

EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday 23 July 2024.

Present: Cllr Kevin Faulks (Vice-Chair and Chair for the meeting), Cllr Marc Besford, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Richard Eglington, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Shakeel Hussain, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Paul Rowling and Cllr Marilyn Surtees.

Officers: Jonathan Nertney, Judy Trainer, Gary Woods, Michelle Gunn (CS), Garry Cummings, Clare Harper (DCE&F) .

Also in attendance: Cllr Eileen Johnson

Apologies: Cllr Sylvia Walmsley (Chair) and Cllr Laura Tunney.

ESC/8/24 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation procedure.

ESC/9/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

ESC/10/24 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 May 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ESC/11/24 Medium Term Financial Plan - Outturn March 2024

The Committee received a report on the draft financial performance and position as at 31 March 2024.

The overall financial position was similar to the position projected at the end of December 2023, as outlined in the Budget report in February 2024, with a variance of £163,000 from the previously reported position.

Actions taken to manage the overspend of £7m had been agreed as part of the budget report, and the position had continued to be carefully monitored.

There were ongoing financial pressures and the Powering our Futures Programme was integral to identifying opportunities for resolving the gap. Further reports would be presented throughout the year providing updates.

The Capital Programme had been updated to incorporate new schemes and reflect those schemes completed as at the financial year end.

Key issues discussed were as follows:

- Debt write-off 2024/25 – this related to longer term debt over 8 – 10 years old and would affect the 2025/ 26 budget due to accounting rules
- Capital programme - Details were sought on what was included under the building management maintenance programme
- Relocation and demolition of Castlegate site – it was confirmed that under accountings standards a proportion of these costs had been met from revenue.
- Works carried out at Whitton land fill site – £170,433 had been funded from revenue contributions. It was permissible to use revenue contributions for the capital programme, typically for smaller schemes. Further details would be provided

AGREED that the report be noted and responses provided in relation to the queries set out above.

ESC/12/24 Council Plan Update

The Committee received an update on the priorities included in the Council Plan 2023/26. This was the last time that an update would be provided in this format due to the refresh of the Council Plan.

Key issues discussed were as follows:

- It was important that residents without online capability still received an efficient service via telephone enquiries. Members reported issues that had been experienced, for example, by elderly residents being cut off and asked that this should be examined as part of the relevant transformation review. Councillors also expressed frustration with officers not leaving telephone messages as the system did not reveal the identity of the caller
- An update was requested on the operation of the Public Spaces Protection Order in Stockton and Norton Village
- Portrack Relief Road – the update included a reference to a footbridge nearing completion as part of the A689/A19 interchange improvements, however, it was believed that the footbridge was no longer going ahead. Officers would check and report back to the Committee
- Elton Interchange – Members reported accidents that had occurred owing to confusion about the right turn onto the A66 and requested that the road safety audit be referred to the appropriate body and ward Members for consideration
- Plans for the maintenance of the new riverside development had not been included in the update. The Committee were advised that work was on going regarding safety and cleansing and further details would be provided as part of future updates

AGREED that the report be noted and responses provided in relation to the queries set out above.

ESC/13/24 In Depth Scrutiny Review Topic Suggestion - Muslim and Faith Burial Provision

At the March 2024 meeting, Executive Scrutiny Committee had agreed the work programme for 2024/25 which focused supporting the Council's Powering Our Futures Programme.

A topic suggestion had now been received requesting an in-depth review of Muslim and Faith Burial Provision.

The topic suggestion referenced a previous review of burial provision in 2020/21. The scope of the previous review focussed on burial capacity rather than the type of burial offered. This new topic suggestion requested that further investigation takes place into the provision of burial tombs/vaults in the Borough's cemeteries.

Under the Pick Scoring System, the topic received a high score when compared with other topics submitted in previous years. There was also an acknowledged need to consider the burial provision offered to residents in the Borough.

If agreed by Executive Scrutiny Committee, it would be appropriate to add this to the work programme for Place Select Committee to complete. Due to operational demands relating to implementing changes to waste and recycling, this review would not be able to start until March/April 2025. If agreed, the topic would therefore roll forward as the first topic for the next municipal year.

AGREED

- (1) that the topic of Muslim and Faith Burial Provision be agreed as the first topic for the Place Select Committee for 2025/26, following the conclusion of the Select Committee's current review of Affordable Housing.
- (2) That, in the meantime, officers be asked to explore whether there can be any flexibility to book in burials after 3pm each day.

ESC/14/24 Final Report of the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee - Scrutiny Review of Access to GPs and Primary Medical Care (Executive Summary for Information)

The Committee considered the Executive Summary from the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee's review of Access to GPs and Primary Medical Care.

The main aims of this review had been to firstly understand the existing local 'access to GPs' landscape in the context of national / regional developments around this ongoing issue. The Committee then sought to ascertain current systems for accessing general practice services, how these were communicated to the public, and how effective they were. Finally, and most importantly, determining any areas which might assist in improving the experience of the local population, and practices themselves, when individuals wished to contact and / or access general practice services.

The review had shone another light on a sector which remained under significant strain, principally due to the twin pressures of sustained high-level demand and ongoing workforce challenges and made recommendations relating to communication, operation matters and public / patient feedback.

AGREED that the Executive Summary be noted.

ESC/15/24 Final Report of the Place Select Committee - Scrutiny Review of (Unauthorised) Roadside Advertising (Executive Summary for Information)

The Committee considered the Executive Summary from the Place Select Committee's review of Unauthorised Roadside Advertising.

The Committee was satisfied that unauthorised roadside advertising was no longer a major concern for the Borough and mechanisms were in place to deal with any issues regarding unauthorised roadside advertising efficiently and effectively. The recommendations sought to ensure the public were fully informed of the rules regarding roadside advertising and strengthen reporting systems. The Committee felt that online reporting could be enhanced through the introduction of mapping layers, similar to the approach currently being used for reporting of flyposting and that the online reporting system should be reviewed to ensure that all relevant information was obtained to enable issues to be promptly directed to the appropriate service for action.

AGREED that the Executive Summary be noted.

ESC/16/24 Chairs' Updates

Members were provided with updates from the Chairs of each Select Committee. Discussion included:

Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee

The Chair advised that the scope and project plan for the Select Committee's next review of the Reablement Services would now be considered in September to allow more work to take place on clarifying the scope of the work.

Members thanked the new Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care (and new TEWV Governor) for attending the May meeting which was exploring concerns outlined by the regulator regarding the operation of the Trust.

Children and Young People Select Committee

Members noted the update from the Children and Young People Select Committee.

Community Safety Select Committee

Members noted the update from the Community Safety Select Committee.

People Select Committee

Members noted the update from the People Select Committee.

Place Select Committee

Members noted the update from the Place Select Committee.

AGREED that the Chair's updates be noted.

ESC/17/24 Chair's Update and Executive Committee Work Programme 2024/25

AGREED that the work programme be noted.