

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 17 AUGUST 2020 AT ONLINE MEETING.

Present:

Cllr Chuck Berry, Cllr Christine Crisp, Cllr Kevin Daley, Cllr Stewart Dobson, Cllr Howard Greenman, Cllr Alan Hill (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Ruth Hopkinson, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Gordon King, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Tony Trotman, Cllr Stuart Wheeler and Cllr Graham Wright (Chairman)

Also Present:

Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cllr Pauline Church, Cllr Richard Clewer, Cllr Atiqul Hoque, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Bridget Wayman, Cllr Philip Whitehead and Cllr Allison Bucknell

49 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Pip Ridout and John Walsh.

50 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2020 were presented for consideration, and it was,

Resolved:

To approve and sign the minutes as a true and correct record.

51 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations.

52 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no announcements.

53 **Public Participation**

There were no statements or questions submitted.

54 **Task Group Update**

Updates were received from the Wiltshire Council Covid-19 Response Task Group and the Global Warming and Climate Change Task Group.

The Global Warming and Climate Change Task Group had met with Sustrans, the walking and cycling charity, the Woodland Trust and other environmental groups regarding land use. Other activities included a series of workshops convened by the Wiltshire Climate Alliance about the opportunities for a Green recovery after Covid-19. The Task Group continued to work closely with the new Head of Carbon reduction. Recommendations were being drafted by the Task Group for the Autumn 2020.

The Wiltshire Council Covid-19 Response Task Group had met to consider the report to Cabinet on Covid-19 recovery, and the council's budget monitoring. In discussing the update there were questions from the Committee on care home testing. It was stated that 84% of care home saying they had access to testing, but the rollout of residents being tested every 28 days and staff tested weekly had been postponed to September.

There were questions on the completion of risk assessments for the reopening of schools, and capacity of mental health support. It was stated that very few risk assessments for schools had not been completed, and there was work through education recovery with public health to provide mental health support. Further government funding was expected on emotional support. Some members stated concerns still remained regarding school reopening plans from some schools, but officers stated it was expected all schools in Wiltshire to open full time, with some online learning as well.

There was also discussion of the decision to delay in the majority of council staff returning to office work. It was noted that the decision had been carefully considered taking into account welfare and the needs of the organisation, and that outputs from staff remained high. However, some members considered a return to officers would set an example. The number of council staff currently working in council hubs was raised. The importance of learning lessons of positive changes that could be maintained post-Covid-19 was discussed.

It was also announced that Councillor Ian Thorn, Chairman of the Financial Planning Task Group, had requested that he be taken off the Task Group. The Committee requested at the end of the meeting that their thanks for the contribution and chairmanship of Councillor Thorn on the Task Group be noted.

At the conclusion of discussion,

Resolved:

- 1) To note the update on Task Group activity provided.**
- 2) To remove Councillor Ian Thorn from the Financial Planning Task Group following his request to stand down.**

Note: Councillor Ruth Hopkinson arrived at 11.30am.

55 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee received the Forward Work Plan for Overview and Scrutiny, which was unchanged since its last meeting.

It then discussed as also resolved at that meeting to review the arrangements for Select Committees and Task Groups from September 2020 onwards.

It was noted that the regular schedule of meetings had been suspended at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Committee had adopted alternative arrangements including through the Wiltshire Council Covid-19 Response Task Group, which had representatives from each Select Committee and open for members of the Financial Plan Task Group.

The Committee was updated by Terence Herbert, Chief Executive, on the council's recovery from Covid-19, staffing implications and the ongoing need for senior officers to be able to focus upon the continuing recovery.

The Committee then discussed at length options for the continuation of Overview and Scrutiny activity to ensure robust and appropriate scrutiny without diverting key officers and members from necessary work relating to the Covid-19 recovery.

Some members were very concerned that there should not be an open-ended suspension of the regular arrangements, but that any temporary suspension or deferral be for a fixed period or regularly reviewed. It was suggested that given the constitutional requirement and importance of the Select Committees, any ongoing streamlined Overview and Scrutiny process should require approval from Full Council.

The great work being undertaken by officers in difficult circumstances was acknowledged, however it was also stated by some members that careful prioritisation of scrutiny work without overburdening officers was itself a key consideration.

There was discussion of preparatory work that could be undertaken informally by Select Committees if they remained deferred for public consideration, and the level of officer support and engagement which could reasonably be expected in those circumstances. There was also discussion of the need to avoid duplication of work, and the frequency and content of any Wiltshire Council Covid-19 Response Task Group meetings.

It was agreed by all present that it was not a question of any solution seeking to avoid Scrutiny, but for there to be a clear plan for manageable Overview and Scrutiny operation which had the support of members and was deliverable by officers.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

- 1) **The meetings of Children's, Environment and Health Select Committee scheduled for September to be deferred, with the position to be reviewed by OS Management Committee at its next meeting, taking into account the Covid-19 situation.**
- 2) **Full Council approval for the continuance of the streamlined OS arrangements in place to be sought in October 2020.**
- 3) **Additional public meetings of OS Management Committee to be scheduled if appropriate to ensure ongoing public scrutiny.**
- 4) **Wiltshire Covid-19 Response Task Group to continue to meet, but more frequently and receiving additional information beyond the regular Recovery reports to Cabinet on request.**
- 5) **Members of the Financial Planning Task Group to continue to be invited to attend meetings of the Wiltshire Covid-19 Response Task Group to support ongoing financial scrutiny.**
6. **The select committees to continue to be supported to meet informally with their members invited to raise any issues via their committee chairman for raising subsequently at the Wiltshire Covid-19 Response Task Group. Officers and executive members may attend if appropriate. The chairs/vice-chairs to discuss the most appropriate support for their committee with the Chief Executive and CLT**

Note: Councillor Gordon King left the meeting at 12.50pm.

56 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next scheduled meeting was noted as 29 September 2020, subject to any additional meetings that may be necessary as agreed under Minute 55.

57 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 11.00 am - 12.55 pm)

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