

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 15 September 2017 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor R Crute (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors A Patterson (Vice-Chairman), E Adam, A Batey, D Boyes, M Clarke, P Jopling, L Maddison, C Martin, M Simmons, J Turnbull and M Wilkes

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Bell, J Chaplow, K Hawley, H Liddle, J Makepeace, O Milburn, C Potts, L Pounder, J Rowlandson, H Smith, F Tinsley, A Willis, S Zair and Mr R Patel

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H Liddle, C Potts, L Pounder, F Tinsley and A Willis.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Councillor Maddison raised a query regarding review of council buildings. It was noted that this topic had been discussed previously and was incorporated into the COSMB work programme.

4 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Update on the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Plan 6

The Board considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which provided an update on the delivery of the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Plan 6 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Communications and Information Management reported that the MTFP(6) was agreed by the Council in February 2016 and set a savings target of just over £28 million, which formed part of the overall savings target for the period from 2011/12 to 2019/20 of around £250 million.

It was further reported that by the end of quarter 1, over 74% of the savings target for MTFP(6) had already been met with savings having been achieved. The total savings delivered since April 2011 was just over £203 million including Public Health savings. Work was now underway to implement the delivery of MTFP(7) which would seek to deliver a further £23.3 million of savings by the end of April 2018.

In conclusion the Head of Communications and Information Management advised that by 2021/22 approximately £250 million savings would have been achieved.

Cllr P Jopling asked could the redundancy figures be broken down into service.

Councillor Adam in referencing paragraph 13 of the report asked whether any further work had been undertaken in respect of gender profiling. The Head of Strategy advised that data was available.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

6 Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 - Annual Review of the Council's use of powers and approval of RIPA Corporate Guidance Document

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, which informed members about the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA), during the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 and further sought approval of the Council's Corporate Guidance Document relating to RIPA for the forthcoming year (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

- i. That the annual report on the Council's use of powers under RIPA be noted.
- ii. That the Council's Corporate Guidance Document on the use of RIPA be approved.

7 Scrutiny of the Medium Term Financial Plan (8)

The Board considered a joint report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and Corporate Director Resources which provided an update on the proposed approach to scrutiny of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2018/19 - 2021/22 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services advised that at this time there was still significant uncertainty regarding the future of local government funding with reductions expected to continue until at least 2020.

He advised that the settlement from government was not expected until November 2017. In line with previous practice the MTFP Model had been reviewed and savings of £41 million were forecasted to be required to balance the budget over the 2018/19 to 2021/22 period.

It was also reported that the total savings required at this stage for 2018/19 in order to balance the budget amounted to £25.6 million. Plans to identify those savings were already underway and the council will also consider how best to utilise the Budget Support Reserve across the MTFP(8) period.

Further details were reported in respect of key changes to the proposed MTFP Model whilst also noting key challenges with regard to uncertainty relating to social care funding, adult social care precept, 2% cap on council tax, Business Rates Retention, National Living Wage and inflationary pressures.

It was noted by Councillor Crute and reiterated by Councillor Adam that the council although still in a challenging time was in a more favourable position than other authorities due to prudent financial management of the council's reserves and planning.

Further discussion took place regarding business rates collection and the impact a move to 100% retention would have upon the authority.

In responding to a query from Councillor Martin, the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services advised that the decision relating to the use of Business Support Reserve was a political one and would be determined alongside details of full savings required.

Councillor Wilkes asked when scrutiny would be able to view and comment upon the detail of any proposed savings. The Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services advised that savings would be reported to Cabinet in line with the published timetable.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and timetable be noted.

8 Quarter 1 2017/18 Performance Management Report

The Board considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which presented progress against the council's corporate performance framework by each Altogether priority theme for the first quarter of the 2017/18 financial year (for copy or report and slides of presentation see file of Minutes).

In responding to a query from Councillor Maddison relating to social worker caseloads and the impact of sickness absence on other team members, Councillor

Patterson advised that this matter had been flagged and would be reviewed by the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny committee.

Councillor Batey in referring to the Altogether Better Council made reference to those residents who were technically isolated and were unable to receive strong mobile signals or get online. Many people however were still able to text and queried whether this was an option for reporting issues directly to Customer Services. In response the Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager advised that texting was an option however up until this point it had only been offered to those with the inability to contact the council by other means.

Councillor Boyes commented that it was concerning to learn that there had been a 44% increase in crime on the comparable quarter last year, noting that this was the second highest rise in the country. He further referred to flytipping data and the use of covert cameras. Councillor Adam commented that Environment Scrutiny were to hold a special meeting regarding this issue.

Councillor Wilkes noted that although he welcomed the new format of performance data he felt that many of the issues were not 'corporate' and he was concerned that issues previously scrutinised by Corporate Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee were going to be overlooked.

In referring to page 187 of the report he further added that it was disappointing that the business case for Horden Railway Station had been delayed again. He commented that this had been in discussion for over 15 years and now given the delay in the full business case and the time it would take central government to action it, it could potentially be 20 years on. He added that he found this to be totally unacceptable and felt that the Board should be applying pressure to move the project forward. Councillor Crute noted that funding for the station had been committed by the Coal Board Authority however agreed that reasons for the delays should be explained. The Head of Strategy suggested that she invite the service to provide an update.

With regard to comments made regarding the workload of the Board, the Head of Strategy advised that if special meetings were required then there was capacity to accommodate this. In addition there was four scheduled MTFP sessions included in the timetable. Councillor Wilkes added that he did have concerns that due to the volume of work scrutiny of important items would be diluted. He added that reducing the time of presentations would also help. Councillor Crute agreed that the time spent on presentations could be cut down if needed to provide more time for questions and comments. The Head of Strategy advised that she would in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board review agendas to ensure that there was adequate time to accommodate the workload.

In referring to the Altogether greener theme, Councillor Maddison made reference to issues in Spennymoor Town Centre and in particular problems relating to rubbish on private land. It was noted that this was a problem across the county. It was noted that the council would offer services to private landowners for clearing of rubbish under a formal service level agreement.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.

9 Customer Feedback Report Quarter 1 2017 - 2018

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided details of Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions for quarter 1, 2017/18 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager provided an overview of the report attached at Appendix 2, highlighting the number of complaints, statutory complaints and corporate complaints received during the quarter. She further reported details in respect of complaints to the Local Government and Social care Ombudsman and compliments and suggestions received.

Councillor Wilkes raised a query with regard to an ombudsman decision relating to delays in processing a disabled facilities grant. In adding that this was a serious issue he welcomed the service improvements although noted that it was important to monitor whether the changes made were successful. In response the Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager advised that she would provide an update on progress to a future meeting under quarterly performance monitoring.

Councillor Turnbull commented that he had recently received two complaints regarding issues with sky telephone systems and non-returning of calls which possibly could have something to do with a caller-id system. It was agreed that this would be investigated further and a response given at a later date.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.

10 General Fund Revenue and Capital Outturn Q4

The Board considered reports of the Corporate Director Resources and Director of Transformation and Partnerships which provided details of the outturn position highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget based on the outturn position at the end of March 2017. The second report provided details of the forecasted outturn budget position, highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget based on the position to the end of June 2017 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Wilkes referenced the underspend reported on employees within the Revenue and Benefits service area and added that he did appreciate that savings had to be made but it was important that assurances were given that adequate capacity remained in order to manage the workload. It was agreed that further details in this regard be forwarded to Councillor Wilkes after the meeting.

Resolved:

That the content of the reports be noted.

11 Notice of key decisions

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided a list of key decisions that were scheduled to be considered by the Executive (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Senior Committee Services Officer reported that since the last update the Strategy for School Provision in County Durham had moved to October and the Aykley Heads SES Project Update had been moved to December's Cabinet.

Councillor Wilkes added that he would have liked further information on the Durham City Sustainable Transport Strategy and the Strategy for school provision in County Durham. The Senior Committee Services Officer agreed to feedback to the report authors.

Resolved: That the information contained within the report be noted.

12 Information update from the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

There were no updates.

Signed.....

Date.....