

Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

At 7:00pm on Tuesday 13 February 2024

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

Present:

Members

Councillor Lyn Buckingham (Chair)

Councillor Jim Hakewill

Councillor Richard Levell

Councillor Lora Lawman (Vice Chair)

Councillor Paul Marks

Councillor Zoe McGhee

Officers

Janice Gotts – Executive Director of Finance and Performance

David Watts – Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing and
Interim Director of Children’s Services

George Candler – Executive Director of Place and Economy

Mark Dickenson – Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy

Claire Edwards – Assistant Director of Finance Accountancy

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

45. Apologies for Non-Attendance

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Steven North, Anup Pandey and Russell Roberts.

46. Members’ Declarations of Interest

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

No declarations of interest were made.

47. Notification of Requests to Address the Meeting

There were no requests to address the meeting.

48. Minutes of the Meetings held on 12 December 2023 and 23 January 2024

The minutes of the meetings held on 12 December 2023 and 23 January 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

49. Key Performance Indicators Report 2023/24 (Period 8)

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 8 (November 2023).

Comments on several specific indicators were made, including:

- In response to a question as to how an item identified within the performance report could become a task and finish group, the Chair advised that any requests for a task and finish group would be considered by the Scrutiny Management Board. The Chair undertook to establish how many requests for a scrutiny review from back benchers had been approved by the Scrutiny Management Board.
- A green burials review had been agreed by Full Council and the former Scrutiny Commission but had not progressed. The Vice Chair advised that this issue had been taken back to the Scrutiny Management Board, where it was confirmed that a strategy should be developed by the appropriate EAP and then the outcome of that work, scrutinised by the relevant scrutiny committee.
- % children in care with three or more placements in the previous 12 months (BBF07) – the improved performance was welcomed but the establishment of emergency homes was not a permanent solution. In response, the Director of Children's Services advised that more local homes were being looked at. When a child was in crisis, it was better for them to be supported closer to their home.
- Number of rough sleepers (AFL12) – it was concerning that the number of rough sleepers was higher than the benchmark of seven when support had been put in to help them. The Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing advised that the number of rough sleepers fluctuated. Not all rough sleepers accepted support and often refused to go into temporary accommodation.
- Prior to vesting day, the former Borough Council of Wellingborough had purchased a number of properties for emergency accommodation. The Executive Director undertook to look outside of this meeting what the status was of those properties.
- It was noted in the local press that the Euro Hotel was being decommissioned for rough sleepers. The Executive Director advised that they were always looking at capacity and the hotel would be recommissioned if needed. The Council would ideally invest in more appropriate accommodation.

RESOLVED:

To note the performance of the Council and its services.

50. Forecast Draft Outturn for 2023/24 (Period 8)

The Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy presented the report which set out the draft outturn for 2023/24 as at Period 8. 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 £8.552m and an overspend of £121k for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was forecasting a £9.019m overspend.

The Children's Trust were forecasting an overspend of £24.577m, of which the cost to the Council was £10.853m. The main pressure within the Children's Trust related to placements for children in care. If these pressures were not mitigated this would pose a significant financial risk to the Council.

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

- i. In response to a question as to what measures had been put in place to deal with the demand in adults services, the Executive Director advised that a number of actions had been put in place. The directorate was looking to deliver around £5m of savings during 2024/25. New activity introduced included increased client contributions, a programme of work around assistive technology, review of high care packages, increasing the number of single-handed care packages and working with the Children's Trust around transitions.
- ii. It was accepted that it would be difficult to find savings but how would management know that the proposed savings would not affect the standard of care provided and how did staff feel about the move towards more single-handed care? In response, the Executive Director advised that the aim was to make services more efficient and not reduce the level of care. It was important that the right conditions were in place for staff and it would be necessary to ensure that it was safe to go to single-handed care. It would be risk assessed before any changes.
- iii. How would the work around transitions be quantified? The Executive Director advised work would be done around preventative proposals and supporting the Children's Trust with commissioning activity. It was better to work with families to manage their needs. There would be a number of measures in place including looking at outcomes, reviewing cases with the Trust through strengths based practice and case file audits. The Accountability Board for SEND was also being refreshed.
- iv. In response to a question as to why there was an overspend for the Children's Trust, officers advised that there had been an increase in staffing and placement costs. There were pressures in recruiting staff which required the use of agency staff, who were more expensive, and therefore this put a pressure on the budget.
- v. In response to a question to the Executive Member on how he scrutinised the budgets, the Executive Member explained that the budget was owned by all members and officers of the Council. Month-by-month monitoring reports were considered and this was also done on a day to day basis by officers. The Executive met weekly and also met before the Executive meeting to examine the reports in detail. The non-demand services were performing very well.
- vi. Having a high level of vacancies within Finance and Performance teams was a risk to the Council, how was this risk being managed? In response, officers advised that both the Performance and Internal Audit teams were now at full complement. This meant that the Audit Plan was being delivered and

performing well. External contractors in Audit were brought in if needed, but it was acknowledged that this was a difficult area for recruitment.

- vii. In relation to the deficit on the DSG, was there a potential liability on the Council? In response, officers advised that there was potentially a liability if the statutory override was removed by the government. It was acknowledged that not enough money was going into the high needs block. There was money in reserves, but it needed to be remembered that once reserves were spent, they were gone. When reserves were used, there needed to be an exit strategy and for them to be replenished. If the government stated that we needed to cover the deficit, we would be in a better position than some other authorities. The statutory override had been extended until March 2026 and we would be looking at ways to reduce the deficit. We needed to working with the government to develop a recovery plan. A bid had been made for an alternative provision unit and we were also looking at more support in mainstream schools through high needs units, however this was a challenge nationally.

RESOLVED:

To note the draft outturn report for 2023/24 as at Period 8.

51. 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. The ICT Value for Money Scrutiny Panel needed to be re-established. There was a need to examine whether we were getting value for money for what we paid to West Northamptonshire Council.

RESOLVED:

To note the Scrutiny Work Plan as it relates to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

52. Close of Meeting

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

The meeting closed at 8.32pm.

Chair

Date