



## **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in The Jeffrey Room at The Guildhall, St Giles Street, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Monday 18 September 2023 at 6.00 pm.

### **Present:**

Councillor Ian McCord (Chair)  
Councillor Sam Rumens (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Maggie Clubley  
Councillor Rupert Frost  
Councillor Jonathan Harris  
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere  
Councillor Koulla Jolley  
Councillor Colin Morgan  
Councillor Ken Pritchard

### **Also Present:**

Councillor Jonathan Nunn (Leader of the Council)  
Councillor Mike Hallam (Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services)  
Councillor Malcolm Longley (Cabinet Member for Finance)

### **Apologies for Absence:**

Councillor David James  
Councillor Brian Sargeant

### **Officers:**

Martin Henry, Executive Director - Finance (Section 151 Officer)  
Sarah Reed, Executive Director - Corporate Services  
Alison Golding, Assistant Director - Human Resources  
Matthew Prisk, Head of Transformation Delivery  
Mitchell Thomason, Transformation Project Manager  
Katie A Brown, Complaints, Comments and Compliance Manager  
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager  
Richard Woods, Democratic Services Officer

## **1. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **2. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 May 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### 3. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair made the following announcements:

1. Following a recent change in Committee membership, the Chair welcomed Councillor Brian Sargeant to the Committee and thanked Councillor Charles Moreton, who had left the Committee, for his service.
2. The Chair also welcomed Jean Lineker to the meeting, who would be speaking on Agenda Item 5.
3. Members were reminded about the Finance and Budget Scrutiny training session, which was due to be held as a remote meeting via MS Teams on Thursday 21 September.

### 4. **Pay and Grading Review**

The Committee received a presentation from the Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services, the Assistant Director – Human Resources, and the Transformation Programme Manager which set out the progress of the Council's Pay and Grading Review.

In introducing the presentation, the Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services reiterated that the overarching aim of the Pay and Grading Review was to create a local pay structure for the Council, which was underpinned by job evaluation to ensure the Council operated a logical, transparent, lawful, and equitable approach to pay. It was also important to establish West Northamptonshire Council as an attractive prospective employer within the local jobs market.

Since the previous update to the Committee regarding the project, the Assistant Director – Human Resources explained that time had been spent meticulously checking outcomes to ensure that job matching was robust, logical, and relative within the pay bands across job families.

Referring to the Outcomes Summary, the Assistant Director – Human Resources highlighted that as a result of the project, a red, amber and green (RAG) analysis had been undertaken which demonstrated that 90% of the workforce would either see a comparative or positive change in pay as a result of the implementation of the new pay structure, with approximately 10% of the workforce negatively impacted.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding whether there was any risk of an equal pay claim similar to that experienced by Birmingham City Council, the Assistant Director – Human Resources advised that legal advice was sought ahead of the commencement of the project, and alongside the review of TUPE terms and conditions, the Executive Leadership Team would seek to continuously review and mitigate any specific equal pay risks as and when they arise. The Assistant Director – Human Resources also advised that an equality Impact Assessment had also been undertaken in conjunction with the delivery of the project, which demonstrated that across all equality measures, the new pay structure brought about greater equity.

## **Resolved**

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

### **5. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2022-23**

The Committee considered a report from the Complaints and Compliance Manager which set out the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter 2022-23.

Jean Lineker, a member of the public, addressed the Committee and raised a number of matters relating to the provision of services for children with autism, however the Chair advised that this fell under the remit of the Children, Education and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and invited Ms Lineker to attend the next meeting of that Committee to make her representations.

In introducing the report, the Leader of the Council highlighted that the authority was now receiving fewer complaints than the total of all four of the previous legacy Councils prior to the change to unitary governance arrangements in 2021, however key areas of concern still existed within special education needs, disabilities provision, housing, and adult social care. Education and Children's Services complaints made up 24% of the national workload, and the rate at which complaints relating to these services were upheld locally was 84%, compared to 77% in the previous reporting period.

The Complaints and Compliance Manager advised that this review was the first annual review for West Northamptonshire Council since its creation, however the timescales involved with some complaints meant that a proportion of these were attributable to the previous legacy Councils but were determined on in this reporting period. The Complaints and Compliance Manager added that the fact a high proportion of complaints originated from SEND and Adult Social Care had been acknowledged by the Executive Leadership Team and was being constantly monitored.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding what stage the Ombudsman becomes involved in the complaints process, the Complaints and Compliance Manager advised that the Ombudsman only become involved once all avenues of resolution had been exhausted at local level.

Members of the Committee thanked Officers for their report, however expressed concern at the high proportion of complaints originating from SEND and Adult Social Care, therefore agreed to keep this under closer review and requested a progress update every six months, to include information on complaints that do not reach the stage of referral to the Ombudsman. Members of the Committee agreed that this would support in raising the profile of complaints handling within the organisation and would also allow the Committee to gain a broader understanding of the complaints process.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) That Officers be requested to bring to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee a progress update on complaints every six months, which shall also include an overview of complaints that do not reach the stage of referral to the Ombudsman.

## **6. Transformation Projects and Wicked Issues**

The Committee received a presentation from the Leader of the Council, along with the Executive Director – Corporate Services, the Assistant Chief Executive, and the Head of Transformation Delivery which provided Members with an update on ongoing and upcoming Transformation Projects and ‘Wicked Issues’ identified by Cabinet.

The Leader of the Council began the presentation with an overview of the key Wicked Issues that were identified following a review in the summer of 2022, which included Children’s Placements, Adult Social Care, Front Door issues, Ways of working, School Transport and Homelessness. Leader of the Council advised that, since the previous update to the Committee, a transformation and efficiencies programme and commenced at Northamptonshire Children’s Trust for the financial year 2023-24, which had provided a total efficiency of £7.672m.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the breakdown of the efficiency, this was £3.8m in valuing care, £4.185m in enablers, services, and other efficiencies, £1.55m on inhouse fostering, and £840k in placements sufficiency in order to maximise the use of the Council’s assets to improve sufficiency and deliver cost efficient and high quality placements.

The update on Wicked Issues also set out enhancements to the Council’s “Front Door” service offering, with the Leader of the Council highlighting improvements in the routing of planning enquiries through the customer contact centre, and equipping agents with access to planning systems such as DEF Mastergov, as an example of where progress was being made against Wicked Issues.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding pressures in Home to School Transport, the Leader of the Council advised that the total spend on contracts for school transport was considerable across the whole of Northamptonshire, however a public consultation had taken place on the West Northamptonshire School Transport Policy and presented to Cabinet on 11 July 2023 for a decision. This was now in the process of implementation and was expected to deliver a saving of circa £500k in 2023/24 and a further saving of £525k in 2024/25.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the Chair thanked the Leader and Officers for their attendance and advised that a further update on Wicked Issues and Transformation Projects would be requested at a later date.

## **Resolved**

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

## **7. Revenue Monitoring Report - Period 4 2023-24**

The Cabinet Member for Finance and the Executive Director – Finance submitted a report which set out the current Revenue Monitoring position as at the end of Period 4 for the Financial Year 2023-24 and provided an assessment of the Council's financial performance against its approved 2023-24 budget.

In introducing the report, the Cabinet Member for Finance explained that the Council's forecast outturn position as at the end of Period 4 was an overspend of £2.8m after the use of £8.2m of budget contingencies, which were set aside in the budget for foreseeable risks during the current financial year. The main reasons for the underlying pressures were continuous demand and cost pressures within Northamptonshire Children's Trust, along with pressures within housing, temporary accommodation, adult social care, and the cost of the 2023-24 pay award being greater than forecast at the time of setting the budget in February 2023.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the projected Children's Trust overspend, the Executive Director – Finance advised that West Northamptonshire Council's share of the current projected overspend would be approximately £14m, as per the agreed funding split with North Northamptonshire Council, however this was subject to demand and cost-led variances throughout the year.

In response to further questions from the Committee regarding capital costs should any reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) be detected in any Council-owned buildings, the Executive Director – Finance advised that the Council would be liable for any such costs as this would be categorised as a landlord cost.

### **Resolved**

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

## **8. Medium Term Financial Strategy - Quarterly Update**

The Cabinet Member for Finance and the Executive Director – Finance provided a verbal update on the progress of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Executive Director – Finance advised that the Budget Setting Process for the 2024-25 financial year was underway, and Star Chambers meetings with budget holders were now underway, with eight sessions having been held to date.

The Cabinet Member for Finance also advised that he would be attending finance meetings at Northamptonshire Children's Trust going forward, in order to provide oversight on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council, and also to gain a better understanding of financial decision making at the trust.

**Resolved**

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

9. **Review of Committee Work Plan**

The Chair advised that the next formal meeting of the Committee would take place on Thursday 16 November 2023 at 6pm and would be held in The Jeffrey Room at The Guildhall, Northampton.

In discussing the Committee's approach to Budget Scrutiny for the 2024-25 budget setting process, the Chair advised that this process would begin with an informal meeting of the Committee with the Executive Director – Finance and the Cabinet Member for Finance in late October 2023 to allow the Committee to receive an overview of the draft budget for 2023-24, with further Budget Scrutiny sessions focussing on specific areas of the budget to be timetabled thereafter.

The Chair advised that the informal meeting of the Committee would be held via MS Teams, and that diary invites would be circulated in due course.

**Resolved**

(1) That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

(2) That an informal meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee be convened on Tuesday 24 October 2023 to allow Members to receive an overview of the Draft Budget for 2024-25.

10. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8:21 pm

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

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