

Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

At 7:00pm on Thursday 29 June 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 Steven North

Councillor Dr Anup Pandey

Councillor Russell Roberts

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

Guy Holloway – Assistant Chief Executive

Mark Dickenson – Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy

Claire Edwards – Assistant Director of Finance Accountancy

Tom Barden – Head of Performance, Intelligence and Partnerships

Ben Smith – Head of Democratic Services

Louise Tyers – Senior Democratic Services Officer

Also Present

Councillor Lloyd Bunday – Executive Member for Finance and Transformation

1. Apologies for Non-Attendance

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Lora Lawman and Richard Levell.

2. Members’ Declarations of Interest

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

Councillors	Item	Nature of Interest	DPI	Other Interest
Russell Roberts	Performance Indicators Report 2023/24 (Period 1)	Daughter works at Buccleuch Academy.		Yes

3. Notification of Requests to Address the Meeting

A request to address the meeting had been received from Councillor Dorothy Maxwell on item 5, Performance Indicators 2023/24.

4. Background to the New Scrutiny Arrangements and Terms of Reference

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report which set out the changes to the Council's scrutiny arrangements following the decision of Full Council at their meeting held on 30 March 2023, with particular regard to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

NNC operated an executive model of governance and was required, under statute, to operate at least one scrutiny committee. Following the review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements, there were now four bodies which made up the new scrutiny arrangements:

- Scrutiny Management Board
- Corporate Scrutiny Committee
- Health Scrutiny Committee
- Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee mirrored the work of the old Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee, where it would scrutinise finance and performance. It would also scrutinise external partnerships and companies such as the Children's Trust. The following key areas were also agreed by Full Council as the basis of scrutiny for this Committee:

- Council owned buildings and resources
- Enabling Services e.g. Information Technology
- Outside Bodies
- Customer Services
- Complaints

The Scrutiny Management Board was due to hold a workshop over the summer 2023, at which it would review the work programme from the previous year and to consider topics for inclusion in the Annual Workplan.

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

- i. Resources given to EAPs had reduced the resources available for scrutiny. Those resources should be redirected to the scrutiny function.
- ii. In response to a question about performance data and whether the Committee would have an input and be able to follow the information through, officers advised that it would be a corporate report and any specific data requirements could be discussed with officers.
- iii. It was clarified that the Scrutiny Workshop would be for Scrutiny Management Board members only, but the outcomes would be circulated to all scrutiny members.
- iv. Protocols still needed to be established for how items to be referred for scrutiny would be dealt with, but discussions could be held with the Chair as part of their role as a member of the Scrutiny Management Board. Members were reminded that scrutiny did not all have to be done through a formal meeting.

RESOLVED

- (i) To note the new Scrutiny arrangements which came into effect in May 2023; and
- (ii) To note the new Terms of Reference for the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

5. Performance Indicators Report 2023/24 (Period 1)

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance and Performance 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 1 (April 2023).

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Dorothy Maxwell addressed the Committee and raised the issue of support for primary SEN children. The Chair suggested that Councillor Maxwell should discuss the issue with the Executive Director of Children's Services outside of this meeting.

Comments on several specific indicators were made, including:

- Did the definition for flytipping also include fly posting? In response, it was confirmed that flyposting was dealt with as if it was flytipping. If it was occurring, please report it to officers as it was an offence and any incidents may be able to be enforced. With respect of signage put up by highways contractors and left, this was not treated as flytipping but there were other powers which could be used for its removal.
- Number of defects outstanding on the network (STP29) – some reports of defects were closed down without any explanation. It was clarified that reports should not be closed down without a reason and these should be explained on Fix My Street. However, duplicate reports for the same defect would be closed down.
- Could officers explain why some of the PIs did not have a target? Members believed that all should have a target and it would also be useful to identify those PIs which are provided on behalf of government departments. In response, officers advised that the new Performance Framework allowed for PIs without targets and these were usually those PIs where we could not control a target and it was more useful to monitor trends. Officers would look at which indicators were statutory returns.
- It was suggested that training around KPIs would be helpful for the Committee.
- Number of defects repaired in the new network (STP30) – it was noted that demand was greater than the resources available and the Council needed to put in more resources. The highways provider should be scrutinised over their performance.
- Where possible, did the Council claim back from those utility companies who failed to make up the channels that were going under, for example broadband as this was a burden that fell on the taxpayer. Could this be put forward as a potential KPI?
- Why had vacancies and sickness absence been taken out of the report? In response, officers advised that good quality data was extremely important, and this data was being reviewed and would be reported on a quarterly basis.

RESOLVED:

To note the performance of the Council and its services.

6. Draft Outturn 2022/23

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance and Performance which set out the draft outturn for 2022/23. The report set out the material financial issues which had been identified since the 2022/23 budget had been set in February 2022 and was based on the draft outturn for 2022/23.

The draft outturn reflected an overspend of £965k and due to strong financial management, the Council had been able to absorb most of the pressures arising from the Children's Trust. This was the Council's largest single contract and they were reporting an overspend of £21.387m, the cost of which to the Council was £9.444m.

The Council's overall draft outturn forecast for the Housing Revenue Account was a forecast underspend of £701k against the approved budget of £36.270m.

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

- i. The overspend by the Children's Trust was worrying and what actions were being taken to address this? In response, officers advised that they were continuously working with the Children's Trust to look at service delivery. Due to the arrangements for the establishment of the Trust, the two councils did not have operational oversight.
- ii. The Council had two demand led services, children's and adults social care. Adults had delivered around its budget but children's was raising a red flag and could be a significant risk to the Council. Were the Council confident that children were being looked after effectively? In response, officers confirmed that they were constantly trying to work with the Trust who had significant pressures on staffing, placement costs and transport. We were also working with the Department for Education, escalating any challenges that we saw. It would be legitimate to ask whether the Chair of the Improvement Board could attend a future meeting, also the Chair of the Trust.
- iii. In the report, one paragraph stated that there was a saving on street lighting but in another paragraph, it stated that there was a pressure. In response, officers advised that there were a number of street lighting assets and contracts. Some were managed under a contract with Balfour Beatty, but the former district and borough lighting was managed through a separate contract and that is why there were different outturns.
- iv. In response to a question as to whether the government had undertaken their review of Business Rates, officers clarified that it had been delayed for another year. A reset was now expected in 2025/26 but this may now be delayed until after the next general election. This was leading to uncertainty around our funding schemes.
- v. The situation with the Children's Trust was similar to what had happened at the former County Council. The Executive Member stated that the situation at the County Council was due to the lack of management and control over the service. NNC did not have control over the Trust.
- vi. How was the Council not aware of the situation with Kettering Leisure Village if they were aware of pressures on other leisure facilities? In response, the Executive Member advised that the Council had made a separate grant to KLV of £337k. KLV was run by a separate, private company and NNC only knew of the proposed closure at the last moment, the same time as everyone else.

RESOLVED:

To note the draft outturn report 2022/23.

7. Capital Forecast 2022/23

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance and Performance which set out the Capital Forecast 2022/23 as at Period 12. The report set out the material financial issues identified since the 2022/23 budget was set in February 2022.

The outturn for 2022/23 in respect of General Fund Capital Programme showed a revised capital budget position of £109.3m, including slippage and in-year approved programmes. The spend was £35.4m, which represented movement (slippage/underspend) of £73.9 against the revised budget.

The outturn for the HRA Capital Programme showed a revised budget for 2022/23 of £28.3m, including slippage from 2021/22 of £14.3 and approvals in-year of £0.610m. The outturn was showing a spend of £9.6m, which represented an underspend of £18.7m compared to budget.

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

- i. An underspend of £73m was significant. These were projects which were intended to improve the wellbeing of local residents and there needed to be scrutiny of the capital Programme. In response, officers advised that scrutiny had been undertaken on the programme. A lot of the capital schemes were from the legacy councils, and these had been reviewed and revised. The capital programme was a combination of funding, including grants and discretionary funding. The funding was still there but would be put to projects that we think can be delivered.

RESOLVED:

To note the provisional Capital Outturn 2022/23.

8. Close of Meeting

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

The meeting closed at 8.25pm.

Chair

Date