

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 9 March 2022.

PRESENT

Mr. M. T. Mullaney CC (in the Chair)

Mr. R. G. Allen CC
Mr. T. Barkley CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. Max Hunt CC

Mrs. R. Page CC
Mr. T. J. Pendleton CC
Mr J. Poland CC
Mr. C. A. Smith CC

In attendance

Mr L. Breckon CC (Lead Member for Resources)
Mrs P. Posnett CC (Lead Member for Community and Staff Relations)

66. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st January 2022 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

67. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 34.

68. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

69. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items for consideration.

70. Declarations of interest

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations were made.

71. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

72. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 35.

73. Report of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on the Council's Corporate Ways of Working Programme

The Commission considered a report of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on the Council's Corporate Ways of Working Programme. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mr L. Phillimore CC, the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, to the meeting. In presenting the report Mr Phillimore highlighted that:

- The Programme would see a significant shift in how the Council operated. The Group had been keen to understand the impact of this on staff and how they might engage both with each other to ensure a coordinated and joined up approach, but also with residents and service users and elected members.
- As the report made clear, the Group chose to focus on the People element of the Programme, it being of the view that the workplace and technology elements would flow from that in time as the Programme was rolled out.
- Whilst the financial savings identified were important, the key benefits of adopting a hybrid working approach were seen as being much wider than that and the Group had felt strongly that if the People element of the Programme was not delivered well, irrespective of the savings, the Authority, its staff and service users, could be negatively affected.
- The Group had put forward a number of challenges and identified some key risks. However, officers were able to offer significant reassurance on many issues. The Chairman, on behalf of the Group, thanked officers for the excellent work that had gone into the preparation of the Programme.

Arising from discussion, the following points were noted:

- (i) Members welcomed the report which was comprehensive and demonstrated the in-depth challenge provided by the Group and which had drawn out some useful recommendations. The Commission thanked the Group for its work and that of officers in preparing what was a well considered Programme.
- (ii) It was recognised that hybrid working would provide great flexibility which would benefit both the organisation in addressing issues such as the recruitment and retention of staff, and officers who could perhaps adapt their working arrangements to provide for a better work/life balance.
- (iii) It was recognised that service needs would be the first priority for all sections, but that discussions with managers would ensure that where appropriate, flexibility was provided.
- (iv) The need for a whole Council approach was recognised and sense checking all communications would be essential to ensure the Programme did not become campus centric. It would be important for all staff be kept informed and involved in the process.

- (v) Key issues around socialisation amongst staff and the potential impact on health and wellbeing had been considered by the Group and the Commission was assured of the level of communication and guidance provided to staff to encourage new ways for people to come together. It was acknowledged that this was the start of a long process and teams would adapt as best suited them and their service area.
- (vi) The exercise had emphasised the critical role of managers, both in the successful delivery of the Programme, but also in the future management of a hybrid workforce. The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group confirmed that it had been confident that officers were well aware of the need to support managers through this process, but that it had made recommendations to help strengthen the proposed approach in some areas e.g. encouraging the use of Annual Performance Reviews to ask softer questions and in tracking delivery of the Programme.

Mr Breckon CC, on behalf of the Lead Member for Covid Recovery and Ways of Working, Mr Peter Bedford CC, reported that Mr Bedford welcomed the report, the work of the Group and its recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on the Council's Corporate Ways of Working Programme be welcomed and forwarded to the Lead Member for Covid Recovery and Ways of Working and the Director of Corporate Resources for consideration.

74. Corporate Ways of Working Programme - Delivery of Financial Savings

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources, the purpose of which was to update the Commission on the delivery of financial savings from the corporate Ways of Working Programme as recently outlined in the approved Medium Term Financial Strategy. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) The Council had to modernise and change the way it operated. This had a number of wide ranging benefits as looked at by the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group and considered as part of the previous report. However, the delivery of ongoing long term efficiencies meant a significant reduction in costs could also be realised, as well as the potential to generate income.
- (ii) A review of all Council's locality offices, owned and occupied, would be undertaken as part of the Programme. As the Council changed the way it operated it would be important to ensure these were still fit for purpose and that their location matched current business and service user needs.
- (iii) Those working to deliver the Programme were working closely with the Carbon Reduction Programme team. A key aim of the Ways of Working Programme would be to improve the Council's estate to generate better environmental outputs wherever possible, both in terms of the new planned office arrangements, and by reducing travel and, for example, the use of paper with

improved technology.

- (iv) The pilot being undertaken in room 700 at County Hall to change the office layout to suit a more hybrid working approach would be vital. Without this it was unlikely the Council would be able to achieve the culture change necessary to deliver the Programme fully. On behalf of the Lead Member for Covid Recovery and Ways of Working, Mr Breckon CC encouraged members to attend an all member briefing planned in May to talk members through the changes further, at which members would also be invited on a tour of the new collaborative workspaces being piloted.

RESOLVED:

That the update now provided on the delivery of financial savings from the Corporate Ways of Working Programme be welcomed and noted.

75. 2021/22 Medium Term Financial Strategy Monitoring (Period 10)

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources, which provided an update on the 2021/22 revenue budget and capital programme monitoring position as at the end of period 10 (the end of January). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) Since the last report to the Commission, the Council's financial position appeared more positive, moving from a £2.6m overspend to a £3.5m underspend. However, Members recognised that there were still three key areas of significant concern – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Adult Social Care (ASC) and the Capital Programme.
- (ii) Members questioned whether in light of the forecasted deficit of £28m on the High Needs budget, whether further Government funding would be forthcoming to help address this. Members were disappointed to hear that this was unlikely and that whilst some additional funding had been provided to some authorities, this had been on a one off basis and did not match the ongoing level of growth and increased costs being seen. Whilst a national problem, Members noted that this would most likely have to be managed locally.
- (iii) The High Needs budget deficit had grown for several years due to increased age range of children with SEND the Council was now responsible for (was up to 18 years, but was now up to 24). The increased responsibility had not been matched with additional funding. Members noted that there were also increased parent expectations and requests for children with SEND to be educated in a special school as opposed to a mainstream school which was significantly cheaper.
- (iv) The Leader Member for Resources reported of work being undertaken by external consultants Newton Europe to review SEND services. Members noted that the Council currently provided what was considered a 'gold' standard, but that the grant was not sufficient to continue this. It had to be recognised that a 'silver' or 'bronze' standard was still good and over and above the Council's statutory responsibilities. Mr Breckon assured Members that this was being looked at carefully by the Director and Lead Member for

Children and Family Services.

- (v) Members noted that the planned transfer of £2m from the mainstream school grant to the High Needs budget did not go ahead as proposed as this had been rejected by both the Schools Forum and subsequently the Secretary of State.
- (vi) The underspend in the Public Health budget resulted from some public facing services having ceased or reduced temporarily as the Department focused on work required to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. The underspend would be kept in reserve to support such services as these were reinstated.
- (vii) ASC Services currently depended on a significant amount of NHS funding. However, this was uncertain over the long term and so the position would be monitored closely.
- (viii) Members raised concern at the level of overspend on the Capital Programme and the slippage of two key projects (the Melton Mowbray Distributor Road and the A511) which whilst understandable, as explained in the report, increased the risks being faced by the Council in this area. Members highlighted that added costs and inflationary pressures exacerbated by current events would likely continue and make the position even more difficult. It was suggested that officer time spent designing schemes and bidding for funding might be a false economy if the Council was not then in a position to finance those schemes (providing match funding) over the long term.
- (ix) A member commented that securing the receipt of adequate section 106 developer contributions to fund growth infrastructure had always been difficult and that this would likely become even harder as developers were also affected by cost and inflationary pressures. Members questioned if the viability of schemes were challenged by developers, reducing the section 106 contributions received by the Council, how this would be managed and what discussions were being held with district councils to share this risk.
- (x) Members were concerned that the Members Advisory Group (MAG), which was a partnership body, looked at and agreed growth requirements across the County, but that the Council was the sole provider of the infrastructure necessary to support this. Members challenged how this was being managed and how such growth demands were being balanced with what the Council could realistically afford.
- (xi) The Director outlined the work of the Growth Service which had been established to provide oversight of large scale growth projects and how these were aligned with the Council's financial plans and capabilities. Members noted that the Service liaised with district councils on a regular basis, in particular as part of their local plan process, to ensure infrastructure needs were considered early. It was noted that the Service also played a significant role in supporting the work of the MAG, working alongside the Joint Strategic Planning Manager for Leicester and Leicestershire.
- (xii) Members acknowledged that there were a number of factors to consider and suggested it would be right for the Commission to take a more holistic view of the Council's Capital Programme and all the risk factors identified.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 Monitoring report up to the end of January 2022 (Period 10) be noted;
- (b) That the Director of Corporate Resources be requested to provide the Commission with a more holistic view of the Council's Capital Programme and the key risk factors affecting this in light of current national and international circumstances.

76. Outcome of Consultation on the Strategic Plan

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which set out the feedback received during the public consultation on the draft Strategic Plan 2022-26. The report also sought the Commission's views on the revised Plan which had been amended to take account of the comments made. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points arose:

- (i) The level of support for the identified outcomes was welcomed. Members were pleased to see that all comments previously made by the Commission and the other overview and scrutiny bodies had been considered and largely addressed in the revised draft. Members agreed that this was now a much improved document.
- (ii) Members supported the shortening of the Plan, which it was agreed made it more focused and reader friendly.
- (iii) It was noted that the response rate, whilst higher than usual, was not vast. Members acknowledged that consultations on strategic documents often generated less feedback as residents could find it difficult to relate their purpose to their own circumstances and day to day lives.
- (iv) A Member challenged whether the number and style of questions asked in such consultations struck the right balance to encourage residents to respond. Members were assured that the number and type of questions asked were always considered when formulating a consultation, as were the options for targeting a variety of audiences. The Council had a specialised team that ensured best practice was always followed. It was acknowledged that lessons could always be learnt and the potential for improvements would be considered, including the quality and number of questions asked.
- (v) Whilst the Strategic Plan was not a statutory document and not therefore subject to the legal requirement to consult, as it would set the overall strategic direction for the Council over the next four years undertaking such a consultation was considered essential. Not engaging on the document would likely result in criticism and Members agreed that this would have affected the overall quality of the Plan.
- (vi) A Member suggested that whilst references to district councils had been improved, they had not been referenced in sub-section 5.2 of the Plan (People participate in service design and delivery) and suggested that they perhaps

should be.

- (vii) The reference to Neighbourhood Plans was again queried. It was noted that the language in the Plan now made clear that the County Council had a supporting role in this area, and that district councils were ultimately responsible for their development. A Member commented, however, that a Neighbourhood Plan might not be suitable for all areas and questioned therefore the Council's action (in sub-section 5.2 of the Plan) to support communities to develop these Plans. It was suggested that support should be targeted to those areas where such a Plan was considered locally to be appropriate and beneficial.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the revised draft Strategic Plan for 2022 to 2026 be welcomed and supported;
- (b) That the comments now made by the Commission be referred to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 29th March 2

77. Draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council Collaborating with our Communities - Our Communities Approach 2022-26 - Feedback from Community Engagement

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which provided an update on the preparation of the Council's draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council Our Communities Approach 2022-26. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

In presenting the report the Chief Executive highlighted that the link included on page 16 of the Strategy to the Leicestershire Communities Asset Based Approaches web page was incorrect. This had now been corrected with the following <https://www.leicestershirecommunities.org.uk/sr/assetbased.html>.

Arising from discussion, the following points arose:

- (i) Members welcomed the broad level of engagement undertaken and the conversations held with communities to seek their views on the Council's proposed Approach. It was acknowledged that the process had focused on ensuring good quality feedback and that this had provided some useful insights and helped to shape and inform the planned way forward.
- (ii) The Commission was pleased that there was overall support for the Approach but acknowledged requests for further embedding existing practices and building on partnership working and what people were already doing within their communities.
- (iii) The Members were satisfied that its comments and concerns previously made had been addressed and complimented the revised Strategy which was clear and focused, easy to follow and engaging. Members also welcomed the inclusion of hyperlinks which easily signposted communities to useful information and support available.

- (iv) A Member commented that the Strategy would be a valued document and support elected members in their role as community leaders.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the revised draft Communities Strategy: Leicestershire County Council– Our Communities Approach 2022-26 be welcomed and supported;
- (b) That the comments now made by the Commission be reported to the Cabinet at its meeting on 29th March 2022.

78. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on Wednesday, 6th April 2022 at 10.00 am.

10.00 - 11.56 am
09 March 2022

CHAIRMAN