

Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday, 25th October, 2022.

Present: Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley (Chair), Cllr Maurice Perry (Vice-Chair), Cllr Chris Barlow, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Ted Strike, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Barry Woodhouse

Officers: Garry Cummings, Tony Montague, Clare Harper (FD&R), Jonathan Nertney, Judy Trainer, John Devine (DS)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Jacky Bright, Cllr Laura Tunney

1 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th September 2022 For Approval

Following feedback circulated to Members of the Committee in response to queries raised at the last meeting, Members made the following comments:

- With regard to the comment that the Council did not currently have plans to create either temporary or permanent car parking within Ropner Park, it was felt that other options should be considered including a park and ride option or approaches made to the West End Bowling Club for ad hoc event parking
- Provision for holiday buses had not yet been finalised and was still subject to further consideration as part of town centre development plans
- As the main contact for residents was still by phone, Members requested details of customer waiting times

With regard to declarations of interest, Officers explained that where members make reference to an issue purely for transparency purposes, these did not need to be recorded in the minutes as a formal declaration of interest.

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 20th September 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 FINANCIAL UPDATE AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Members were presented with the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which had been brought to the meeting early at members' request.

The report outlined that for the first quarter that Stockton Borough Council had projected an overspend of £4.3 Million. Officers highlighted that the key reasons for the projected overspend were related to energy/fuel costs, the pay award agreement, and continued pressures on child placements. Provisions had been taken to account for anticipated pressures, but these had been significantly worse in the areas mentioned than previously anticipated.

Members discussed the subsidy arrangements to Tees Active and asked for a full breakdown and outline of arrangements.

Members asked whether proposals to sell Council offices surplus to requirement would be accelerated to offset the identified overspend. Officers informed Members that options for earlier disposal were being considered.

It was confirmed that the Council was not responsible for providing assistance to schools struggling with rising energy costs.

In response to queries about the costs of senior management transitional staffing arrangements, officers emphasised that the restructuring and transitional arrangements had been agreed by Council as part of the Senior Management Review which had also achieved savings.

Members referred to the Energy Relief Scheme, which had been announced by the Government. Officers commented that the Energy Relief Scheme had not been factored into the current MTFP but would be included in the projections in December. It was, however, uncertain how long the energy support would be provided for.

Council borrowing is undertaken subject to agreed Treasury Management Strategy. Members were advised that no external borrowing had been taken out in recent months and that any borrowing decisions are taken after consideration of advice from specialist external advisors. With an update to the MTFP set to go to Cabinet in December 2022, it was acknowledged that difficult decisions would have to be made by Members.

Members thanked officers for attending the Committee on the earlier date and for the information provided.

AGREED that the report and discussion be noted and actioned as appropriate.

5 Scrutiny of Crustacean Deaths

Members were presented with an update on the invitation to participate in a joint scrutiny arrangement following the Redcar & Cleveland Council motion concerning crustacean deaths off the North East coast.

Further clarification was still awaited from Redcar & Cleveland Council who were considering how a joint working arrangement might operate at a meeting of their Adults, Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny & Improvement Committee on 31 October 2022.

In addition, Members were advised that the Government's Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee were holding a hearing on 25 October 2022 into the conflicting theories about the cause of the deaths.

AGREED that the report be noted and a further update be provided at the next meeting.

6 Chair's Update and Executive Scrutiny Work Programme

AGREED that the discussion be noted