



Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in The Council Chamber at The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester, NN12 6AD on Thursday 16 November 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 David James
Councillor Koulla Jolley
Councillor Colin Morgan
Councillor Ken Pritchard

Also Present:

Councillor Malcolm Longley, Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor Jonathan Nunn, Leader of the Council

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Brian Sargeant

Officers:

Martin Henry, Executive Director - Finance (Section 151 Officer)
Simon Bryant, Business Intelligence Manager
Richard Corless, Intelligence & Partnerships Manager
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager

11. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

12. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13. Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

1. The Chair advised that the A43 between Towcester and Northampton was closed from 8pm, and therefore it was intended to finish the meeting prior to this to allow for Members and Officers to make their way home prior to the start of the road closure.
2. The Chair also drew the Committee's attention to a correction on Agenda Item 5, which should have read as Budget Scrutiny 2024-25 and not 2023-24.

14. **Budget Scrutiny 2023-24**

At the invitation of the Chair, Members of the Committee put forward their ideas and suggestions as to how scrutiny activity of the budget setting process for 2024-25 could be delivered, ensuring the engagement of not only all Committee Members, but other Councillors who did not sit on the Committee.

One suggestion put forward was that the Committee could receive an in-depth briefing on the current proposals for the draft budget, including the Council's current financial position and any anticipated movements on this before year end, in order to inform further budget scrutiny activity.

Further to this, it was suggested that the format used in previous years of holding a budget scrutiny workshop, supplemented by breakout groups to review specific areas of the budget that were of particular interest to Members, be retained owing to the positive feedback for this approach in previous years, and the level of engagement it fostered between Members and Officers.

Resolved

- (1) That the views of Members of the Committee on the delivery of scrutiny activity of the Draft Budget 2024-25 be noted.

15. **Revenue Monitoring Report - Period 6 2023-24**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Cabinet Member for Finance and the Executive Director – Finance on the Revenue Monitoring position as at the end of Period 6 2023-24.

In introducing the update, the Cabinet Member for Finance explained that the forecast outturn position for the financial year 2023-24 was an overspend of £2.7m, after the use of 8.2m of general 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 potential movement on the forecast outturn position between now and the end of the 2023-24 financial year, the Executive Director – Finance advised that budgets were under constant review, and all directorates were continually seeking ways to reduce costs, manage demand, and drive efficiencies in order to operate effectively.

Resolved

- (1) That the verbal update on the Revenue Monitoring position as at the end of Period 6 2023-24 be noted.

16. Corporate Plan Performance Report - Q1 2023-24

The Committee considered a report from the Business Intelligence, Policy & Performance Lead which provided an update on the Council's performance metrics for the current year against the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan as at the end of Q1 2023-24.

In introducing the report, the Leader of the Council advised that there had been a number of recent changes implemented by central government which had impacted various inspection and regulatory regimes, which had altered some data collection and reporting channels. In turn, a review had been undertaken of the corporate performance scorecard to reflect these changes.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the accuracy of scorecard data against the backdrop of service transformation, the Intelligence & Partnerships Manager explained that further indicators would be developed, amended, and removed during the course of time to reflect changes to teams, services, and systems that have taken place during the course of the creation and evolution West Northamptonshire Council.

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) That the changes to the performance metrics for 2023-24 agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 19 September 2023 be noted.

17. 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 well underway, and Star Chambers meetings with budget holders had recently concluded, with significant positive engagement with heads of service and directorate leads, with all directorates now continually seeking ways to

streamline their operating costs, operate efficiently, and continue to deliver best in class services.

The Cabinet Member for Finance also advised that he had continued to attend finance meetings at Northamptonshire Children's Trust on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council, which was helping the Council to gain a more in-depth insight into the financial operations and decision making at the trust, and how their costs are managed and could be managed in the future.

Resolved

- (1) That the verbal update on the progress of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted.

18. Review of Committee Work Plan

The Committee reviewed its Work Programme and also considered ideas, proposals, and a preliminary timetable for its approach to scrutiny activity of the Draft Budget for 2024-25.

Following the earlier discussion with regards to budget scrutiny, the Committee requested that it be provided with a comprehensive briefing on the proposals for the draft budget, including the Council's current financial position and any anticipated movements on this before year end.

Having sought the agreement of the Executive Director – Finance and the Cabinet Member for Finance to provide such a briefing, the Committee agreed that this be held on Wednesday 29 November at 6pm via MS Teams.

Resolved

- (1) That the Committee Work Programme be noted.
- (2) That a comprehensive briefing on the Draft Budget for 2024-25 be provided to Members of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Wednesday 29 November 2023 at 6pm, via Microsoft Teams.

19. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.15 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____