



**MINUTES of
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
15 APRIL 2021**

PRESENT

Chairman	Councillor V J Bell
Councillors	M G Bassenger, Miss A M Beale, Mrs J L Fleming, C Mayes, C P Morley and C Morris
In attendance	Councillor N J Skeens

371. CHAIRMAN'S NOTICES

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the remote meeting, held under regulations which came into effect on 4 April 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Referring to the recent passing of His Royal Highness the Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, the Chairman asked all present to join her in a minute silence in remembrance.

The Chairman then took Members through some general housekeeping issues, together with the etiquette for the meeting and then asked Officers and Councillors in attendance to introduce themselves.

This was followed by a roll call of all Committee Members present.

372. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R P F Dewick.

373. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED (by assent) that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 January 2021 be approved and confirmed.

374. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was none.

375. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

There were none.

376. UPDATE ON AGREED SCRUTINY ITEMS

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance providing an update on the approach to agreed scrutiny items.

The report reminded Members of two areas of scrutiny the Committee had, at its last meeting, agreed to include in its workplan. The report provided an update on the two areas following the start of information gathering by Officers.

Transformation – Learning from what we have done

The Programmes, Performance and Governance Manager took Members through the report provided at Appendix 1 which detailed a review of the outcomes from the transformation programme and identified learning points. The report highlighted where further financial information was expected, and the Officer explained that the Finance team were working on a wider reconciliation exercise for transformation. Members were requested to consider revising the final reporting date to 31 May 2021 to allow the finance work to be included in the final conclusions.

The Chairman proposed that recommendation (i) as set out in the report be agreed. This was duly seconded.

Members were advised that the report and related papers for the Council meeting in August 2018 were available through the internal I Drive.

In response to a question regarding reviewing the impacts originally identified in the Committee report, Officers agreed to include this within the report.

The Chairman thanked the Programmes, Performance and Governance Manager for her work in relation to this scrutiny report.

Responding to a question raised, the Officer advised that the results of the recent staff survey had been considered by the Performance, Governance and Audit Committee (PGA). The responses had shown that since the last survey there had been a good increase in staff satisfaction and a decrease in turnover. The Programmes, Performance and Governance Manager advised that she would share the report considered by the PGA with the Committee.

The Chairman then put recommendation (i) as set out in the report to the Committee as this related specifically to the Transformation item. Upon a vote being taken this was duly agreed.

A review of the debt collection process and policy and the impact on residents

In Appendix 2 to the report Officers had attempted to address the key outcomes and bring back in interim response as the team involved were very busy managing the Covid response. The Programmes, Performance and Governance Manager outlined the further background information that the response sought to provide. It was noted that staff worked closely with partner agencies to support customers in difficulty although it was difficult to assess issues around vulnerability if people did not engage properly with the Council.

The Chairman thanked Officers for their work putting the report together and particularly thanked Revenues and Benefits Staff for the work they did to support the vulnerable people in the community. She then put recommendation (ii) as set out in the report to the Committee and this was duly seconded.

The Programmes, Performance and Governance Manager reminded Members that this was an interim report and acknowledged that the detail was absent. Due to current pressures on relevant teams this was the reason why an extension to the reporting

timeline had been requested. This extension would allow time to extract the data and provide contextual analysis if for example, enforcement may span between different years.

A lengthy debate ensued and in response to a number of queries raised the following information was provided:

- Members were advised that the Corporate Debt Recovery Strategy covered all debts.
- The percentage of tax payers in arrears etc. was part of the information requested by the Committee but currently outstanding. The Chairman agreed with comments from Members on the importance of such figures but acknowledged the pressures that staff were under at this time and the reasoning behind the request for an extension to the reporting deadline. She confirmed that the Committee would receive a breakdown, so it can identify the problems and specific areas.
- The Corporate Governance Project Officer was the lead Officer in relation to this scrutiny item and Members were reminded that the process was for any communications to be through him. The Chairman advised that if any Members was having problems with this she would follow this up in her role as Chairman.
- It was noted that the Committee had previously requested information regarding the use of attachment of earnings orders versus bailiff action, and this was part of the information outstanding.
- During the COVID pandemic there had been a reduction in Council Tax collection rates and this was reflected in the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy and budget setting for future years. Debts were up slightly on previous years.
- It was also requested to include information on how much money we recover from using bailiffs, and the cost of using bailiffs.

Councillor C Morris, the lead Member for this item of scrutiny, raised a number of points of concern and provided the Committee with additional information in respect of vulnerable persons, use of bailiffs and the need to ensure that unreasonable pressure was not put on vulnerable persons in the District.

The Officer confirmed that information requested regarding the number of accounts in arrears, what debts were etc. would be included and fed back to Members.

It was suggested that the Chairman request a review of this item of business be put on the agenda for every meeting of the Committee going forward.

Councillor C Mayes proposed that recommendation (ii) be amended to refer to a deferment of 3 – 4 months at the most. This amendment was duly seconded.

Councillor Morris proposed a further amendment, that the Council stopped sending out bailiffs until the information requested by the Committee had been received. In response he was advised that this could not be determined by the Committee as it was not within its Terms of Reference and a Motion to the Council would be required.

The Chairman proposed a further amendment that a deferment of two months be agreed.

Members discussed the proposed amendments and the importance of the Committee being presented with the information it had requested as reiterated.

In response to a suggestion that a date be given to the deferment, Councillor Mayes amended her proposed amendment to specify that the deferment be until 31 August 2021 with a report then brought to a meeting of the Committee in September 2021. This proposal was duly seconded.

In accordance with Procedure Rule No. 13 (3) Councillor V J Bell requested a recorded vote. This request was duly seconded.

The Chairman put the amended recommendation in the name of Councillor Mayes to the Committee and the voting was as follows:

For the recommendation:

Councillors M G Bassenger, Miss A M Beale, V J Bell, Mrs J L Fleming, C Mayes and C P Morley.

Against the recommendation:

Councillor C Morris.

Abstention:

There were none.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the Committee reviews the initial update on the Transformation Learning item at Appendix 1 to the report and agrees the final report be delayed to 31 May 2021;
- (ii) That the Committee notes the initial response and information provided on the Debt Recovery Process and agrees a deferment of the review to 31 August 2021 (with a report being brought to a meeting of the Committee in September 2021) and redefines the scrutiny item in light of the interim report at Appendix 2 to the report.

377. ANY OTHER ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE DECIDES ARE URGENT

The Chairman reminded Members of the requirement to present an annual report from the Committee to the Council for consideration. She requested that Members feed any matters to her by email and advised she would be working with the Corporate Governance Project Officer to compile the report.

The meeting closed at 7.21 pm.

V J BELL
CHAIRMAN