

Performance Scrutiny Committee's Commentary for the Cabinet meeting on 19 January 2021

Performance Scrutiny Committee 18 December 2020

The Committee considered the revenue savings, pressures and investment proposals for 2021/22 to 2025/26 and the proposed themes for inclusion within the refreshed corporate plan at its meeting on 18 December 2020.

Corporate Plan

There needs to be a closer alignment between the Corporate Plan and the budget proposals so that Members can see how the budget is being used to meet the priorities.

Adult Services

There was concern expressed at the reduced provision of step-down beds and increasing use of home care provision and whether there is likely to be a greater risk for those being discharged from hospital as a result.

Members shared officers' concern about the likely long-term effects of long-COVID, perhaps leading to much greater pressures in 2022/23.

Given the savings being projected through the increasing switch to home care the Committee would like to see the Council being in a position to support more people and to support them from an earlier stage.

Children's Services

Members welcomed the fact that the £400,000 investment in SEND remains in the budget for 2021/22 even though this year's spend was not drawn down due to COVID-19.

The Committee agreed that the new Council elected next year should take a look at the projected savings in the area of School Transport to ensure that the provision made is sustainable.

The Committee was reassured that plans for a new children's home have not been shelved but that they are simply being reviewed to ensure that they meet the needs. Members would like to see a reduction in the numbers being provided for out-of-county.

Members were supportive of increased funding for apprenticeships to recognise that young people will need more support following the effects of COVID-19.

Members also asked for assurances that the reduction in management by combining Early Years Teams will not reduce the level of support available for schools.

Public Health

The Committee supports the issue being raised nationally that increased government support is needed to finance greater costs that local authorities incur in services commissioned with the NHS following the pay award.

Members asked the Director for Public Health to ensure that programmes related to domestic abuse are well coordinated with the work of the Police and Crime Commissioner, who has a large budget for this issue, as well as the work of the city and district councils.

The Committee would like to see the additional £1m in the Youth Offer being targeted at tackling inequality and were pleased to hear that discussions have already taken place between Public Health and Children's Services as to how to best do that.

Members were assured that the savings under accident prevention were the result of eliminating duplication with other partners and that programmes will continue in this area.

Environment and Place

Members welcomed the extension of the street permit system and the increased level of cost recovery in fees charged to developers.

It was noted that the issue of drain clearance is more critical in rural areas and there was a request to use the increased funding to improve the frequency of clearances in problem areas. Members themselves should be consulted more in prioritisation as they are well aware of the problem locations in their division.

Members welcomed the moves to co-design 20 mph speed limit areas with parish councils and community groups and hoped that parish council funds could be used to support these.

Customers, Organisational Development and Resources

Concern was expressed at the reduction in the book fund and the fact that this is an annual occurrence. Members asked that the libraries be protected, especially as it provides a particularly valuable service for disadvantaged people.

Commercial Development, Assets and Investments

Members asked that the issues surrounding leisure centre joint use agreements, which are a major headache for the schools involved, be resolved as soon as possible.

It was noted that proposals relating to the use of council property have been promised for 10 or 12 years and, while understanding that this has been difficult year in which to progress proposals, Members would like to see movement on this soon.

The importance of enforcing HGV limits was emphasised and Members were concerned at the small reduction in staffing for enforcement officers when the current level of enforcement is not seen to be adequate.

Corporate Measures

Members welcomed the saving in relation to the new approach on insurance, which also see savings for schools, and were reassured that it has been achieved without any increase in risk.

The Committee also received assurances that staffing levels are sufficient, and are being monitored regularly, to ensure that the capacity is there to carry out the various change programmes.

Performance Scrutiny Committee 14 January 2021

The Committee considered the Capital and Investment Strategy including:

- Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22
- Investment Strategy 2021/22
- Property Strategy
- Proposed Capital Programme 2021/22 to 2030/31
- Proposed changes to the Capital Programme

Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22

Members asked for consideration to be given to increasing the investment in externally managed funds from £100m to £125m as it appears that there is sufficient long term cash available to support this. It was noted that these investments generate a higher rate of return than in-house investments.

Investment Strategy 2021/22 and Property Strategy

Members welcomed the increased focus on the property estate and were supportive of the approach set out in the Investment Strategy 2021/22 and Property Strategy. However, Members requested earlier engagement with local Members about opportunities to develop Council owned sites within their areas.

Members also urged more partnership working with City and District Councils when considering the use and development of Council assets.

Members noted that there is a tension between reducing the amount of property and people having to travel further when considering climate change concerns.

Proposed Capital Programme and Proposed Changes to the Capital Programme

The Committee welcomed the proposed additions to the programme.

The Committee received assurances that the proposed investment in Property set out in the Proposed ten year Capital Programme is adequate to meet the current requirements. However, condition survey work is being undertaken on the Council's estate and further proposals for investment may be brought forward in future years.