

Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday 9 January 2024.

Present: Cllr Sylvia Walmsley (Chair), Cllr Ross Patterson (Vice-Chair), Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Richard Eglinton, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Marilyn Surtees

Officers: Sarah Bowman-Abouna, Carolyn Nice (AH &W); Garry Cummings, Clare Harper, (FD&R); Rebecca Saunders-Thompson, Gary Woods (CS)

Also in attendance: None

Apologies: Cllrs Carol Clark and 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

Members requested an update on queries raised at the previous meeting on the Thornaby Town deal and spending on road and pavement repairs as part of 'Our Places' section of the Council Plan update. Officers confirmed that information would be provided.

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Winter Planning Update

The Select Committee received an update on winter planning work across the Council and work with partners.

Key issues discussed were as follows:

- Members welcomed early winter planning from April/May and queried if Members were involved in specific planning events. Officers responded that a local authority representative was always present at Integrated Care Board (ICB) planning events and feedback from various groups was disseminated to Members as part of the wider planning process. The Council was committed to commencing early winter planning to ensure that residents could remain at home and out of hospital as much as possible.
- A discussion on covid statistics was held. Members were informed the Office for National Statistics still coordinated the gathering and dissemination of national covid data. The scale of this project was reduced by the national government in October 2023 but it still provided the most accurate data on

covid levels. Officers were also able to obtain data from acute trusts on the number of covid patients in hospital.

- A discussion was held on government funding for the retention of staff in care homes.
- Members queried how the virtual frailty wards operated. Officers outlined that the purpose of the wards was to assist those with complex health needs who no longer needed to remain in hospital but required ongoing support services in their own homes.
- Members praised *The Bread and Butter Thing* initiative.
- Members praised the success of the Community Spaces initiatives and highlighted the continuation of some community groups throughout the summer months. Officers agreed to present a report to the Adult Social Care and Health Committee on the Community Spaces initiative.

Further information was requested in respect of:

- Gritting and flood management as part of the Council's winter maintenance programme.
- Project Viper and if the database had identified any individuals at risk.
- Details of training to be provided to Members on the RAYVN communications programme.
- The number of Council staff who had received flu and covid vaccines as part of the Council's vaccination programme.
- The number of people accessing virtual frailty wards.
- Figures for those utilising *The Bread and Butter Thing* scheme.
- The number of groups who have continued with the Community Spaces initiatives throughout the summer of 2023 and information on how £60,000 worth of funding would be utilised to support and sustain groups.

AGREED

- 1) That the winter planning update be noted.
- 2) That responses to the queries set out above be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

5 Financial Update and Medium-Term Financial Plan

The Select Committee received an update on the Council's financial performance and position as of 30th September 2024 for the current year (2023/24) and an outline of plan for the 2024/25 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The projected overspend was approximately £6.9million and this has been communicated to Council managers and staff. The report also highlighted that work was underway to assess reserves and this would be incorporated into the MTFP report in February 2024.

Key issues discussed were as follows:

- A discussion was held on funding provided by the Council to Tees Active Limited for energy support and a difference between figures on Tees Active accounts and Council reports. Officers provided an explanation and confirmed that accurate figures were contained in the Council's budget and end of year report for 2023/24 but they would investigate this issue and provide clarity on figures.
- Members raised concerns about not receiving information and reports in a timely manner so they could be scrutinised accurately. Officers responded that the financial situation was moving at a fast pace and Members would be briefed on the updated financial situation in January. It was also confirmed that the Council's financial position had not changed significantly since receipt of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement before Christmas 2023.
- Members queried how much the annual maintenance cost for the waterfront development would be. Officers responded that the current estimate was £380,000 but work in this area was ongoing.
- Members questioned if solar panels installed on the Ingleby Barwick leisure centre would generate income. Officers responded that income would be generated, and figures would be provided.
- Members queried why the Council's office accommodation project had been revised by £2.5million. Officers explained that original figures for this project had been determined several years ago and a report outlining the new position had been presented to Cabinet in July 2023. It was also confirmed that the sale of Municipal Buildings had not been included in current figures because the Stockton Town Centre blueprint consultation was ongoing.
- Members questioned if a worst case scenario and best case scenario could be included in future financial reports. Officers responded that due to reduced termed settlements and uncertainty on a national level, it was currently difficult to forecast. It was also highlighted that, because of this uncertainty, other Councils had chosen to only set budgets for 1 or 2 years.
- Members queried why revisions to programmes had not been presented to full Council for approval. Officers explained that updates to programmes within year only needed to be referred to Cabinet for approval for funding changes and additions.
- Discussions were held on the release of information to Members as part of the upcoming budget setting. Officers assured Members that work was continuing and a report was due to be presented to Cabinet and Members briefing session. It was also commented that, through the scrutiny function, Members would be involved in some of the larger transformation reviews.
- Members raised concerns about the procurement of a new household waste recycling centre. The Chair of the Place Select Committee reassured Members that this had been covered as part of the Scrutiny Review of Domestic Waste Collections, Kerbside Recycling and Green Waste and would be picked up in the subsequent action plan.

Further information was requested in respect of:

- The Council's bid submission to the government's Winter Pressure Fund.

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.

6 Forward Plan of Key Decisions

AGREED that the Forward Plan be noted.

7 Select Committee Chairs' Updates

Members were provided with updates from the Chairs of each Select Committee. Updates and discussion included:

Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee -

Members noted the update from the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee Chair.

Children and Young People Select Committee -

The Children and Young People Select Committee update was noted.

Crime and Disorder Select Committee –

As part of the Committee's current review of Outdoor Play Provision, funding issues were highlighted as an ongoing concern.

The final progress update for the Scrutiny Review of Bonfires on Public Land was also highlighted.

The Committee Chair explained that links to relevant issues and legislative changes had recently been included within the Committee's work programme document to provide Members with further information for consideration.

Members questioned if an update on winter tree maintenance could be provided and raised specific issues surrounding tree maintenance. The Chair agreed that an update from officers would be provided on this issue. Officers added that the first progress update for the Scrutiny Review of Tree Asset Management would be provided in the current year.

Members questioned if an answer could be provided on how often the online mapping system detailing Council owned land and private land was updated. Officers agreed to look into this and provide a response.

People Select Committee -

The Chair highlighted the current Scrutiny Review of the Cost of Living Response and praised the Council for its robust approach to the cost of living situation.

Place Select Committee -

Members noted the update from the Place Select Committee Chair.

AGREED that the Chairs' updates be noted.

8 Chair's Update and Executive Scrutiny Work Programme 2023/24

AGREED that the work programme be noted.