

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 23 JULY 2024 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Graham Wright (Chairman), Cllr Christopher Williams (Vice-Chairman),
Cllr Gavin Grant, Cllr Ruth Hopkinson, Cllr Johnny Kidney, Cllr Gordon King,
Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Cllr Robert MacNaughton, Cllr Tony Pickernell, Cllr Pip Ridout,
Cllr Tom Rounds, Cllr Jonathon Seed, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Clare Cape (Substitute) and
Cllr Jacqui Lay (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Nick Botterill

36 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jon Hubbard, Gordon King and Tony Jackson.

Councillor Tony Jackson had arranged for Councillor Jacqui Lay to attend the meeting in his absence.

Councillor Gordon King noted that he would be substituted at a later point in the meeting for Councillor Clare Cape.

37 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2024 were presented for consideration, it was;

Resolved:

To approve and sign as a true and correct record of the minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2024.

38 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

39 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman announced that there had been a premeeting with officers relating to Scrutiny and that a lot of good ideas had been suggested. Consequently, a series of meetings would take place with Select Committee Chairmen and officers to discuss the ideas.

40 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements submitted by members of the public.

41 **Financial Year 2023/24 - Outturn Revenue Budget Monitoring**

The Chairman noted that on page 19 of the agenda pack was a report setting out the year end revenue position for the Council as of 31 March 2024 for the financial year 2023-24. The report provided detail of the final position for services and details of variances against budgets following the quarter three budget monitoring reported to Cabinet on 6 February 2024. The report was considered by Financial Planning on 9th July and Cabinet on 15th July.

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning stated that in the previous year the Council had underspent by £14.371million. It was outlined that in Quarter 3 there had been a proposal for £8.66million to be moved to the High Needs Reserves Block, which had been a one-off payment and had left therefore left a net underspend of £5.7million or 1.2% of the net budget.

Regarding savings, out of an ambitious target of £26million, 90% of the proposed savings had been made, which was a great example of the control of accounts and spending achieved by officers.

Clarity was provided that the £5.7million underspend would be redirected to other pressing priorities, the biggest of which being Highways. Therefore, the £5.7million of underspend would be added to another £5million, meaning that an extra additional £10.7million spend on Highways had been committed, with £10million already allocated in the last year, therefore taking the total funding up to £20.7million, which represented a 50% total increase in spend. It was stated that though roads would be disrupted from works, this was necessary to bring the roads back into an acceptable condition.

Cllr Pip Ridout, Chairman of the Financial Planning Task Group endorsed the report and placed emphasis on the need for individual members to challenge the report and to conduct scrutiny.

The following comments were received by Select Committee Chairmen of the Committee with clarity sought regarding whether there was concern regarding the significant overspend in adult social care. The officer agreed that adult social care was an area for concern as small changes could lead to significant impacts. The officer outlined there was a real need to understand each element of the under and overspends to ensure that the correct assumptions were included in the budget setting process in the future. It was also suggested that some of the underspends had been produced through non-delivery and there was a need to understand such aspects.

The following comments were received by Members of the Committee with clarity provided that the Council was still on track to open properties in early

2025 to support young people over 18-years old and that a matching process had started to ensure that the children were identified and appropriate for the homes they would be moved into. Regarding the challenge of recruitment of foster carers, it was detailed that this was a challenge nationally and that in Wiltshire the number in care was lower than the national average, therefore meaning for less of a demand. Furthermore, in Wiltshire there was high occupancy rates in services, which was positive. It was outlined that there was a challenge with recruitment and that meetings took place to discuss the issue as well as the plans and strategies in place. It was also questioned what Councillors could do to increase the number of foster carers, with feedback welcomed to be sent to Jen Salter, Director Families and Children.

A discussion took place regarding what was meant by “High calibre agency staff”, to which it was noted that not all agency staff available were of “high calibre” and that Wiltshire would not have an approach of taking on agency staff unless they were able to meet the Council’s expectations and were able to deliver practice. Detail was also provided by the S.151 Officer as to how an increase in national living wage might affect the budget and how there was a need to monitor this to ensure that the spinal column points in place maintained differing roles, responsibilities and rewards.

The recruitment difficulties experienced by services that resulted in projected underspends for School Effectiveness, Targeted and SEND and Inclusion service areas was discussed with assurance provided that the Council was back on track with its recruitment. Also, that generally in terms of recruitment, appropriate pay rates would be considered by the leadership team and whether market supplements would be needed. It was also outlined the high needs sustainability plan had additional capacity built in with it acknowledged that the Council wasn’t doing as well as it could be in this space.

Clarity was sought regarding stretch income targets for car parking and that the achieved reported income was because of usage metrics and contributed to a wider improving picture on usage statistics. In addition, it was confirmed that the underspend relating to Area Boards was because of the underspend in grant funding, which was a result of the robust processes which had been put in place to target the spending of Area Boards based on outcomes.

It was questioned whether the underspend of the early years block related to capacity or nursery practices not wanting to support take up, to which it was noted that generally early years take up in Wiltshire had been positive over the past years with a continual rise. It was agreed that officers would go away to source an in-depth answer as to why the gap had shifted.

It was raised that though the report was positive, whether there were any risks that the Council was exposed to, and that the Committee should be aware of to which it was outlined that the high needs block was the largest risk, however this was not of the Council’s making and that there was a need for Safety Valve to work to mitigate this. The Council had been successful to date due to how it had correctly anticipated risks as well as the preventative measures and practices that had been delivered for a successful outcome. It was stressed that

the Council could not afford to be complacent with its positive position and that the oversight of metrics would enable the Council to deal with any issues which might occur as well as the general fund reserves and not being heavily indebted. It was stressed that though the Council had a strong balance sheet, reserves could only be used once and could not be replicated should multiple issues occur.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed:

- 1. The general fund revenue budget outturn position for the financial year 2023/24;**
- 2. The Dedicated Schools revenue budget outturn position for the financial year 2023/24;**
- 3. The Housing Revenue Account outturn position for the financial year 2023/24;**
- 4. The contributions to and from earmarked reserves as planned and detailed in Appendix B;**
- 5. The final year end position of savings delivery.**

Cllr Gordon King left the meeting at the conclusion of this agenda item at 11.30am and was substituted by Cllr Clare Cape.

42 **Year End Capital Investment Programme Financial Outturn Position 2023/24**

The Chairman noted that on page 57 of the agenda pack was a report setting out the year end position of the Capital Programme for the council for the financial year 2023/24. The report included the movements from the original budget, final scheme slippage and how the programme has been funded. The report provided an update on the significant programmes that had been delivered and those that had been reprogrammed into future years. The report was considered by Financial Planning on 9th July and Cabinet on 15th July.

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning outlined that in the previous year £163million had been spent on capital projects, which was £30million more than the previous years. This had previously presented a challenge of starting with a large capital programme and only spending a small percentage of the budget. It was stated that this had not been the case this year with demonstrable progress made in the ability to forecast and then spend and that though some projects had been moved to the subsequent year, some projects had also been brought forward.

It was outlined that 82% of the overall projected spend had been spent, with such areas as Housing Revenue spending 93% of its original projected spend as well as People spending 94%. It was also noted that no additional borrowing or debt had been taken out within the last year with a lot of projects not

requiring net resource to be put in. Furthermore, it was outlined that a lot of the projects proposed would save revenue in the future.

Cllr Pip Ridout, Chairman of the Financial Planning Task Group raised that on 10 September a training session would take place for all Committee Members, if not all Councillors regarding HRA. Additionally, it was stated that the capital programme had been refined and adapted to provide the best possible reports and that it was positive that no borrowing had taken place given the current costs.

The following comments were received by Members of the Committee including a discussion on the use of internal borrowing and the costs involved when going to market to borrow. The importance of conducting medium to long term assessments on cash balances was noted, with there being many interlinking features between capital investment and treasury management. The importance of profiling was stressed when making decisions and how there was a desire not to borrow early and incur costs.

Regarding Ageing and Living Well, it was questioned why £0.601million had been moved to future years, with clarity provided that the Council had received a Disabled Facilities Grant from government to aid adaptations to homes and that there had been an underspend due to the identification of areas and people who would benefit from the work. The balance had been accrued to make sure that it could be used to ensure the best outcomes with the Council pushing boundaries to ensure that the maximum benefit was achieved.

Detail was sought regarding the Council House Build programme, with 44 out of the 77 planned homes completed in 2023/24, therefore posing the question whether this was indicative of the level of delivery. Clarity was provided that this contributed to the wider housing acquisition taking place and that there was an ambition for 1,000 homes to be acquired. Regarding the House Build programme, it was noted that due to the modern methods of construction there had been complexity, therefore meaning that construction had not been to the pace of delivery desired. It was outlined that there was a desire to have sufficient housing stock, predominantly in the south and that officers were considering how this could be expanded across the county at a staged process to manage revenue cost; for example, purchasing homes on block from developers.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed:

- 1. To note the capital programme end of year spend position of £163.421m for financial year 2023/24.**

The Chairman noted that on page 109 of the agenda pack was the Annual Outturn Report reviewing the council's Treasury Management activities for the year. The report was considered by Financial Planning on 9th July and Cabinet on 15th July. The report would be considered by Full Council on the next meeting set to take place on 24 July 2024.

Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning stated that the Council was making money work in the most effective way and drew attention to the balance between internal and external borrowings which provided for capacity in areas within the balance sheet and revenue areas. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of having good treasury management, with it suggested that Wiltshire Council had got this right.

The following comments were received by Members of the Committee, with a discussion taking place on the change of interest rates, with it outlined that at some stage the Council would need to borrow, and that it would be important to forecast and borrow at a time when interest rates had sufficiently fallen. It was outlined that the optimal time to borrow would have to be calculated. Assurance was provided that the finance team in place had great understanding of treasury management as well as when to borrow.

Clarity was provided regarding the "Lender Option, Borrower Option" (LOBO) loans referenced in the report, with it outlined that there had been a loan for £4million paid off with reference made to the consideration of not burdening future Council taxpayers. Reference was made to the appendix included within the report which set out all of the borrowings.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed:

- 1. To note that the contents of this report are in line with the Treasury Management Strategy 2023-24.**

44 **Financial Planning Task Group Update**

The Chairman noted that on page 135 of the agenda Pack, was a report which provided an update on the activity of the Financial Planning Task Group. The Task Group met on 9th July to consider the three reports that discussed earlier in the agenda and a summary of the Group's discussions was included in the report.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed:

1. To note the update on the Task Group's activity provided.
2. To note the Task Group's forward work programme.

45 Management Committee Task Groups Update

A report was received on the Task Groups and Panels established by the Management Committee.

Evolve Programme Task Group

Cllr Ruth Hopkinson outlined that the Task Group had not expected to have continued for as long as it had, however the reason for this had been that some of the issues raised by the work had been complex and impacted every aspect of Council work. Praise was directed towards officers who had been exemplary in taking on challenges and responsibility. Overall, the Task Group had been well managed and that there would be an interim report brought to the September Committee meeting.

An observation was made regarding the impact of Evolve on the Wiltshire Pension Fund team, to which the s.151 Officer outlined that there had been issues across the board with reporting, particularly on pensions payroll reporting. This was now working, however sometimes there was source issues with the data. Actions which could be taken to make improvements had been highlighted.

Stone Circle Governance Task Group

Cllr Ruth Hopkinson, Task Group Chairman drew attention to the Terms of Reference for the Task Group, with it noted that there had been a close distinction between what was operational and what was overview and scrutiny. One area encountered during examination was that there had been a poor understanding of what Stone Circle was as well as the management and governance arrangements; therefore, a lot of time had been spent to provide clarity. It was hoped that once the information was available this should be of use to all Councillors to enhance understanding. The Task Group had reached the conclusion of their work with a report set to be written which would be brought to the September Committee meeting.

Transformation Task Group

Cllr Chris Williams, Task Group Chairman outlined that the Task Group had had its first meeting on 19 June 2024 to start to look at the transformation process. The Group aimed to look at how decisions were made as well as what guidelines were available to support officer with a focus on residents and how they would benefit from investments from the transformation programme. The next meeting of the Group would be on 31 July with Members welcome to join the Task Group.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed:

- 1. To note the update on the Task Group activity provided.**
- 2. To approve the membership and terms of reference of the Transformation Task Group.**

46 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the forward work programmes for each select Committee, as well as updates from the Chairman for each Select Committee.

Cllr Jacqui Lay, Vice-Chairman of the Children's Select Committee provided a verbal update which included that the Committee was conducting a large amount of work with an awareness that some items would need to be recommendations for the new Council as there was a desire not to have any partially completed pieces of work. Following a meeting with the Executive, the following items had been added to the Forward Work Plan:

- Children's oral health and access to NHS Dentistry
- Early Years, childcare and entitlement strategy
- A one-year review of Safety Valve programme due in January 2025.
- SEND Strategy and SEND improvement plan
- Information on the Wiltshire Learning Alliance.

Emphasis was placed on Children's oral health, which had received increasing media interest, particularly from BBC Wiltshire which would be including a segment within their programme.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Lay and the Select Committee for the exemplary work which they were renowned for as well as the in-depth Scrutiny which they had conducted.

Cllr Johnny Kidney, Chairman of the Health Select Committee provided a verbal update which covered that the most recent meeting of the Committee had taken place on 17 July with detail provided on which items had been discussed. Looking forward it was outlined that over the summer there would be meetings with ICB and Council Officers to fine tune the Forward Work Plan to ensure that the Committee had a positive final year.

Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, provided a verbal update which covered that the last meeting of the Committee had taken place on 18 July with an overview of the items which had been discussed including the Culture and Leisure Strategy. It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 3 September, with detail provided regarding which updates would be brought to the Committee. Gratitude was placed towards Cllr Jonathon Seed for Chairing the Speed Limit Assessment Task Group.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed:

- 1. To note the updates on select committee activity and approve the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme.**

47 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 12 September 2024.

48 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 12.22 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ben Fielding - Senior Democratic Services Officer of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718656, e-mail benjamin.fielding@wiltshire.gov.uk

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