

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Friday, 18 December 2020 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 4.45 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE – in the Chair
Councillor Jenny Hannaby (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Nick Carter
Councillor Tony Ilott
Councillor Liz Leffman
Councillor Jeannette Matelot
Councillor Charles Mathew
Councillor Glynis Phillips
Councillor Judy Roberts
Councillor Michael Waine
Councillor Ted Fenton (In place of Councillor Mike Fox-Davies)

Officers:

Whole of meeting Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive; Ansaf Azhar, Corporate Director of Public Health and Wellbeing; Stephen Chandler, Corporate Director Adults and Housing Services; Kevin Gordon, Corporate Director for Children's Services; Jason Russell, Corporate Director Communities; Claire Taylor, Corporate Director Customers and Organisational Development; Steve Jorden, Corporate Director Commercial Development Assets & Investment; Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance; Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Committee Officer

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 and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda, reports and additional documents are attached to the signed Minutes.

54/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Mike Fox-Davies (substituted by Councillor Ted Fenton).

55/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - GUIDANCE NOTE ON BACK PAGE OF THE AGENDA (Agenda No. 2)

The Chairman noted that her daughter worked for Public Health in the Sexual Health section which is referred to in the papers.

56/20 MINUTES
(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2020 were approved.

57/20 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2021/22 - 2025/26
(Agenda No. 5)

Claire Taylor introduced a presentation with the Corporate Plan update which on this occasion was an annual refresh and not a full review. Councillor Glynis Phillips asked that there be a closer alignment between the Corporate Plan and the budget proposals so that Members could see how the budget was being used to meet the priorities. Claire Taylor agreed to take that point on board for next year's process (**ACTION**).

Lorna Baxter summarised the Planning Assumptions and responded to questions from Members as follows:

- The national pay freeze for those earning over £24,000 had been factored in to the budget.
- The service redesign savings not delivered in 2020/21 due to COVID-19 were itemised under the different service areas.

Adult Services

Stephen Chandler introduced the proposal and responded to Members' questions as follows:

- The trend everywhere was towards a reduction in residential care and COVID-19 had added to this. Many alternatives were available in the home including live-in options should 24-hour support be required.
- The increased funding for mental health in 2022/23 was going into adult mental health services, mostly in the social care housing pathway. It was not aimed at delivering more service but was addressing cost pressures in the contract.
- It was to be expected that there will be an increasing demand for mental health services in the wake of COVID-19 and this may be more likely to impact in 2022/23.
- Home care was more cost-effective than residential care and was often better for the individual. The Council was about to retender for home care and reablement.
- It was to be hoped that reduced costs mean that more people can be supported and supported earlier to stay well for longer.
- Individual reviews of support levels should reduce waste and free up resources for others.

Children's Services

Kevin Gordon summarised the investments, pressures and savings and responded to Members as follows:

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- This Council spent more on the administration of SEND than comparable councils. The capacity was there and the extra spend was to improve management oversight. There was also an investment of £400,000 in SEND early intervention for 2021/22 which was deferred from this year's budget.
- The reduction in School Transport spending was not related to cuts in services but involved drawing down only what was expected to be required given population forecasts.
- Plans for a new children's home had not been shelved but were being reviewed to ensure that they met the needs.
- There was an investment of £150,000 in the budget for apprenticeships. The Youth Offer in general will be escalated to provide more support in the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown. Members will be contacted in the new year about a new campaign to encourage local businesses to provide more apprenticeships
- A review of the needs of young people was due in March 2021 and there was a proposed £1m of core funding to finance the proposals from that. Accelerator funding will be used to support existing youth offers especially in the voluntary sector where there are a lot of well-funded and sustainable organisations already doing good work.
- The reduction in management by combining Early Years Teams would not reduce the level of support available for schools, play groups and others.

The Chairman agreed that the new scrutiny committee next year should review School Transport to ensure that the plans are sustainable (**ACTION**).

Public Health

Ansaf Azhar summarised the proposals and responded to Members' questions:

- The NHS pay award impacted on the Council where activities have been commissioned through the NHS. It had been raised nationally that increased government support was needed to finance these greater costs that local authorities incur.
- Public Health experts will still be involved in drawing up procurement contracts under the new procedures but will benefit from the expertise of procurement specialists.
- Domestic Abuse had only just come in under Public Health but they would ensure coordination with other funders such as the Police and Crime Commissioners. The Council's focus will be on prevention and the links with inequality.
- Inequality was everyone's business. The aim was to make savings from commissioned services to invest in a more needs-based approach. Demand was not equal across all communities.
- Discussions had already started with Children's Services on how the extra £1m in the Youth Offer could help to tackle inequality.
- Savings under accident prevention were the result of eliminating duplication with other partners and programmes will continue in this area.

Environment and Place

Jason Russell summarised the proposals under three themes: efficiencies, increasing income and investment. The following were his responses to questions from Members:

PSC3

- The savings under the street works permit system were partly efficiencies and improvements but were also from extending the scheme which will bring in more income.
- Charges for developers had been reviewed and set at a level to ensure cost recovery while still enabling development.
- Improvements in reactive road maintenance will be tied into improvements with FixMyStreet.
- It was not planned to increase the frequency of drain clearing in general but to focus on problem areas.
- There was increasing demand for 20mph limits but they were difficult to introduce. A trial involving co-design with parish councils was to take place and would be rolled out further, including other community groups where there is no parish council, if successful.
- Civil Parking Enforcement had already been factored into the budget.

Customers, Organisational Development and Resources

Claire Taylor summarised the proposals and responded to questions as follows:

- The savings under ICT came from the implementation of the strategy much of which was delayed this year due to the extra work brought on by COVID-19.
- With regard to the savings in the library book fund, this budget had been historically under-used. A strategy for cultural services was being developed which will include a clear plan for libraries rather than making year-to-year decisions on the budget. It was agreed to circulate the figures for the last ten years to Members of the Committee (**ACTION**).
- The extra spending on HR Resourcing was to provide more business partner support work to deal with challenges there before they become problems. This was for the County Council only – Cherwell District Council had a review some time ago and the policies differ between councils.

Commercial Development, Assets and Investment (including Community Safety)

Steve Jorden gave an overview of the proposals in this area and responded to Members' questions:

- The Joint Use Agreements with leisure centres were across all the districts. It was agreed to circulate a list to Members of the Committee (**ACTION**).
- Under the new directorate management there was a focus on attitudes and behaviours and the importance of the customer to the Council. This will be reflected in any new structures.
- A review of leases the Council pays will be undertaken with a focus on those that cost the most. Future leasing arrangements will be carefully considered as a result of COVID-19 but there was still much uncertainty so this may take some time. Once a clearer picture emerges, decisions will be made on what leases to retain.
- It was agreed that a reduced budget for carbon zero consultancy would still enable the Council to develop its carbon zero aspiration. It was noted that this work had been delayed due to COVID-19 response taking priority.

PSC3

- The savings identified for HGV enforcement will not impact on effectiveness as a more targeted approach would be taken. The Council worked closely with the police who can issue fixed penalty notices. It was an area that will be reviewed once changes to legislation and were made and new technology made available.

Corporate Measures

Lorna Baxter outlined the savings in this area and responded to questions:

- The savings in insurance followed a change in approach and there is no change in the risk. The insurance reserve fund had been built up over the years and funds had been released into the general fund on an ad hoc basis. In the new approach the Council will take it as an on-going revenue saving.
- The Council’s borrowing profile changes regularly and the savings listed were expected to result from the change in profile from last year. Rather than setting aside money for the cost of borrowing the Council was using those funds to pay directly for capital which was cheaper.

Yvonne Rees responded to a question on staffing levels. She stated that the situation was constantly monitored by herself and senior officers to ensure that the Council was appropriately resourced. It had been an extraordinarily difficult year for staff and she thanked Members for the support they had given.

Claire Taylor added that COVID-19 funding had been used to provide additional resources related to demand management for example in the customer contact centre.

The Chairman thanked officers for all their time and energy in getting the budget together. She reminded the meeting that the budget could still change as a result of the consultation or changes in the general financial situation but she would report this Committee’s views to the Cabinet.

58/20 WORK PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 6)

It had been agreed earlier to recommend that the new Committee next year should review School Transport arrangements.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 20