



## **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at The Guildhall, St Giles Square, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Monday 6 March 2023 at 6.00 pm.

### **Present:**

Councillor Ian McCord (Chair)  
Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Jamal Alwahabi  
Councillor Paul Clark  
Councillor Maggie Clubley  
Councillor Rupert Frost  
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere  
Councillor David James  
Councillor Koulla Jolley  
Councillor Colin Morgan  
Councillor Ken Pritchard  
Councillor Azizur Rahman  
Councillor Danielle Stone

### **Substitute Members:**

### **Also Present:**

Councillor Jonathan Nunn

### **Apologies for Absence:**

Councillor Sally Beardsworth  
Councillor Mark Hughes  
Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms

### **Officers:**

Martin Henry, Executive Director - Finance (Section 151 Officer)  
Stuart Lackenby, Executive Director - People Services & Deputy Chief Executive  
Rebecca Peck, Assistant Chief Executive  
Sarah Reed, Executive Director - Corporate Services  
Matthew Prisk, Head of Transformation Delivery  
Julie Curtis, Assistant Director - Place Development  
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager  
Richard Woods, Democratic Services Officer

## **46. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

47. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

48. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council and all Officers for their attendance to present their respective items.

49. **Transformation Projects and Wicked Issues**

The Committee considered a presentation from the Leader of the Council which provided an overview of ongoing and upcoming Transformation Projects and 'Wicked Issues' identified by Cabinet.

In introducing the presentation, the Leader of the Council advised that the key Wicked Issues identified by Cabinet were children's placements, adult social care, homelessness and single vulnerable adults, school transport, developing a new way of working, and 'front door' issues such as customer contact. The identification of these subjects had led to the development of new projects for the Council's transformation programme, along with enhancements to existing transformation projects which had been built into the 2023-24 budget savings.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding children's placements, the Leader of the Council explained that the Council had encountered difficulty with the ongoing national challenges of demand and a shortage of suitable available placements for children who require them, however the Council was seeking to develop its offer and pursue opportunities to work together with partner agencies to reshape our local market, become a 'foster friendly Council' thereby improving outcomes whilst reducing costs.

In explaining the current position on homelessness, the Leader of the Council advised that West Northamptonshire had a Higher percentage of single homeless households compared to the national average, which also had links to poor mental health and a loss of government subsidies due to a lack of qualifying support accommodation, which were issues the Council was working to fix through the acquisition of temporary accommodation and transformation within the housing service, which would be achieved through the adoption of a new single system, the development of a single 'West' way of working to enable a strong culture, and the development of a programme of both demand and supply improvements, enabled by system rationalisation and adoption of best practice.

In terms of 'front door' issues such as customer journey, the Leader of the Council explained that due to the nature of bringing together four Councils, West Northamptonshire Council had inherited a number of different systems, pathways and experiences for people accessing our services, with siloed services leading to repeat contact as we addressed one issue at a time, which in turn had led to an increase in demand. The Leader advised that, in order to tackle these issues, the Council had

begun the process of implementing telephony modernisation, a new single Customer Relationships Manager (CRM), process redesign and locality hubs. This, in turn, was intended to deliver financial efficiencies by moving customer contact from expensive back office settings to the customer contact centre.

The Leader also outlined the current position on school transport, which was that the Council had seen significant pressures arising from increased costs and demand, with a total spend on contracts for school transport in excess of £25m across Northamptonshire as a whole. In order to make any changes to existing school transport policies, a full consultation would be required to be undertaken with parents and stakeholders ahead of the beginning of the academic year. In order to simplify the school transport system, the Leader advised that the Council had procured a new system which was due to go live in November 2023 and would pursue other opportunities for simplification such as check ins, route optimisation, and the development of a new West Northamptonshire School Transport Policy.

The final wicked issue centred around operating costs and utilities, which had also seen a significant increase due to the rising cost of energy, however the Leader explained that the Council would look to move towards greater energy efficiency, which was being achieved through the use of renewable energy sources and the drive towards net zero, LED lighting, more modern heating and cooling systems, and the office optimisation project which sought to make better and more efficient use of the Council's buildings.

In introducing the Transformation Update, the Executive Director – Corporate Services provided an overview of the Council's current operating model and explained that Transformation projects and activities in the previous two years have delivered £12.5m of transformation-related savings. In the first two years there were also a number of projects which were paramount to building successful teams but would not necessarily deliver immediate financial savings, for example the Pay and Grading project, the development of the People Strategy, which were primarily aimed at creating a level playing field for all staff who had transferred to West Northamptonshire Council under TUPE from previous sovereign council terms and conditions, and ensuring that WNC was marketed as an attractive and competitive employer in the local jobs market.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the number of ongoing disaggregation projects, the Executive Director – Corporate Services advised that there were currently 23 live disaggregation activities requiring some level of project management.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the update on Transformation Projects and Wicked Issues identified by Cabinet be noted.
- (2) The Committee receives further details on Transformation Projects and Wicked issues at its September 2023 meeting.

50. **Local Area Partnership Funding**

The Committee received a presentation from the Executive Director – People Services which sought to provide Members with an overview of how Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) were funded, formed, and operated.

In introducing the report, the Executive Director – People Services set out that Local Area Partnerships were largely born out of the Health and Care Act 2022, which provided a new legislative framework for greater collaboration between the NHS, local government, and other partners. Local Area Partnerships themselves are based on community areas collaborating across organisational barriers to engage and coproduce services with local people. Ways of achieving this involved the use of local area profiles to provide insight for local priorities, and the development of local area plans. However, the Health and Care Act 2022 did not create additional funding for LAPs, therefore the operation of LAPs was reliant on innovation, existing funding streams and attracting funding from elsewhere.

The Executive Director – People Services explained that the objectives of Local Area Partnerships were to promote partnership working at a community level to reduce inequalities and improve public health and wellbeing outcomes for local residents. By working collaboratively together, health services integrated at a local level had the potential to reduce duplication and drive efficiencies. Local Area Partnerships also make full use intelligence led data and insight information for priority setting and development of Delivery Plans and have the potential to highlight specific issues and attract funding.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the implementation timescale for all Local Area Partnerships to cover West Northamptonshire as a whole, the Executive Director – People Services advised that it was intended to have all nine LAPs covering West Northamptonshire mobilised by the end of March 2023, so that each LAP could then commence its work on holding inaugural meetings and beginning to identify local priorities.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the contents of the presentation be noted.
- (2) That the Committee shall receive further details on the funding of LAPs at its September 2023 meeting.

51. **Quarterly Revenue Monitoring Report**

The Executive Director – Finance presented a report which set out the Quarter 3 Revenue Monitoring report that was considered at the Cabinet meeting held on 13 January 2023.

In introducing the report, the Executive Director – Finance advised that as at the end of Q3 2022-23, an overspend of £3.9m was currently forecast after use of £10.1m of budget contingencies, which were set aside in the budget for risks that have

subsequently crystallised in the current financial year. This represents an adverse movement of £0.2m from the Quarter 2 position reported to Cabinet in December 2022.

However, as the Council had since set its budget for 2023-24 at the meeting of Full Council in February 2023, the position at the end of Q3 was now outdated and that as at the end of period 10, the forecast outturn position was now an overspend of £2.9m, which represented an improvement of approximately £1m in the current position.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the current financial pressures faced by the Council, the Executive Director – Finance advised that further pressures of approximately £800k had been seen in Children’s Services since the end of Period 10, which had been offset in part by underspends across other services, however the final position for the end of period 11 was not yet known.

**Resolved**

(1) That the contents of the report be noted.

52. **Quarterly Medium Term Financial Plan Update**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Executive Director – Finance on the Medium Term Financial Plan, following the setting of the budget for 2023-24 at Full Council in February 2023.

The Executive Director – Finance explained that, although the final budget for 2023-24 showed a balanced position, there was considerable uncertainty in the medium term due to current economic uncertainty and inflationary forecasts, establishing post-pandemic levels of demand and changes in consumer behaviours over future years, confirmation of the implementation of Business Rates reform, the resetting of the business rates baseline and the fair funding review, and the future likelihood of one off Council Tax benefit surpluses which the Council benefitted from in 2023-24.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the budget outlook for future years, the Executive Director – Finance explained that as part of the final settlement announcement, the government had confirmed that the business rates baseline reset will not be implemented until 2025-26 at the earliest. Therefore, the Medium Term Financial Plan had since been updated to reflect this change in funding assumption, which materially improved the 2024-25 budget position.

**Resolved**

(1) That the verbal update on the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted.

53. **Review of Committee Work Programme**

The Chair advised that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 15 May 2023 at 6pm and would be held in the Council Chamber at The Forum, Towcester.

Members of the Committee also requested that further updates on major contracts, capital contracts, and the progress of the Asset Management Strategy be included on the Committee Work Programme for the 2023-24 municipal year.

**Resolved**

- (1) That the Committee Work Programme be updated and noted.
- (2) That Major Contracts and Capital Contracts be referred to the O&S Coordinating Group as a potential cross scrutiny Committee review.
- (3) That Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) be referred to the O&S Coordinating Group as a potential cross scrutiny Committee review.

54. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.04 pm

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_