

## Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

At 7:00pm on Tuesday 15 August 2023

Held in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby

### Present:

#### Members

Councillor Lyn Buckingham (Chair)

Councillor Jim Hakewill

Councillor Paul Marks

Councillor Zoe McGhee

Councillor Lora Lawman (Vice Chair)

Councillor Steven North

Councillor Dr Anup Pandey

#### Officers

Janice Gotts – Executive Director of Finance and Performance

Adele Wylie – Executive Director of Customer and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

David Watts – Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing

Graeme Kane – Interim Executive Director of Place and Economy

AnnMarie Dodds – Executive Director of Children’s Services

Mark Dickenson – Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy

Lucy Hogston – Assistant Director of Revenues and Benefits

Marie Devlin-Hogg – Assistant Director of HR

Nicky McLoughlin – HR Workforce, Policy and Projects Strategic Lead

Tom Barden – Head of Performance, Intelligence and Partnerships

Louise Tyers – Senior Democratic Services Officer

#### Also Present

Councillor Lloyd Bunday – Executive Member for Finance and Transformation

## 9 Apologies for non-attendance

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Richard Levell and Russell Roberts.

## 10 Members' Declarations of Interest

The Chair invited those who wished to do so to declare any interests in respect of items on the agenda.

The following declarations were made:

Councillors	Item	Nature of Interest	DPI	Other Interest
Lora Lawman	Performance Indicators Report 2023/24 (Period 2)	Is a member of the Corporate Parenting Board.		Yes
Jim Hakewill	Update on Pay and Grading	Is a member of the LGA HR Board who		Yes

		are a lobby group.		
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Adele Wylie also declared an interest as she was a Council appointed Director of Opus People Solutions.

## **11 Notifications of requests to address the meeting**

There were no requests to address the meeting.

## **12 Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the inclusion of:

### Minute 5 – Performance Indicators Report 2023/24 (Period 1)

Include after final bullet point:

- It would helpful for the Chairs of the Children’s Trust Improvement Board and the Trust’s Board to be invited to a future meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.
- The importance of robust data provision was highlighted. In response, the Head of Performance, Intelligence and Partnerships explained the reviews which were currently taking place within his team and undertook to keep the Committee updated on the outcomes.

## **13 Performance Indicators 2023/24 (Period 2)**

The Head of Performance, Intelligence and Partnerships presented the report which provided an update on the Council’s performance across a wide range of services. The report provided a detailed assessment of the Council’s performance in relation to Key Performance Indicators for 2023/24 for period 2 (May 2023).

Comments on several specific indicators were made, including:

- It was noted that waste indicators had not been included in the report and would they be reported at some time during the year? In response officers advised that the quarterly/annual KPI set included two indicators relating to waste – diversion from landfill and flytipping.
- The indicators for voids only covered Corby and Kettering but Keyways covered all of North Northamptonshire so it would be helpful to see the number of voids across the whole area. The Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing advised that they only reported on those areas with former Council housing stock. Officers could explore with larger landlords about wider Keyways reporting.
- Number of Voids – Corby Area (STP36) – the number of void properties in Corby appeared to be high, what was being done to turnaround these properties quicker? It was suggested that this might be an area to be considered for the future Scrutiny Work Plan. In response, the Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing advised that a lot of work had taken place to understand the issues. A presentation and report had been provided to the former Scrutiny Commission on the issue and he undertook to circulate this to Committee members.

- Vacancy Statistics – was information on the number of vacancies now coming through following review? In response, the Head of Performance, Intelligence and Partnerships advised that the data quality had improved, and they would be included in the next report to the Executive.
- Agency spend – this was an area which should be scrutinised, including who are OPUS and are we obtaining the expected efficiencies. In response, the Executive Director of Customer and Governance advised that OPUS was a Joint Venture of a number of organisations including NNC and was how we sourced agency staff to drive down costs. Sometimes, with very specialist roles, we needed to use other agencies.
- Number of children currently missing from education (BBF33) – The Executive Director of Children’s Services explained that this indicator included those children with no known placement or those awaiting a placement at a special school. Further work on breaking down the information behind the indicator was needed.
- Number of rough sleepers (AFL12) – how many rough sleepers were in Kettering? In response, the Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing advised that the indicator was based on the whole of North Northamptonshire, the Rough Sleeper Team would likely be able to give a figure of the number of rough sleepers in Kettering.
- Number of households with family commitments living in bed and breakfast accommodation (AFL18) – how much was bed and breakfast accommodation costing the Council? In response, the Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing stated that officers tried to keep costs to the minimum and looked at all possible options, however it depended on individual circumstances. There was a maximum number of times the Council would offer temporary accommodation before it was believed we had met our legal requirements.
- The Children’s Services indicators should include indicators on how many children had received their initial medical and dental assessments within 28 days of going into care. In response, the Executive Director of Children’s Services advised that those indicators would be reported through the Corporate Parenting Board, however a link to those indicators could be included in future reports to this Committee.
- Climate indicators – how would we be able to monitor the actions taken to address our climate targets? In response, the Head of Performance, Intelligence and Partnerships advised that work to measure our climate footprint happened once a year and he undertook to check whether it would be reported annually. The Executive Director of Place and Economy also advised that we did report against the Carbon Management Plan.

**RESOLVED:**

To note the performance of the Council and its services.

**14 Forecast Draft Outturn for 2023/24 (Period 2)**

The Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy presented the report which set out the draft outturn for 2023/24. The report set out the material financial issues which had been identified since the budget had been set in February 2023.

The overall outturn reflected an overspend for the General Fund of £7.120m against a budget of £336.590m and due to strong financial management, the Council had been able to absorb most of the pressures arising from the Children's Trust.

The Children's Trust contract value was £150.938m, of which the Council's share was £66.654m. The Children's Trust were forecasting an overspend of £20.579m, of which the cost to the Council would be £9.087m. If these pressures were not mitigated this would pose a significant financial risk to the Council. Whilst the Trust were looking at potential mitigations, there was a risk that this position could worsen before year end. A key risk was the delivery of efficiency savings of £7.632m which formed part of the contract sum. The Trust was presently forecasting that £6.653 of these savings were at risk of non-delivery. Additional mitigations of £1.114m had been identified, however there remained a residual financial risk of £5.539m which could increase the overall pressure from £20.578m to £26.117m.

The Executive Director of Children's Services announced that the Council had now issued the Trust with a Rectification Notice as part of the contract arrangements. A response from the Trust was awaited about how they proposed to deal with the Notice and the Committee would be kept informed.

The Council's overall outturn forecast for the Housing Revenue Account was a forecast overspend of £93k against the approved budget of £38.752m.

During discussion on the report, the following key points were made:

- i. The Council was being run well and it was clear where the main overspend was coming from. It was disappointing that the Trust was not delivering in line with their contract, including promises on efficiencies not being delivered. Could the contract with the Trust be referred to the Scrutiny Management Board for Scrutiny's work plan?
- ii. It was acknowledged that the Trust had been imposed on the two councils by Central Government and urgent representations needed to be made to Ministers about the situation and the requirement for financial action. In response, the Executive Director of Children's Services advised that outcomes for children were being monitored and for the financial issues, the rectification notice had now been issued. The Council was working closely with the Department for Education.
- iii. The Executive Director for Finance and Performance confirmed that every effort was made to minimise overspending and each directorate was asked to look at mitigation.
- iv. It was noted that a number of legacy audits for 2020/21 were still outstanding, including Northamptonshire County Council. Members asked for clarification as to what, if any, were the risks of these accounts not being closed. The Executive Director for Finance and Performance explained that the final balances and disaggregation from the County Council were still outstanding, for example the final assets and debts. It was hoped that both outstanding accounts would be signed off in September.
- v. The bad debt provision was noted, and Members sought clarification as to what the majority of the debt was for. In response, it was confirmed that a number of bad debt provisions were held and covered a number of areas. The £870k detailed in the report related solely to the General Fund.
- vi. The pressure of £272k on agency costs within Growth & Regeneration was noted and Members questioned when the proposed restructure of the service would be completed. In response, the Executive Director of Place and Economy advised

that the restructure was ongoing and that some senior roles were being appointed to.

**RESOLVED:**

To note the draft outturn report 2023/24.

**15 Revenues and Benefits Annual Report 2022/23**

The Assistant Director of Revenues and Benefits presented the report which provided Members with an update on the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Service for the 2022/23 financial year.

The Revenues and Benefits Service were responsible for the billing and collection of Council Tax and Business Rates and the calculation and payment of Housing Benefit, Local Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing Payments. Also, since the onset of the pandemic, the Service had also administered a number of business grant schemes on behalf of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme on behalf of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Performance information was provided for the following areas:

- Collection of Council Tax
- Collection of Business Rates
- Recovery Activity
- Breathing Space
- Benefits Administration
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Council Tax Discretionary Discount Section 13A Application
- Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme and Discretionary Fund
- Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Fund
- Alternative Fuel Payment Alternative Fund
- Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund
- Business Grants

All Members of the Committee wished to put on record their thanks to the Assistant Director and her team for all of their work and congratulations on the performance for the past year.

**RESOLVED:**

To note the Revenues and Benefits performance data for the financial year covering 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

**16 Update on Pay and Grading**

The Executive Director of Customer and Governance presented the report which outlined the NNC proposed pay structure and employment terms and conditions to be recommended for adoption by Full Council.

The Council did not have a pay and grading structure, or a complete set of employment terms and conditions of employment that were specific to NNC. The

workforce was currently made up of employees who remained on their previous councils' terms and conditions, protected by TUPE legislation (c60% of the workforce); and employees who were on 'interim' / hybrid North Northamptonshire Council terms and conditions (c40% of the workforce).

TUPE legislation (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Rights) protected those employees who transferred to NNC from one of the predecessor councils and who's role had not changed since the transfer. Employees who were in this position remained on their previous councils' terms and conditions (including salary, pay scales, annual leave, allowances and redundancy pay) until such time that their role was changed significantly, or they applied for a new internal role.

New starters who had joined the Council since 1st April 2021, or who had changed roles since that time, had been appointed to 'interim' NNC pay, terms and conditions. These comprised of a small number of terms and conditions that were agreed before vesting day and those which were inherited from the predecessor councils.

A proposed pay structure for NNC and an accompanying set of terms and conditions had been developed, in consultation with the Council's recognised trade unions and also shared with employees. These had been designed to support the attraction and retention of skilled employees and provide a robust defence against potential equal pay claims.

During discussion on the report, the following key points were made:

- i. How would the proposed performance bonus for senior managers work and would this be pay protected? The Assistant Director of HR clarified that for the majority of staff incremental pay would be automatic. For senior posts, they would be required to prove they had performed. Pay had not been reduced due to performance and was managed in other ways.
- ii. It was suggested that the Scrutiny Management Board may want to consider adding review of implementation of pay and grading to the Scrutiny Work Plan.

It was moved by Councillor Jim Hakewill and seconded by Councillor Zoe McGhee that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee welcome the report and its recommendations and recommend the report in full to Full Council.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Corporate Scrutiny Committee welcomes the report and its recommendations and recommend the report in full to Full Council.

**17 Close of Meeting**

The Chair thanked members and officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm.

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Chair

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Date

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm