

# PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Friday, 21 July 2023 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.25 pm

**Present:**

**Voting Members:** Councillor Eddie Reeves – in the Chair

Councillor Donna Ford  
Councillor Damian Haywood  
Councillor Bob Johnston  
Councillor Kieron Mallon  
Councillor Ian Middleton  
Councillor Trish Elphinstone  
Councillor Alison Rooke

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillor Charlie Hicks (virtually, owing to officer error)  
Councillor Glynis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services  
Councillor Michael O'Connor, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities

**Officers:** Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance  
Andrew Richards, Enterprise Resource Planning Programme Manager  
Steven Fairhurst-Jones, Senior Policy Officer  
Michael Fletcher, Head of HR Partnering and Advisory  
Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes  
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Manager

*The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting [, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting/the following additional documents:] and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports [agenda, reports and schedule/additional documents] are attached to the signed Minutes.*

## **19/23 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE 2023/24 CIVIC YEAR** (Agenda No. 1)

It was proposed by Cllr Johnston, seconded by Cllr Ford and **AGREED** that Cllr Reeves be appointed Chair of the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2023/24 civic year. There were no other nominations.

Cllr Reeves assumed the role of Chair at this point.

**20/23 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE 2023/24 CIVIC YEAR**  
(Agenda No. 2)

It was proposed by Cllr Elphinstone, seconded by Cllr Johnstone and **AGREED** that Cllr Baines be appointed vice-Chair of the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2023/24 civic year. There were no other nominations.

**21/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS**  
(Agenda No. 3)

The following Councillors tendered apologies:

Cllr Baines (Cllr Elphinstone substituting)  
Cllr Fawcett (Cllr Rooke substituting)  
Cllr Haywood

Cllr Hicks logged into the meeting virtually following an officer error but was advised that under the Council Procedure Rule 10 he would be unable to participate.

**22/23 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE**  
(Agenda No. 4)

None

**23/23 MINUTES**  
(Agenda No. 5)

Following review, the minutes of the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 28 April 2023 were **AGREED** as a correct record.

**24/23 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS**  
(Agenda No. 6)

None

**25/23 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN AND COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN**  
(Agenda No. 7)

The Scrutiny Manager explained to the Committee changes to the planned Work Programme from the last minute, explaining their rationales. The proposed work programme was **AGREED** subject to the following amendments:

- Capital and revenue expenditure be brought to the September Scrutiny meeting.
- That the draft report to Cabinet deciding whether to progress to a procurement for the Business Services Transformation project return to the committee at a date most suitable to the existing timetable.

- The Employee Engagement survey and associated action plans be brought to the September Scrutiny meeting.
- That the Committee's wish to have the Workforce Strategy return after 12 months be organised by the Scrutiny Manager.

It was **AGREED** that the Scrutiny Manager schedule a date outside half-term for the extraordinary meeting scheduled October/November with expected attendees.

## **26/23 BUSINESS SERVICES TRANSFORMATION**

(Agenda No. 8)

Councillor Glynis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance, and Andrew Richards, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Manager presented to the Committee an update report concerning the Business Services Transformation Project.

Cllr Phillips conveyed Tim Spiers, Director of Digital and ICT's apologies for being unable to attend the rescheduled meeting. Lorna Baxter introduced the report in greater detail. An important focus of the Business Services Transformation lay not just in making changes to core systems such as HR, Payroll, Finance and Procurement but in communicating with staff to ensure deeper confidence and competence around using the functions of any incoming system or systems. One of the learning points from the current system, which users variously reported as finding confusing, clunky, difficult or deficient. The most recent report which had gone to Cabinet, an outline business case in April 2023 had recommended the full or partial in-sourcing of finance, procurement, HR and payroll functions, as well as enabling technology, which meant that was the direction being pursued. Nevertheless, within that broad outline remained a number of important decisions around full or partial insourcing in order to develop a preferred option on which to progress the business case. The option to remain with IBC, the existing provider, and improving efficiency was also being explored owing to a forthcoming upgrade. Steps taken to date had included the holding of wide engagement with stakeholders across the Council and the different functional areas through interviews and workshops to understand the project requirements. Following this, a business case would be developed to go to Cabinet in November. Timings-wise, it was noted that any shift to a new system would need to occur before or after IBC's own upgrade; owing to its extent and complexity it would not be possible to make a move during that period. Known risks and the associated mitigation activities planned and delivered were kept on a detailed risk register, with progress reported to the programme board on a monthly basis.

In response, the Committee raised a number of issues for discussion including the following

- Risk management. Many of the risks in the risk register were recognised by the committee to have high likelihood and/or impacts. It was, however, explained that these reflected the pre-mitigation risk levels, which it would be contrary to transparency to downplay, and that the Council's mitigations would then be expected to reduce the levels of risk to more acceptable levels. It was put forwarded to the Committee that the failure to manage risks sufficiently at the time IBC had been originally adopted had led

to significant disruption and pressure on staff to maintain services. It was recognised that there would be value in presenting expected post-mitigation risk levels, as well as greater granularity in regards to the scoring in future reports. It was also confirmed to the committee that there was a more detailed, scored risk register, which allowed greater targeting of resources to the most necessary mitigation activities.

- The feasibility of implementing a change programme. A key challenge was identified as filtering out familiarity with the new system and its responsibilities to staff and managers further from the core of the organisation, a problem which would be made significantly harder owing to the high turnover in staff meaning there was less time to embed changes from a point of familiarity and a threat to continuity. In response, it was noted that staff turnover was on a downward trend, that the Council had learnt from the implementation of the previous roll-out and had set aside £1.5m to bring in additional capacity. Furthermore, it was ensuring the change was being undertaken slowly to allow pre-identification and mitigation of problems whilst putting as little additional stress on staff capacity.

- The underpinning justifications for change. The Committee challenged whether the weightings used to determine the outcomes of the project were correctly aligned with the drivers as described in the report. Usability for staff formed only 30% of the weighting, as opposed to financial concerns at 40%, and yet the principal issue was frustration over usability. It was explained to the committee that if the weightings were to be factored into groupings, finance would occupy 40% and the other three aspects – business users, functional users and technical/implementation – formed 60%, illustrating the concern for usability over simply financial impacts.

- Capturing the 'real' scope. Given the necessity of workarounds to the system the Committee expressed concern over whether these would really be captured and thus whether the new system would provide a real solution. A survey had gone out across the organisation two days prior and had had a 35% response already. It was expected that there would be a high response rate owing to the fact respondees had volunteered to be involved, the high initial response rate and the energy of managers in following up those who had not replied. This exercise would enable the capture of a detailed picture of usage, both within and without the system.

- Other IBC partners. Further information was sought regarding the decisions made by other partners using the IBC system. One operational partner, Kensington and Chelsea, was confirmed to have given notice, the remaining operational partners had given no indication of wishing to move away, and the founding strategic partners remained committed to the system. On further questioning officers confirmed that they were in regular contact with the project lead at Kensington and Chelsea. The driver for change had been a similar issue to Oxfordshire - the level of inflexibility of the current system, but primarily from an HR perspective. Kensington and Chelsea had made the decision to move to a system provided by Oracle, and officers were seeking to learn as much as they could from their experience.

**ACTION.:** For the in-depth, scored risk register to be distributed to members.

It was **AGREED** to submit a report to Cabinet outlining the Committee's observations concerning its preference for an in-house system, issues of staff capacity, the potential disconnect between the weighting of the outcomes of the project and the stated drivers, but making no recommendations.

## **27/23 EDI ACTION PLAN 2023/24** (Agenda No. 12)

The Committee **AGREED** to a change in the order of the agenda to bring forward the EDI Action Plan 2023/24 item ahead of the remaining items.

Councillor Michael O'Connor, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities, Councillor Glynis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance, and Steven Fairhurst-Jones, Senior Policy Officer, presented to the Committee a report on the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Action Plan 2023/24.

Steven Fairhurst-Jones was invited to introduce the report. It contained three elements – the Council's Action Plan for its equality, diversity and inclusion activity, the 'Including Everyone' inequalities framework, and the RACE equalities code.

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty the Council was required to have a 4-year strategy for tackling inequalities, and an annual action plan to implement it. The action plan in the report had been signed off and was the Council's live plan for the current year.

"Including Everyone" was likely familiar to members having been adopted some time previously as the Council's inequalities framework and the Council could point to a number of successes inequalities through the framework, including being awarded a Stonewall gold award earlier in the year in recognition of our commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion at work, running a successful campaign to recruit on-call fire fighters from different backgrounds – as a result women made up over 10% of the service's operational workforce, and supporting 51 people with long-term health issues or a disability to gain or maintain employment. Good work aside, inequalities remained, and the Council's action plan sought to focus in on the actions which would make the biggest difference, or which most effectively act on feedback from our staff, Staff Networks or residents. The framework would be due for renewal by October 2024, and whilst councillors would have additional opportunities to comment, they were invited to give early feedback.

Finally, the RACE equalities code was introduced as an external source of accreditation around racial and ethnic issues, an area in which the Council's own staffing diversity did not necessarily mirror its population. Senior officers were keen that the accreditation be earned as a means of addressing this issue.

Councillor O'Connor further introduced the details of the action plan; the Council's main areas of focus were fostering inclusive communities, inclusive service delivery and an inclusive workforce. An area of particular interest was whole-Council approaches to delivering these actions, particularly the outward looking ones, such as the promotion of social value and tackling inequalities through the way the Council procures its goods and services. The proposed RACE equality code accreditation was welcomed on the basis of its high level of accountability and clear actions needing to be taken.

Councillor Phillips referenced the latter paper on the workforce report to highlight to the Committee the distance the Council needed to travel if it wished to have a representative workforce. According to the 2021 census data, 23.2% of the Oxfordshire population were from non-white backgrounds, compared to 9.85% working for the Council. In view of the scale of the challenge, contributions needed to be made to its achievement across the entire organisation.

In response to the report the Committee raised a number of points, including:

- The accessibility of the action plan. A number of members, including those without visual impairments, struggled to read the action plan owing to the font size. Members were assured that for those who requested it the action plan could be made available in large print. A further aspect of accessibility concerned the language used, and concerns were raised that regular residents of Oxfordshire may be unable to understand sufficiently the action plan owing to its use of technical language.
- Stonewall accreditation. In view of the number of organisations who were consciously ceasing to secure Stonewall accreditation it was requested that the justification for including the accreditation as part of the Council's plan was questioned. Though it was recognised by officers that the feedback received as part of the accreditation had been helpful to the Council in informing its action plan, little further discussion was held in response, and it was requested that a written response be provided instead.
- Positive discrimination. Assurances were sought that the Council was avoiding positive discrimination and diversity targets. It was put forward in response that the aim of the Council was to create a welcoming and inclusive environment, whilst also recognising that to deliver for residents in the best way possible it was necessary to ensure the Council's workforce understood and reflected the diversity of its population. The action within the action plan which best reflected stated that the Council would be more welcoming and attractive towards candidates from diverse backgrounds, but did not set any specific targets for recruitment diversity needing to be achieved.
- A question was raised concerning direct-entry into management positions within the fire service, but the matter was not discussed owing to the issue primarily falling within the remit of a Cabinet Member who had not been invited to the meeting, Cllr Kate Gregory.
- Monitoring. The Council's accountability for following through on its actions was queried. In response, it was put forward that the actions within the action plan were SMART and benchmarked, and that a named Cabinet member and corporate director was allocated to each action allowing more granular accountability than simply that from overall corporate responsibility.

- Digital connectivity. The issue of digital connectivity was raised as an example of what might happen to the Council's aspirations when providing for harder to reach residents was difficult or expensive. It was pointed out in response that the Council's activity around digital connectivity had been a success in that it had ensured digital access for areas of the county which would otherwise be unserved by commercial suppliers.
- Co-production. More information was sought regarding the precise outputs of the Council's undertakings to engage in 12 co-production meetings around adult social care. In response it was explained that these meetings provided the platform to hear from service users about how services were being delivered, and it would not be until their feedback was heard that further actions would be identified.

**ACTION:** For a large print version of the Council's EDI Action Plan to be distributed to committee members.

It was **AGREED** to submit a report to Cabinet outlining the Committee's observations concerning the accessibility of language within the EDI action plan, and the physical size of the text in the plan, the importance of continued monitoring. In addition, the report should include a recommendation that the Council provide an appraisal of the relationship with Stonewall and the justification for continued decision to seek Stonewall accreditation.

## **28/23 WORKFORCE REPORT AND WORKFORCE DATA Q4 22/23** (Agenda No. 9)

Councillor Glynis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance, and Michael Fletcher, Head of HR Partnering and Advisory were invited to present the report which was presented to Cabinet on 20 June concerning the Workforce Report and Data for Q4 of 2022/23.

Taking the report as read, Cllr Phillips highlighted some key points. The Council was looking hard at how to reduce its agency spend; in the last quarter £10.8m had been spent. Progress was made in reducing the agency spend in children's services, with a fall of almost £1m relative to the previous quarter. Concerning its demographic profile, the workforce had relatively few young staff, with only 4.4% of the workforce being under 25 and 22% being under 35. For people in this cohort, social value, work-life balance and a sense of purpose had been found to be more important a hook for staff than simply pay and benefits, a core observation underpinning the Council's Workforce Strategy. Whilst sickness rates had fallen over the year and were comparable with other local authorities, they remained above target rates and work was being undertaken to reduce them. Stress, anxiety and depression was the leading cause of sickness absence; the Council's Delivering the Future Together programme was a deliberate effort to invest in the wellbeing of staff, partially to address this issue.

In response the Committee raised the following issues for discussion:

- Agency spend. It was confirmed that agency spend had remained flat, reductions in spending for Children's Services was offset by a growth in Environment and Economy. Overall, steps being taken to reduce agency spend across the Council had been developed, 25 suggested steps had been considered and approved by the Council Management Team, with a Task and Finish Group established to work up more rounded proposals. These measures were important to counter the challenge of the increased pay and flexibility agency staff receive, which for many remained highly attractive. Ideas for improving flexibility were put forward by the Committee, but it was confirmed that annualised hours, purchasing of extra holiday and term-time only contracts were already part of the Council's offer. However, not all jobs were suitable to allow long-term periods of absence or high degrees of flexibility. Teachers, for example, had to be available during term time.
- Gender breakdown and proportion of disabled workers within the workforce, specifically whether having a 2:1 female to male balance and 6.14% having a disability was normal. It was confirmed that the gender split was within normal parameters, particularly in places with a health and social care focus. The proportion of people disclosing a disability was low and recognised as so. A key measure of success within the Workforce Strategy was the improvement of this measure, and steps were included within the Strategy to make the Council more attractive to prospective disabled applicants, and welcoming once they applied and were appointed.
- Absence rates. The importance of supporting those with stress, anxiety and depression was noted and the Council's absence rate vis a vis the private sector and other Councils was queried. Officer experience indicated that the numbers were broadly comparable. The Council did not monitor other public sector comparators but could do so.
- Longer-term trends. It was suggested that change by quarter or year was a valuable measure, but that some significant changes could only really be appreciated on a long-term view. As such, it would be valuable if longer, five-year trends for key KPIs were also published. In response, it was noted that over a period of five years big structural or organisational changes could take place, and indeed had done so. In such instances comparisons could be misleading as they would not be comparing like with like. The Committee's view was that higher level, corporate data might be less susceptible to change than individual services, notwithstanding the fundamental changes wrought to corporate-level working practices by Covid-19.
- The growth in employment and agency rates. The Committee noted that it would be expected that as the number of permanent members of staff increased, as they had, the number of agency staff would be expected to fall. This had not, in fact, happened. Both had gone up. It was explained that the Council had some very significant capital schemes, such as the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bid, which meant the Council had needed to bring in a high volume of temporary staff to address the skill and resource deficits created by them. Furthermore, with mandatory responsibilities in certain areas, the Council's headcount was at least partially demand-led. As demand increased, so would the need for additional staff simply to deliver business as usual services.



It was **AGREED** that a report be submitted to Cabinet outlining the Committee's observations around the importance of reducing agency spend, flexibility, and the wish to see the Council's ambitions to increase the number of disabled staff members employed at the Council; and to include the following recommendations:

- That the Council increases the contextual data provided in its Workforce Data reports, specifically to
  - a) Provide a five-year trend comparison for some statistics (to be confirmed via e mail outside the meeting)
  - b) To display directorate levels of turnover as percentage figures of the number employed
  - c) To identify a group of comparator councils and provide comparative performance data (to be confirmed via e mail outside the meeting)

## **29/23 DRAFT WORKFORCE STRATEGY**

(Agenda No. 10)

Councillor Glynnis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance, and Michael Fletcher, Head of HR Partnering and Advisory were invited to present a report on the Council's draft Workforce Strategy.

Councillor Phillips advised the Committee that the document in front of them was an early draft rather than a near-final version. Whilst it had been available for discussion within the organisation a new HR director would be joining the Council in September and it would be necessary to get agreement on it with the new post-holder before progressing to Cabinet, likely for consideration in November. The overall aim of the strategy was to ensure the Council had talented, committed and creative staff to enable it to be an efficient, high-performing organisation. The draft strategy sought to put forward how this might be achieved, focusing on four key areas: i) Attract, recruit and retain talented people, ii) Promote a positive and inclusive working environment, iii) Enable growth and development, iv) Develop leadership capability and high performance. The success of the strategy would be monitored through a set of key performance indicators, including ones over the Committee's concerns in previous items around agency spend and staff absence. An annual review of progress would be taking place, and it was offered to bring that back to the Committee.

In response, the Committee made the following observations and raise the following issues for discussion:

- Military Families. In light of the high number of military families in Oxfordshire, who face particular challenges with accessing work, that a dedicated work stream to access that talent pool would be worthwhile developing, particularly if it involved partnering with other councils to provide support to armed forces family members to identify suitable alternatives around their new locations.
- Internal promotion. The importance of opportunities for staff to advance within the organisation was underlined as a core element in addressing the degree of turnover within the organisation. The Council's target of achieving 160 internal promotions from a figure of 152 was questioned as being unambitious. It was

explained the figure of 152 actually represented a high watermark, so the target was to go beyond the Council's previous best performance.

- Following on from the previous item, a breakdown of the 5310 staff working for the Council between full time and part time was requested, and for the figures to be benchmarked against the figures five years previously.
- Corporate culture. The ability of staff to challenge behaviour which did not accord with the Council's values was questioned. The Council had in place formal whistleblowing and grievance processes, but, as would be explored in the following item, the Council was putting a lot of effort into embedding its values through less formal means via the Delivering the Future Together programme. Programme champions were already starting to receive and raise feedback from staff who had witnessed behaviour in need of challenge which did not meet the threshold of a formal grievance. Further to this, the work of union representatives and the Council's relationship with them was also noted as a source of support for staff members. It was requested Cllr Mallon's previous union membership be noted. Within the formal processes available, protections existed to enable issues to be raised to managers and directors outside of the employee's own directorate or line-management structure.

It was **AGREED** to submit a report to Cabinet recommending that the Council develop workstreams to target and support military families to work for the Council.

It was **AGREED** that the Committee's recommendation for five year data around staff numbers be appended to the Workforce Data report being submitted to Cabinet.

### **30/23 DELIVERING THE FUTURE TOGETHER - UPDATE AND IMPACTS** (Agenda No. 11)

Councillor Glynnis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance, and Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes were invited to present a report to the Committee, updating it on the Council's activity around Delivering the Future Together, and assessing its impacts.

The Committee was informed of Jo Hatfield's apologies for the meeting; she was on annual leave for the rescheduled meeting date. Councillor Phillips highlighted of the multiple work streams taking place under Delivering the Future Together the forum for two-way feedback between senior managers and staff representatives as being of particular value, and the subtle change of focus in 1-2-1s of the 12-3-2 model, which placed staff wellbeing at the front of manager concerns. A recent employee survey had been completed across the organisation with a 55% response rate from staff and Delivering the Future Together was a key means through which the actions to address issues raised were being pursued. The Delivering the Future Together programme provided a solid infrastructure to ensure that the Council remained rooted in its values and behaviours as challenges and contexts changed.

In response, it was noted by the Committee that there were some genuinely innovative ideas being put into operation and they were deeply welcomed. One question was raised over how it could be ensured that Delivering the Future Champions were approachable and independent. It was explained that the role of champion was a voluntary one; the self-selecting element tended towards attracting

people who understood and wanted to fulfil the role in the way it was intended. Further to this, champions were actively encouraged to move around their services, speaking to staff, attending team meetings and embedding themselves within the workings of the organisation in order to understand the concerns of all staff.

The report was **NOTED**.

**31/23 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER**  
(Agenda No. 13)

The Committee **NOTED** the status of previous actions and recommendations. Comment was made that it would be better if colour versions were to be provided.

It was **AGREED** that the Committee would no longer ask for a briefing on the Growth Deals and that be removed.

**32/23 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**  
(Agenda No. 14)

The Scrutiny Manager updated the Committee on the Cabinet’s response to the Cost of Living recommendation, which was confirmed after publication of the Scrutiny meeting agenda. The response was **NOTED**.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing ..... 200