the accuracy of the dog fouling data due to many anecdotal comments from residents stating they no longer contact the Council because have lost faith that officers will respond and clean up the mess;
- the lack of lighting available to outdoor market stall holders and its possible contribution to the decline in market stall take up;

- the publicity available, or otherwise, for promoting the use of direct debit facilities to make payments for Council services;
- the possibility of mapping litter and fly-tipping service requests by wards to allow Members to better pinpoint any hotspots or problem areas for action.

RESOLVED

that the level of performance achieved against the Quarter 2 Corporate Scorecard for 2017/18, as presented, be received and noted.

Reasons:

1. The Council's ambitions for the next three years are clearly identified in the Corporate Priorities which are presented in the Corporate Plan 2016 - 2019. In March 2016, Cabinet agreed the use of a balanced scorecard methodology to enhance the organisations performance framework and ability to understand how successfully the Corporate Priorities are being delivered, the approach providing a more rounded view on performance with a greater emphasis on customer satisfaction and quality.
2. The Corporate Scorecard has previously been agreed by Cabinet.
3. Performance outturn for the Corporate Scorecard will be monitored and managed at CLT, Cabinet and Scrutiny.

OS.26 Overview and Scrutiny Workplan 2017-18

Committee considered the latest position on the remaining topics from the 2017/18 work plan. Members were informed that an additional topic had been suggested for the workplan regarding a review of Council support for Christmas Events. It was envisaged that Members will consider how best the Council can support communities with their planning and implementation of future Christmas events (i.e. trees, lights and entertainment).

RESOLVED that

- a) the ongoing topics included on the 2017/18 Scrutiny Workplan, be noted;
- b) the review of Council Support for future Christmas Events, be added to the 2018/19 Scrutiny Workplan.

Reason:

Consulting, reviewing and agreeing items for the Scrutiny Workplan provides guidance and direction for the work undertaken by Scrutiny in the coming year.

The meeting closed at 7.50 pm

Chairman.