

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on **Tuesday 20 April 2021 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor R Crute (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors A Batey (Vice-Chair), E Adam, R Bell, D Boyes, B Kellett, R Manchester, C Martin, A Shield, H Smith, J Turnbull and M Wilkes

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Hopgood, L Maddison, A Savory, F Tinsley, A Willis and J Makepeace.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitutes.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 22 January and 11 February 2021 be confirmed as a correct record to be signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Quarter Three, 2020/21 Performance Management Report

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director Resources (Interim) which presented progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny & Strategy Manager provided an overview of how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted upon council services, staff and residents and further provided details of key performance issues across the three externally focused results-based ambitions of the County Durham Vision

2035 alongside a fourth 'excellent council' theme contained within the Council Plan.

The Chair commented that there were real concerns as to how families were putting food on the table given the poverty issues reported and also added his concerns regarding female life expectancy and suggested that this may be something that the Board or thematic committee may wish to review in the new municipal year.

Councillor Wilkes added he had concerns regarding health performance and agreed that this should be kept under close observation. Moving on he referred to page 71 of the report, noting his frustration at the poor data available in this area of performance mainly as a result of the loss of staff resources as opposed to being as a direct result of COVID-19 as had been reported during the presentation.

Furthermore, he explained that with 50% of the councils A roads in poor condition and over a fifth of classified roads being in need of maintenance, including rural and estate roads he urged Cabinet to bring forward money in year for repairs before it was too late.

Councillor Boyes commented that he was not optimistic that crime was levelling and noted that in many areas local teams were witnessing a crime epidemic, he specifically referenced the major issues faced in the east of the County with fires and the pressures this was placing upon local services.

He further made reference to the issue of off-road bikes and suggested that pressure should be placed upon Cabinet to lobby government to review powers of the Police to allow them to tackle this issue effectively, as under current powers there was little they could do.

Further discussion ensued regarding confidence in the data presented regarding crime as it was acknowledged that a lot of crime went unreported.

In response to a number of the points raised, the Corporate Scrutiny & Strategy Manager advised that he would seek to obtain figures on the number of women presenting at hospital with alcohol related illness, which may help when reviewing female life expectancy.

With regards to primary and secondary fires he acknowledged that this was a huge issue and suggested that this could be reviewed in the future by the Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Moving on to overall crime data, the Corporate Scrutiny & Strategy Manager advised that data should be standard across the country in accordance with Home Office Counting Rules, however acknowledged that there may be

disparities between crime recorded not through court and the Checkpoint programme of admitted guilt.

Councillor Bell commented that many of the issues raised would be hard to get a grasp on until the COVID fog had cleared, and he suspected that following this there would be a patchy recovery out of the pandemic. With such he felt that it would be hard to discern the true challenges until that time.

Further discussion ensued regarding the way in which crime data was recorded and noted that in some cases this could be a result of the way in which the call is interpreted by the call handler. In relation to fires, the Corporate Scrutiny & Strategy Manager advised that he would seek clarification via Environmental Health regarding their enforcement powers on issues around burning of commercial waste. Members also discussed the timeliness of data available on maintenance of highways and footpaths. Councillor Adam suggested that this could be included on the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee future work programme.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

6 Resources - Quarter 3 December 2020: Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2020/21

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director Resources (Interim) which provided details of the forecast revenue and capital outturn budget position for the Resources Service Grouping, highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget based on the position to the end of December 2020 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

7 Notice of Key Decisions

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

The Head of Strategy and Transformation advised that there was only one new item added to the Forward Plan regarding the proposal to amalgamate

Ox Close Primary and Ox Close Nursery Schools into one primary school in a replacement new build on the Durham Road site of the former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School from 1 September 2024.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

8 Refresh of the Work Programme

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director Resources (Interim) which provided the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (COSMB) with the opportunity to review and refresh the work programme for 2021/2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Strategy and Transformation advised that the report provided information for members to note activity undertaken by the committee during 2020/21 and enable discussion to suggest areas for review activity or agenda items to be included in the committee's work programme for 2021/2022.

Councillor Wilkes commented that whilst there was some excellent work in the plan, he did feel that the Board should include a review of COVID-19 and in particular the number of related care home deaths. The Chair noted Councillor Wilkes comments.

Councillor Bell noted that putting COVID aside, there was still a huge amount of uncertainty regarding future funding settlements and felt it would be important to ensure that the new council are trained appropriately in this area and fully understood the continuing uncertainties faced by the council.

Councillor Boyes commented that he also felt it was important to manage expectations as the council would undoubtedly face further austerity in the future.

Resolved:

- (i) That the contents of the report and the proposed COSMB work programme in relation to the Council Plan 2020 – 2023 be noted.
- (ii) That a further report to agree the COSMB work programme for 2021/2022 will be submitted to the 18 June 2021 meeting.