

EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday 7 November 2023.

Present: Cllr Sylvia Walmsley (Chair), Cllr Ross Patterson (Vice-Chair), Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Shakeel Hussain (sub for Cllr Laura Tunney), Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Tony Riordan and Cllr Marilyn Surtees.

Officers: Jonathan Nertney, Judy Trainer, Gary Woods, Rebecca Saunders-Thompson, Ian Coxon and Clare Harper.

Also in attendance: None

Apologies: Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Richard Eglington and Cllr Laura Tunney.

ESC/16/23 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

ESC/17/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

ESC/18/23 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ESC/19/23 Financial Update and Medium Term Financial Plan (2023/24 Quarter 1)

The Select Committee received an update on the Council's financial performance and position at the end of the first quarter of the 2023/24 financial year.

The first quarter showed a projected overall overspend of £3.7m. The biggest pressures related to the pay award and Children's Services. The position would continue to be closely monitored and managed throughout the remainder of the financial year, however, if the pressures occurred as expected, earmarked reserves would need to be utilised to avoid using general fund balances.

The report also highlighted the significant financial challenges presented by the current inflationary environment, the Council's commitment to commence a transformation programme and an update on the Capital Programme.

Key issues discussed was as follows:

- Members highlighted that due to the timing of the Committee, the report was out of date and asked for an update in relation to Quarter 2. Members were advised that the financial position at the end of second quarter was under review and a report would be submitted to Cabinet in December followed by consideration by Executive Scrutiny Committee in January. This further report would provide an update on the

financial position including the impact of the pay settlement and an update the transformation programme. The Chair of Executive Scrutiny Committee had asked that the scheduling of Executive Scrutiny Committee be reviewed for next year to ensure that there were no delays in receiving the MTFP updates due to the timing of Cabinet and Executive Scrutiny Committee

- Grant funding of £1,804.6k for Disabled Facilities for 2023/24 had been included in the programme
- The Capital Programme had been revised to reflect the match funding element for Yarm LUF (£1952k) which included additional funding of £323.6k from external contributions and Revenue Contribution to Capital Outturn
- The performance against the planned savings built into the budget in February 2023 had been factored into the projected outturn set out in the report
- Employee savings due to staff turnover were forecast to be £2.2m in total. This was £300,000 less than the budgeted estimate of £2.5m
- Interest accrued due to higher interest rates had been factored into projections
- DfE announced the Schools Capital Maintenance Funding allocation for 2023/24 and £1,162k had been added to the programme

Further information was requested in respect of:

- Current agency levels in children's services, including the length of employment and quality assurance arrangements
- Details of the changes in the funding allocation for Reshaping Town Centres
- The reason for the programme revision of £170,000 to the City Region Sustainable Transport line in the Capital Programme

AGREED

- (1) That the update to the Medium-Term Financial Plan and the current level of General Fund balances be noted.
- (2) That the revised capital programme be noted.
- (3) That responses to the queries set out above be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

ESC/20/23 Council Plan Update

The Committee considered a report on the priorities included in the Council Plan which set out progress on all areas of this year's priorities.

Key issues discussed were as follows:

Our People

- The appointment of a new Assistant Director post for children and care and care leavers as a result of the reorganisation of the Senior Leadership Team in Children's Services was noted. Concerns were expressed that Members were not being kept up to date with the changes in a timely way and that consideration needed to be given to how best to brief the wider membership on changes that were being implemented as part of the Transformation Programme. The justification for using external consultants for this recruitment was also requested

Our Economy

- Details were requested on how the Council was planning to build on the success of the August summer jobs event

Our Places

- An update was requested on Thornaby Town deal including the progress of securing the Golden Eagle site
- Clarification of spending on road and pavement repairs in conjunction with the figures provided in the MTFP report

Our Council

- Members reported resident issues with the My Council system and asked for a report back on planned improvements to the service to improve customer experience

The Committee referred to the comprehensive performance management information that had previously been submitted to Members and Executive Scrutiny Committee and discussed how this should in future be presented for Member scrutiny.

AGREED that the report be noted and responses to the queries set out above be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

ESC/21/23 Forward Plan of Key Decisions

AGREED that the Forward Plan be noted.

ESC/22/23 Select Committee Chairs' Updates

ESC/23/23 Chair's Update and Executive Scrutiny Work Programme

The Chair advised the Committee that the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) had recently published a copy of the Council's Scrutiny End of Term Report as an example of good practice. Their article highlighted how Stockton-on-Tees had reflected the four principles of effective scrutiny in the work conducted, provided an insight into a wide array of community issues and established clear links between what the committees considered and the impact of their work.

The Chair also asked that the CfGS publication on Appreciative Inquiry Scrutiny be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

AGREED that the work programme be noted.

Chair.....