

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2022 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Ball, Kitchener, London, Morris, Osborne-Jackson, Pender and Williamson

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Barnes, Layland and Purves

18. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on held on 13 July 2021 and 9 November 2021 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to Minute 8, Final report - In depth Scrutiny Working Group CCTV, page 5, paragraph 5, line 2 the word software being changed to read hardware.

19. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Osborne-Jackson declared for Transparency that he was a trust Member on the Kent Community Health NHS Trust.

20. Responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Scrutiny Committee

There were none.

21. Actions from the Previous Meeting

The Committee was updated with regards to the following actions and were advised that Performance Indicators for LPI_CS001 and LPI_CS002 had moved in a positive direction and were now amber.

In regards to DS Waste002: Missed Waste Collections per 100k Members were advised that domestic waste collections continued operating at high levels of waste collected (up to 15% higher). Although this service was prioritised, in addition to collecting and tipping more waste it has operated with reduced staffing levels due to the pandemic. January was 7.88 against target of 8, February crept up to 9.8 which may be understood when the effect of Storm Eunice was considered.

Members were advised that DS Waste004: Missed green waste collections that the service continued to operate at high levels of collections. Performance was under

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pressure due to the reduced staffing resources and the prioritisation on domestic waste collections. To resolve this the Team were currently looking to re-balance the collection rounds and to introduce an in-cab technology pilot to improve performance. As a positive, the figure/value for February 22 was 5 with a target of 9, so an improvement trend.

Members were advised that Covid continued to have an impact and presently 10 staff were off with Covid. However, Members were reminded that the number of missed collections was 9 out of 100,000.

The Chief Officer Customer and Resources advised that Covid Levels among staff were still monitored in line with the Council's 3 step recovery plan. Many staff Members who did test positive were able to continue to work from home and this had not resulted in a significant impact on service delivery.

22. Dartford & Gravesham NHS Trust

The Chairman welcomed Steve Fenlon, Medical Director at Dartford Gravesham NHS Trust.

The Medical Director gave a presentation to the Committee which informed the Committee on Covid, healthcare reorganisation, system plans and challenges, and a Trust update including estate improvement.

In response to questions regarding Covid, Members were advised that the influenza and Swine Flu plan had been initially instigated at the start which had worked well. However, the biggest challenge was the speed of which Covid passed on, and the influenza plans had not accounted for the number of patients who would require ICU. The ICU unit had beds for 10 patients and this quickly moved to 30. The biggest issue in regards to PPE was inflation and people buying more than what was needed, supplies were shared across Trusts as they were needed.

The Medical director praised staff for the way they had coped with the pandemic. In the first wave there was a high number of ICU staff needed and some staff had to be redeployed work in the ICU. These staff Members were those who had worked closely with ICUs before. During the second wave staff were given the option if they wanted to be redeployed to the ICU and some staff had continued to work in the units. Full physiological support was available for staff and there were plans for the ICU and the number of staff to be increased.

Covid numbers remained consistent with around 40 - 50 patients in the hospital at any one time. Covid was not the sole reason for being admitted but it was important that consistent swabbing and monitoring was continued to track the spread, and whether patients were coming in to hospital with it or it was being picked up whilst they were in hospital. The number of patients requiring ICU care had dropped and this was due to the vaccination and advances in treatment.

Members questions further focussed on patients managing their own care, through apps and advances in IT interfaces and looking at managing care needs outside of

the hospital. It was expected that over the next 15 years, there would be a 20% increase of care requirements, and hospitals would only be able to expand so far.

The Trust had created a paediatric emergency department which meant children were not seen by waiting in the main A&E area. Many people were now using the 111 service who could refer to Urgent Treatment Centres which provided care 12 hours a day 7 days a week rather than going straight to emergency departments which would in turn reduce the waiting time.

The Committee thanked the Medical Director for attending.

23. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council as at January 2022. Members were asked to consider 14 performance indicators which were performing at 10% or more below their target with a commentary from Officers explaining the reasons and detailing any plans to improve performance. The report also provided key performance indicators relating to the Portfolio Holders for Finance & Investment and People & Places.

In response to questions Members were advised that in regards to the Housing performance indicators, Covid, higher energy and food prices were having an ongoing impact on homelessness, alongside the impact of new Domestic Abuse legislation placing additional legal duties on local housing authorities. The Chief Officer People & Places advised Members that under the Act another Local Authority could place someone fleeing domestic abuse within the Sevenoaks District, which had result in an increase in emergency accommodation placements. An ongoing problem was the lack of affordable homes for people to move onto once placed into temporary accommodation. A number of initiatives to respond to the ongoing pressure of homelessness were in place, including Quercus Housing's delivery of more affordable housing and there was an out of area placement policy being developed.

Members thanked Officers for the good service which residents receive.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

24. Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment, Cllr Dickins, reported on recent achievements and challenges faced in his portfolio. Covid was still very much present and from when initial conversations were taking place regarding the implications on the Council's finances in the medium and longer term, coming before Members today it was a delight to say that the Council's finances had performed better than anyone had anticipated back at the start of the pandemic two years ago. Pressures pre pandemic such as income lines and inflation had been accelerated as well as some of the positives such as the upscaling of the organisations and community connections as recognised in the Peer Challenge.

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The budget had remained balanced for the next 10 years, and that innovation would continue to need to happen, and this was particularly through the property investment portfolio, and by using the skills learnt over the years this would benefit the council in the future. The Portfolio Holder's long term plan for the finances of the council was to ensure that a collaborative approach moved forward and the challenges that would arise.

Members took the opportunity to ask questions of the Portfolio Holder. Finances were currently 'under control' and risks had been considered under the budget at Full Council, and presently the figures were showing that there would be an unfavourable variance of £6,000. In terms of cash to property, this remained an area of risk but the Council could no longer invest for yield in property and so the property investment strategy had been removed from the capital programme to allow to borrow for some of the place making schemes. He advised that one of the biggest changes going forward was treasury returns and some of them were being moved into multi asset funds to look at longer terms investments.

In regards to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), we could not borrow from the PWLB if we were still participating in invest for yield property schemes. This had been reinforced by CIPFA in the revised Prudential Code.

Regarding Multi Asset Investment Funds, Treasury Management Strategy advisers had been instructed on fund sifting and would bring to Members their proposed funds based on feedback we had given them, before a final decision was made.

The Capital Programme would be updated with further schemes which have been approved separately. It was noted that these schemes were not without risk.

In regards to assisting fuel bills, central government were providing £150 to Council tax payers in bands A - D with a discretionary payment for those who lived in larger properties, subject to criteria. The intention was to support those most in need. There were still around 9,000 households who did not pay their Council Tax by Direct Debit but these people would not miss out on the payment.

The Committee thanked Cllr Dickins for his attendance and to Officers for their work.

25. Portfolio Holder for People & Places

The Portfolio Holder for People & Places presented her report starting with thanking Officers for all their work within the wide remit of the Portfolio. She advised that the report was only a snapshot of the portfolio. Recent successes included the Making in Happen voluntary and community awards; the District Voluntary Sector Forum had undertaken its second Barometer Survey of the sector to assess the ongoing impact of Covid-19; an artist has been commissioned to deliver a new public artwork in Sevenoaks Town; we received KCC funding for a Community Mobilisation Officer to support a programme of community empowerment work over the next 15 months; the Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership was successful in securing £100k funding and there was a launch of a

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new tourism website for the district. The new Sevenoaks District Community Safety Strategy and Action Plan for 2022/23 had been finalised and included an additional priority for Violence Against Women and Girls

Looking ahead, the Big Sing would be held in June; preparations for the Queen's Green Canopy project were underway and the Family Fun Days have been confirmed for Easter and Summer. The Community Grant scheme is being reviewed, looking to see how the process can be shortened to benefit successful applicants. The opening of the White Oak Leisure Centre had been a success and it had been confirmed that Orchards Academy and the sports hall would be rebuilt as part of an overall development programme for the school. The Kickstarter scheme would finish at the end of March 2022, and a number of Kickstarter's had found new roles.

Members took the opportunity to discuss the report and ask the Portfolio Holder questions. Members thanked the Portfolio Holder for the work on the White Oak Leisure Centre and positive feedback had been received, and congratulated the Team.

Cllr Dyball advised that, Cllr Hogarth and herself were trustees of the Charity Incorporated Company, Concrete Wave for fundraising for the skate park renewal in Swanley. So far, funding had been received and this was solely for the skate park.

In response to a query, Members were advised that the Portfolio Holder's report was only a snapshot of her Portfolio and would send an update on the Town Ambassadors, Mental Health, White Ribbon and the Youth Assembly.

Action: For additional information to be circulated on Town Ambassadors, Mental Health, White Ribbon and the Young People's Assembly.

The Chief Officer People and Places advised that provision for a new sports hall on the Orchards Academy site is being taken forward by the Department for Education. Although this would be delivered within the next two years the Council had been approached for their comments and input for any requirements, including a Community Use Agreement.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for her attendance.

26. Chairman's Draft Annual Report

The Chairman presented the report and invited Members to provide feedback and ask questions.

It was requested by Members that the Chairman's report include comments on the level of Officer administrative support available to Working Groups.

27. In Depth Scrutiny Working Group - Verbal Update

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Cllr Osborne Jackson, Chairman of the Covid -19 Working group updated Members that the working group had met with Cllr Fleming, Richard Morris, Sarah Robson and visited the Dunbrik Depot.

It was hoped the Committee would be able to meet with the Chief Executive, Leader of a neighbouring authority and KCC before making the final report. He advised that the final report would come to the 12 July 2022 Scrutiny Committee.

28. Work Plan

The work plan was discussed and a number of external invitees were suggested for future meetings of the Scrutiny Committee depending on the availability. It was also noted that should two external organisations be available to attend then only one Portfolio Holder would be invited to attend the meeting.

Possible External Invitees

Kent Police

Sencio

Chief Executive West Kent Housing

Leader of KCC

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.16 PM

CHAIRMAN