

Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

At 7:00pm on Tuesday 10 October 2023

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

Present:

Members

Councillor Lora Lawman (Vice Chair, in the Chair)

Councillor Jim Hakewill

Councillor Zoe McGhee

Councillor Paul Marks

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

Jane Bethea – Director of Public Health

Guy Holloway – Assistant Chief Executive

Mark Dickenson – Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy

Claire Edwards – Assistant Director of Finance Accountancy

Lucy Hogston – Assistant Director of Revenues and Benefits

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

18. Apologies for Non-Attendance

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Lyn Buckingham, Richard Levell, Steven North and Anup Pandey.

19. 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	Key Performance Indicators Report (Periods 3 and 4)	Is a member of the Corporate Parenting Board.		Yes

20. Notification of Requests to Address the Meeting

There were no requests to address the meeting.

21. Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 August 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 August 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

22. Key Performance Indicators Report 2023/24 (Period 3 and 4)

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 periods 3 and 4 (June and July 2023).

Comments on several specific indicators were made, including:

- Number of children currently missing from education (BBF33) and Number of children without a school place (BBF22) – members highlighted that this was a significant issue. Many of the children affected were on an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or received free school meals so were very vulnerable. Members were keen to understand what was being done to tackle this issue and how these young people were being supported. The Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing, who would shortly also be undertaking the role of Interim Director of Children's Services, advised that he would shortly be holding some meetings with the team and would provide feedback.

RESOLVED:

To note the performance of the Council and its services.

23. Forecast Draft Outturn for 2023/24 (Period 4)

The Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy presented the report which set out the draft outturn for 2023/24 as at Period 4. The report set out the material financial issues which had been identified since the budget had been set in February 2023.

The forecast outturn position for the General Fund was an overspend of £7.354m and an overspend of £16k for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The Dedicated Schools Grant was forecasting a £4m overspend.

The Children's Trust were forecasting an overspend of £22.954m, of which the cost to the Council was £10.136m. The main pressure within the Children's Trust related to placements for children in care.

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

- i. Members questioned whether it was now time to extricate the Council from the contract with the Children's Trust. The Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing advised that it was the Council's wish to provide these services directly in the future, however the current arrangements were by direction

of the Department for Education. The challenge to both councils was that they carried the risk but could not influence.

RESOLVED:

To note the draft outturn report for 2023/24.

24. Indicative Budget Timeline and Scrutiny Process 2024/25

The Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy presented the report which set out the 2024/25 budget setting process and scrutiny arrangements. The report provided an overview of the budget timeline for the 2024/25 budget process, which included an update on the proposed arrangements for scrutiny.

The Council was required to set a balanced General Fund Budget and the levels of Council Tax for 2024/25 at its meeting in February 2024. It would also set a balanced HRA Budget and rent levels, along with a Capital Programme for both the General Fund and HRA.

The following indicative timetable for the setting of the budget was proposed and would be subject to amendment in light of government announcements and other potential changes:

Key Dates	Activity
<i>During Year</i>	<i>Budget Monitoring reports produced which will be presented to Executive and Corporate Scrutiny.</i>
30 October 2023 to 20 November 2023	Phase 1 Scrutiny - Committee to have dedicated session with Service Directors and separately the Children’s Trust to understand the current in year position for the budgets, which will inform the requirement for 2024/25.
7 November 2023	<i>Children’s Trust</i> - Business and Budget Plan proposals discussed at Operational Commissioning Group
21 November 2023	<i>Children’s Trust</i> - Business and Budget Plan proposals discussed at Strategic Commissioning Group
22 November 2023	Autumn Statement will outline the government’s plans for spending, taxation and borrowing for 2024/25.
30 November 2023	<i>Children’s Trust</i> - Final date for draft budget proposals to be agreed
4 December 2023	<i>Children’s Trust</i> - Phase 2 Scrutiny session – to review the Children’s Trust 2024/25 budget
w/c 18 December 2023	Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement expected
21 December 2023	Draft Budget 2024/25 report presented to Executive. Consultation on the budget will commence following the meeting and subject to Executive approval.

Key Dates	Activity
	Draft Schools Budget (Dedicated Schools Grant) to Schools Forum. <i>Children's Trust</i> – Corporate Scrutiny Committee feedback to December Executive
8 January 2024 to 19 January 2024	Phase 2 Scrutiny – Committee to scrutinise the Council's Budget Proposals with sessions for each Directorate. To include presentation to Corporate Scrutiny on the overarching draft budget proposals. HRA rent increase consultation to tenants' forums / representatives.
15 January 2024	<i>Children's Trust</i> - Latest date that the Council is required to seek approval of the contract sum
18 January 2024	Budget Update to Executive following the Local Government Finance Settlement, if it is not announced before the December draft budget report.
23 January 2024	Corporate Scrutiny Committee to consider report on the feedback from the Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups.
26 January 2024	Budget consultation ends (proposed date)
8 February 2024	Updated Budget reports, including feedback from Scrutiny, presented to Executive for approval and recommendation on to Council
22 February 2024	Setting of the Budget - Suite of Budget Reports presented to Council for approval

Phase 1 of scrutiny would look at the in-year position and the detail of the current budgets and activity as well as general pressures and opportunities. This would include any updates with regard to government funding arrangements and any other proposals. Phase 2 would take place once the 2024/25 draft budgets proposals had been reported to the Executive, which was expected to be on 21 December 2023. The Scrutiny process would complete in January 2024 to feed into the updated budget report to Executive on 8 February 2024.

During discussion on the report the following key points were made

- In response to a question from Members, officers confirmed that the draft Children's Trust budget proposals had been received.
- Members questioned how vulnerable residents would be affected due to the budget savings requirements. The Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy advised that key services would be provided to residents. An Equalities Impact Assessment would be developed throughout the process to assess the impact on residents.

RESOLVED to note:

- (i) the proposed timeline for the setting of the budget.
- (ii) the proposed budget setting and scrutiny arrangements for the Children's Trust.

- (iii) the overall indicative timeline for the budget setting for the Council.
- (iv) the proposal for the scrutiny of the Council's budgets.

25. Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25

The Assistant Director of Revenues and Benefits presented the report which provided an update on the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023/24 and proposed a scheme for 2024/25.

Each Local Authority was required to determine a Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS). Local discretion related to the maximum level of support available to working age claimants, and therefore the minimum percentage of the Council Tax bill they were expected to meet. Council agreed at its meeting in November 2022 that the minimum contribution for 2023/24 would be 25%. It was proposed to keep the LCTSS the same for 2024/25 at 25%.

Members wished to thank the Assistant Director and her staff for all their work in trying to help our vulnerable residents.

RESOLVED:

To recommend the proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 to the Executive.

26. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report 2022/23

The Executive Director of Customer and Governance presented the report which provided the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report (LGSCO) for 2022/23 and which provided the final stage for complaints about councils and social care.

The LGSCO had received 64 complaints in respect of NNC in 2022-23, compared to 55 the previous year. The number of complaints received by the LGSCO broken down by service area was:-

Service area	2021-22	2022-23
Adult Care Services	6	8
Benefits & Tax	8	3
Corporate & Other Services	N/A	8
Education & Children's Services	16	22
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	5	9
Highways & Transport	3	2
Housing	8	6
Planning & Development	9	6
Total	55	64

The LGSCO had noted that it welcomed the Council's agreement for and implementation of seven cases in 2022-23. However, it was disappointed that the Council had not completed four of them within the agreed timescales. It also noted that some information requested from the Council was provided late.

In response, officers were now implementing revised procedures to ensure that all LGSCO queries were responded to on time, and were also ensuring that where action was agreed, it was taken within the agreed timescales. It was therefore expected that these improvements would be noted in the LGSCO's annual report next year.

During discussion on the report the following points were made:

- i. It was noted that complaints to the Housing Ombudsman were not included in the report. The Executive Director of Customer and Governance advised that the Housing Ombudsman did not provide an annual report but now that these complaints would be managed through the Corporate Complaints Team, they would be included in future reports to the Committee.
- ii. It was noted that the highest number of complaints related to EHCPs and members questioned what was being done to improve performance. In response, the Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing undertook to get updates and would pick this issue up outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

To note the content and recommendations of the LGSCO'S annual review letter for 2022/23.

27. Scrutiny Work Plan for Corporate Scrutiny Committee

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee received the Scrutiny Work Plan as it related to the Committee.

During discussion on the report the following points were made:

- i. A member questioned the exclusion of the agreed review into Green Burials on the Work Plan. The review had been agreed by both Full Council and the former Scrutiny Commission. The Chair agreed to refer the matter back to the Scrutiny Management Board.

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the Scrutiny Work Plan as it relates to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.
- (ii) That the Chair and Vice Chair refer the matter of Green Burials back to the Scrutiny Management Board.

28. Close of Meeting

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

The meeting closed at 7.45pm.

Chair

Date