

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WEDNESDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2019

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2019 AT 09:30

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

JPD Blundell	T Giffard	M Jones	RL Penhale-Thomas
RMI Shaw	JC Spanswick	T Thomas	CA Webster

Apologies for Absence

NA Burnett, N Clarke and J Gebbie

Officers:

Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Tracy Watson	Scrutiny Officer

Invitees:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Robin Davies	Group Manager - Business Strategy and Performance
Gill Lewis	Interim Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer
Martin Morgans	Head of Performance and Partnership Services
Councillor Dhanisha Patel	Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Kelly Watson	Head of Legal & Regulatory Services
Councillor Philip White	Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help
Councillor Hywel Williams	Deputy Leader
Councillor Richard Young	Cabinet Member Communities

132. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C Webster declared a personal interest in Agenda item 4., due to her son receiving Home to School Transport to an Out of County Placement. The subject of Home to School Transport was included as a provision of the report and debated.

133. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 17 July 2019 be approved as a true and accurate record.

At the request of the Interim Head of Finance and S151 Officer and with the agreement of Members, it was recommended that the Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees seeks further clarification from the Scrutiny Section, on the Conclusions detailed in Minute 130, and if necessary, reports back to the Committee at the next meeting with a further explanation regarding these.

134. BUDGET MONITORING 2019/20 - QUARTER 1 REVENUE FORECAST

The purpose of this report is to provide the committee with an update on the Council's revenue financial position as at 30th June 2019 and virements over £100,000, which was approved by Council on the 24th July 2019.

The report outlined certain background information, following which, it gave a summary of the Council's financial position at 30 June 2019 with Table 1 here, showing a comparison of budget against projected outturn at this date. This reflected a net over spend of £264k comprising of £763k net over spend on Directorates and £499k net under spend on corporate budgets.

The Interim Head of Finance and S151 Officer confirmed that there had been a number of budget virements and technical adjustments between budgets since the MTFs was approved by Council in February 2019. The main virements and technical adjustments were outlined in paragraph 4.1.4 of the report.

In February 2019 Council approved the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2019-20 to 2022-23. This identified the need to develop recurrent budget reduction proposals, based on the most likely scenario, amounting to around £35.2 million over the next four years. Against that background it is essential that expenditure is kept within the overall approved budget and that longer term proposals continue to be developed so that the Council has as much flexibility as possible to meet the challenges which lie ahead.

With regard to the monitoring of Budget Reduction Proposals and Table 2 in this section of the report, showed that of the £2.342m outstanding reductions, £1.795m is likely to be achieved in 2019-20, leaving a shortfall of £547k. Paragraph 4.2.3 of the report outlined some of the proposals that were likely not to be achieved.

Paragraph 4.2.5 of the report, then outlined Budget Reductions for 2019-20. The approved budget for this year included reduction proposals totalling £7.621m, which was broken down in Appendix 2 (to the report) and summarised in Table 3 on page 12 of the report.

A summary of the financial position for each of the Council's main service areas comprising each of the Authority's Directorates, was attached at Appendix 3 to the report and comments on the most significant variances were shown in paragraph(s) 4.3 of the report, including a further explanation on Council Wide budgets.

Invitees responded to a number of questions from Members on the content of the report and RAG status detailed in the report's attached Appendices, following which, it was

RESOLVED: That Committee noted the project Revenue budget for 2019-20 and further noted the ongoing areas of concern.

135. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The Head of Performance and Partnerships presented a report, the purpose of which, was to update the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee of progress on the corporate Digital Transformation programme.

The report gave some background information, following which it gave a summary of progress in respect of the My Account Platform, with paragraph 4.1 of the report detailing a timeline that demonstrated progress made in this area from 2016 to the present day.

He confirmed that since My Account had been launched in April 2018, the following services have been made available online via the My Account self-serve portal:

- Council Tax;
- Housing Benefits
- School Admissions
- Blue Badges, and
- Residential Parking Permissions

Subsequent sections of the report expanded upon these areas and the accessibility to them through the My Account service, together with other potential benefits that were being looked at where My Account on-line services would prove to be beneficial to the public/constituents of the County Borough, in terms of accessing services.

The report then elaborated upon Communications and Marketing and this section of the report covered the following areas:-

1. Corporate website
2. Microsite Transition
3. Communications Strategy
4. Welsh Translations
5. i-Trent – internal HR Solution
6. Digital Strategy
7. Digital First – Channel Capacity

In terms of the report's financial implications, the original Digital Transformation Programme funding of £2.5m was split into £1m for capital expenditure and £1.5m for revenue expenditure. The current position is that as of the 1 April 2019, there is £520k of capital funding and £899,722 of revenue funding remaining. The table in this part of the report, summarised the expenditure to date incurred on the Digital Transformation programme.

The Chairperson then invited questions from Members.

A Member referred to on-line Council Tax billing/ebilling and asked if any consideration had been given for discount to be given to customers for payments they make in respect of these through My Account as an incentive to sign-up to this.

The Head of Performance and Partnerships confirmed that this could not be given retrospectively to people who have already signed up to the scheme and therefore it would not be fair to do so for new customers. Also, if such discount was given, customers could take the discount and then opt out and resort back to paper based bills.

A Member commended the report and detail and informative accompanying presentation, adding that the area of Digital Transformation in the Authority including the My Account initiative, had come on leaps and bounds in the last 12 months since it was last considered by Overview and Scrutiny, when Members had raised some concerns in particular, to automation and possible future job losses of staff. He noted that there were concerns previously at that time regarding the introduction of automation and the effect this in turn may have, on staff job losses. He asked if this may take place, due to the advances made in Digital Transformation within the Authority.

The Head of Performance and Partnerships, advised that under the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), efficiency savings were required to be made moving forward across all areas of the Authority, so jobs were at risk in any Council Directorates and Departments due to this.

The Chief Executive added to this, by stating that advancing in the area of Digital Transformation was key to the Authority as it gave customers more avenues within which to engage with the Authority on a whole range of important issues, including business transactions. He added that it had also assisted the public/constituents engaging more effectively in the budget consultation process on-line and their feedback on the Council's MTFS was considered very important. He reiterated the point that considerable savings were still needed to be made across all areas of the Council and this unfortunately would include the loss of some posts, otherwise the extent of savings that was required would not be made.

A Member asked how much it would cost the Authority over the next few years, in order to continue the development of Digital Transformation.

The Head of Performance and Partnerships confirmed that the Council had delivered on what it had paid for and was contracted to thus far in terms of its Digital Programme and there was a planned budget allocation in place to develop Digital Transformation further in other departments, service areas of Directorates that comprise BCBC.

A Member commended the progress made in this area of work which he felt was beneficial with regards to meeting the expectations of the public. He added that consideration should be given to monitor how we are progressing in future in respect of this area of work, through data collation such as the number of constituents who were communicating with the Council through the likes of Oggie, My Account, Facebook and the like etc, and possibly benchmarking with other authorities who were also making advances here. It was important he felt, that further strides and development continued going forward, particularly as this was being financially supported by the Council at a time when budget cuts were being made in other service areas.

The Transformation, Performance and Customer Service Manager, advised that the Council had a numerous amount of telephone queries from the public and some of these disappeared in a 'pothole' or were not fully responded to/followed-up. Departments also mostly could not confirm to the customer how long an enquiry would take to be responded to or the business it related to concluded, however, timelines could be given for this through Oggie, the Council's chatbot (Robot) communicator. He added that as the area of Digital Transformation developed further with time, systems would be configured through establishing digital channels that meet customer expectations and needs.

He further added, that there had been some IT glitches in respect of parents and guardians etc submitting School Admissions Appeals on-line via the My Account self-serve portal, which resulted in a large quantity of these not being received. The next submission round was in October coming and the issues that caused the above problem were in the process of being resolved in time for this, so hopefully the submission of the next batch electronically to the Council, would process more smoothly.

A Member referred to paragraph 4.8 of the report with regards to the 'Love Clean Streets (BBITS) Environmental reporting – "Report it" initiative, and he asked if through this Members/Officers of the Authority were able to log into our internal mapping service.

The Head of Performance and Partnership Services responded by stating that he was looking at this with the GIS team with a view of improving processes with 'Fix My Street' to make this form of electronic contact more user friendly than is currently the case.

As this concluded debate on this particular item, the Chairperson thanked the Invitees for their attendance and they then duly left the meeting.

Conclusions:

The Committee thanked the Head of Performance and Partnership Services on his report and noted the positives advances made in the last 12 months.

Members acknowledged the positive contribution digital transformation had on the authority but were concerned about impact on jobs, particularly those in front-facing roles.

Members noted the increase in school admissions completed online during the last academic year and asked what changes are going to be made to resolve any IT issues going forward?

Members noted the financial overview in terms of the cost of digital transformation and further noted that it would be useful to receive details of how much had been saved in future reports.

Members suggested refinement on an analytical tool to identify contacts ringing the Council and the purpose of their call.

136. **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - FEEDBACK FROM MEETINGS**

The Head of Legal and Regulatory Services submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to present feedback from the previous meetings of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for discussion, approval and actioning.

Following consideration of the information contained in Appendices A and B to the report, it was

RESOLVED: That the RAG status of the following be agreed:-

- Social Services Annual Report 2018/19 – Comment/Conclusion 1 – **Green**, Comment/Conclusion 2 – **Amber**, Comment/Conclusion 3 – **Amber**
- Bridgend Replacement Local Development Plan 2018-2033 Draft Vision & Objectives, Growth & Spatial Options – Comment/Conclusion 1 - 4 – **all Green**,
- Financial Performance 2018-19 – Comment/Conclusion 1 & 2 – **Amber**, Additional Information – **Green**
- Council's Council's Performance against its Well-being Objectives for 2018-19 – Comment/Conclusion 1 – **Green**, Additional Information 1 – **Amber**, Additional Information 2 – **N/A**

137. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (FWP) UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report on behalf of the Head of Legal and Regulatory Services on the above topic.

Attached at Appendix A to the report, was the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee FWP, which included the items for the next scheduled meeting.

Attached at Appendix B to the report, was the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees FWP which included the topics prioritised and agreed by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the next set of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees in Table 1, as well as a list of proposed future topics at Table 2.

The Chairperson together with Members discussed the feasibility of establishing a combined Overview and Scrutiny Committee to comprise the membership of the Council's Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees 1, 2 and 3, in order to consider the MTFS proposals, prior to these being in turn presented to Cabinet, for consideration. Such a Committee would hopefully allow for all such Members on this to raise questions on the budget and also have voting rights. This meeting would be in addition to all such Scrutiny Committees meeting in their own right to consider the MTFS proposals.

The Monitoring Officer advised that any such joint arrangement along the lines of the above, would have to be reported to and approved by Council. She would therefore look into this suggestion in conjunction with the provisions of the Constitution, prior to any such report being compiled.

RESOLVED: That the report and supporting information in the form of Appendices be noted, with it further agreed that Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 would consider the subject of Education Outcomes at its meeting on 3 February 2020, and Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 considers the topic of Home to School Transport at its meeting dated 5 February 2020.

138. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 12:36