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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 27th February 2024

Present: Councillor Elizabeth Smaje (Chair)
Councillor Bill Armer
Councillor Andrew Cooper
Councillor Shabir Pandor

70 Membership of Committee

All Members of the Committee were in attendance.

71 Minutes of Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

The Chair updated the Committee as follows:

- (i) The new Flood Risk Management Strategy had been submitted to Cabinet on 20th February 2024. The report had included the comments and recommendations made by the Committee, at its meeting on 5th December 2023, and Cabinet had agreed to adopt the new strategy.
- (ii) At the meeting of the Committee held on 5th September 2023, the provision of further detail had been requested in respect of the partnership work on tree planting and the Council's participation in the 'Vision Zero' road safety management initiative. This information had now been shared with Members.

72 Declaration of Interests

No Interests were declared.

73 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public session.

74 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

75 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

76 Financial Management - Quarter 3 Financial Monitoring and Annual Budget

The Service Director - Finance, Isabel Brittain, submitted the Corporate Financial Monitoring Report – Quarter 3 and the Annual Budget Report 2024-25.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 27 February 2024

Councillor Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Regeneration, introduced the item explaining that the Council's financial situation had improved significantly and the predicted overspend by the end of the financial year had been reduced due to the savings achieved.

The following points were highlighted in the presentation:

- The Budget Report would be presented to full Council on 6th March.
- It had been a challenging year but a balanced budget had been produced.
- The budget included significant new savings which equated to £34 million.
- There had been a contribution to reserves from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.
- There had been an improvement in the position at the end of Quarter 3, with an overspend of £9.9 million pounds compared with £16 million in the previous period. This had been achieved through undertaking a number of central budget challenges including reducing the costs of capital financing and service expenditure from reduction of non-essential spend.
- There were still a number of pressures, particularly in Children and Families, Adults and Health and Growth and Regeneration.
- Further work would be undertaken with the aim of achieving an outturn position with a further reduced overspend.

Questions and comments were invited from Committee Members, with the following issues being covered:

- Detail in respect of the pressures on Children and Families, and Adults and Health services and the mitigations, which included:
 - Work to provide integration support across all elements of Children Services
 - Reviewing the careers contract for the Kirklees and Calderdale joint partnership.
 - Reviewing the mental health offer to families
 - A re-design of youth work within Children and Families.
 - A significant project to review the delivery of adult services, across a number of areas of work, to ensure that financial costs were relevant and realistic and achieved best value. This might include review of the direct payment policy, community based integrated library redesign, older people and physical disability services redesign and cultural fees and charges.
- In response to a question in respect of the approach and opportunities for income generation in the future, it was acknowledged that additional income streams could be investigated further but a cautious approach should be taken to ensure that there would be no financial risk to the taxpayer.
- It was suggested that consideration could be given to the establishment of a vehicle to deliver direct services to residents, or the use of Municipal Climate Bonds, which had been adopted by a number of other Councils; such initiatives being considered to be of lower risk.
- The aim was to reduce the projected £9.9 million further by the end of the financial year and there were some opportunities to achieve this. If the overspend was reduced this would retain more money in reserves and place the Council in a more resilient position for the future.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 27 February 2024

- It was acknowledged that spend in Quarter 1 of the new municipal year may be higher, due to deferred spending, but this was a normal occurrence and would be balanced out over the remainder of the year. In addition, a number of service re-designs would be implemented and essential spend only would continue.
- Capitalisation was currently only used for transformation projects, apart from the general Capital Programme. There was a consultation ongoing in respect of proposals to allow Councils in significant financial difficulty to capitalise some revenue overspend in the future. Kirklees was not considering this at the present time and would continue to capitalise revenue in accordance with Government guidelines.
- A report was to be submitted to Council on the 6th March, alongside the budget documents, in respect of the new powers available to local authorities, as legislated for in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, in relation to long-term empty properties and second homes. The relevant exemptions would be confirmed by the Government in due course. These new powers were welcomed and it was hoped that they would have a similar effect to the previous initiative, in terms of properties being returned to the market.
- It was clarified that authority would be delegated to the Council's Section 151 Officer, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder, to enable the policy to be amended once the final detail was confirmed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Changes to the strategy would need to be referred to Cabinet and Council.

Thanks were expressed to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Regeneration and the Service Director – Finance for the report.

77 Annual Review - Local Flood Risk Management

A report was submitted which provided an annual review of activity in respect of local flood risk management.

Councillor Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Regeneration, introduced the item stressing that, particularly in light of the increased risk due to climate change, this work was very important in order to try and mitigate flood risk as much as possible for local residents.

Paul Farndale, Acting Team Leader - Flood Management and Drainage presented the report highlighting the following points:

- The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, that had been presented to the Committee on 5th December 2023, had now been approved by Cabinet and replaced the 2012 version.
- An update, further to the presentation to the Committee in March 2023, in respect of the natural flood management partnership project at Wessenden Head. This work aligned with the 'protect' theme within the strategy, using various nature-based solutions to slow the flow of water and reduce the risk of flooding downstream. A high-level study had been undertaken to consider opportunities for such work across all areas of Kirklees and was due to be presented to stakeholders on 28th February 2024.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 27 February 2024

- There was a rolling programme of schemes and the team worked very closely with the Environment Agency to attract funding.
- An outline of the process that would be followed for larger projects.
- The number of schemes had increased since the previous report in 2023.
- One of the projects falling under the 'recovery' theme was a pioneering mental health and wellbeing project, led by Kirklees, which aimed to build resilience within communities where flooding was an issue.
- The approach to flooding was centred on the management of risks and risk was a product of the likelihood of an event happening and the severity of its consequences. There was an increased focus on the detrimental effect of flooding on people, in terms of both local and national strategies, and the aim of making communities more resilient.

Jason Hanks, Project Officer - Flood Management, shared a presentation on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Project explaining:

- This pilot project had been developed in partnership with the West Yorkshire Flood Innovation Project (WY FLIP) and alongside the Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Solutions Programme (ICASP).
- WY FLIP was an innovative, collaborative approach, involving the five West Yorkshire local authorities, which had been developed to share ideas and experience and to identify innovative ways to secure investment into flood resilience.
- ICASP was a support service with links to local universities.
- Each local authority took a lead on a particular theme. Kirklees' theme was 'Community and Voluntary', the main focus of which was to help the community and voluntary sector to be better prepared and recover more quickly.
- The thinking behind the creation of the project with the purpose being to raise awareness of mental health amongst flood communities and to address the issues by working with mental health charity partners, providing a check-in service, psychological first aid training and support, facilitating regular events with a flood resilience focus or to link in with natural flood management projects and provision of useful information for the community.
- The Yorkshire Regional Flood and Coastal Committee Group had approved the recent funding bid.

Paul Farndale explained that, in terms of the 'prepare and respond' theme of the strategy, the Council maintained a large database of past flooding incidents and a record of relevant assets. This information was needed to inform project bids, was used to advise the planning department in terms of flood risk for any proposed development and also fed into the authority's emergency planning work and severe weather plan.

Martin Jordan, Senior Emergency Planning Officer gave a presentation which highlighted the following:

- Kirklees Severe Weather Plan dictated how the Council responded to the impacts of a range of weather and how the plan could be activated at three levels, which were triggered by warnings and alerts from partners.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 27 February 2024

- Many Council teams took a role in the response and were provided with action cards to set out the options that they should consider at each level of activation. There was an option to establish a formal command structure if needed, supported by an emergency control room.
- There was a hybrid working approach and the aim was to build relationships and to understand capabilities and interdependencies with ongoing communication via a 'Whatsapp' group which was also used out of hours.
- The plan provided a framework for the response but it was also vital that good communication and relationships were built and maintained.
- The plan was tested at least one year, and exercises took place that could involve multi-agency partners.
- Debriefing was undertaken following an activation of the plan so that any lessons could be learned.
- The use of a collaborative approach during a flooding incident, alongside other Council teams and partners, and with reports from Councillors, residents, front-line officers and a wide range of partners and other public and private organisations feeding into the intelligence-led response.
- The Flood Spotters initiative and the role of the 44 Council staff who had been recruited and trained as flood spotters. There were also 130 emergency volunteers.

A brief outline was given in respect of the work to be undertaken over next twelve months. A significant focus was expected to be related to the review of the Local Plan, which would require an updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment using the latest modelling. In addition, further information was awaited from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in respect of the implementation of Schedule 3 of the Floods and Water Management Act 2010.

Questions and comments were invited from Committee Members, with the following issues being covered:

- The value of the work undertaken in engaging with local communities in building confidence and getting them involved in dealing with the issues.
- Funding from the Combined Authority for the scheme at Queens Mill Road and Albert Road, Huddersfield was welcomed.
- In respect of the mental health and wellbeing project, although there would be work undertaken in the aftermath of an event, consultation with mental health charities had suggested that prevention was better than cure and this would therefore be a significant element of this project.
- Although Kirklees did provide sandbags there was no obligation on it to do so. There were eleven areas in the district where pre-deployment was currently in place and two of those were trialling the use of floodsacs. Sandbags and floodsacs had limitations so property level flood protection, such as floodgates, were a better option and provided a quicker response. There was a need to raise awareness and encourage residents to take this up.
- Debris screens were a necessary evil to stop large objects blocking culverts. The programme for clearing them took into account the level of associated risk, further to information being gathered about the levels of debris in locations. Some of those which would not affect property if they failed had now been changed to be on a more reactive basis. Those where it would affect property

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 27 February 2024

were on an ongoing two-weekly cycle to reduce the risk and some would be prioritised if there was a weather warning. There was also a rolling programme to upgrade these screens.

- Base models would be established so that it could be ascertained whether future natural flood management measures had improved the position and slowed to flow of surface water but this approach took a very long-term view.
- It was suggested that the use of property level protection should be included in the Council Update to raise awareness with Councillors who could consider whether it might be beneficial for any property in their ward. for their areas.
- The position and approach in respect of engagement with Yorkshire Water to try and reduce contamination spills from combined sewer overflows in severe weather and the importance of this work being taken forward.
- An explanation of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and its role in respect of the Local Plan and allocation of development sites.
- Although there were mechanisms in place to provide information to those areas/residents where flooding had happened in the past it was suggested that it would also be helpful to provide information, perhaps via social media, if severe weather was anticipated, so that people who might be experiencing it for the first time would know who to contact for advice/ assistance. Relevant telephone numbers were available on the Council's website but this would be considered alongside the Communications Team.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Mental Health and Wellbeing Project be welcomed as an excellent initiative.
- (2) That efforts be made to raise the awareness of all Councillors in respect of the benefits and possibilities in relation to the use of property level protection against flooding.
- (3) That engagement with Yorkshire Water be pursued at a regional level to examine the potential to reduce contamination spills from combined sewer overflows in severe weather.
- (4) That consideration be given to providing information, in the event of severe weather, to ensure that people who may be experiencing flooding for the first time are aware of who to contact for advice and assistance.

78 Technology Strategy – Update

Andy Simcox - Service Director for Strategy and Innovation and Terence Hudson Head of Technology gave a presentation highlighting the following points

- The current Technology Strategy covered the period 2020 to 2025.
- A refresh of the strategy was planned within the next 18 months with the aim of ensuring that it continued to align with the Council's priorities and reflected the challenges being faced.
- Delivery of key strategic outcomes including:
 - Face to face provision within the Civic Centre Campus.
 - Progression of the procurement of a new corporate data network contract.
 - Implementation of the new Adult Social Care system (which had just gone live).

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee - 27 February 2024

- The deployment of additional cyber security controls.
- Ongoing work in respect of digital inclusion and accessibility.
- Access to gigabit capable broadband for 85% of the district's households.
- Updates in terms of My Kirklees Account and digital transactions.
- Updates to the governance of IT investment projects, to ensure oversight at corporate level, including the formation of four strategic directorate boards.
- Details of the achievements in respect of tactical cashable savings.
- Re-profiling of the Capital Plan.
- An update in respect of telephony and the impact of changes in respect of the removal of the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) infrastructure and turn-off of the 2G and 3G mobile phone networks, particularly for vulnerable residents.
- Maintenance of a view of risk.

Questions and comments were invited from Committee Members, with the following issues being covered:

- The importance of ensuring that residents, particularly those who were vulnerable, were not excluded by the increased use of digital methods, with reference to the future operational model of customer contact centres; a consultation on which was ongoing. Assurance was given that an Integrated Impact Assessment would be undertaken in respect of any changes proposed and these issues would be taken into account in designing the future service model.
- In respect of the potential utilisation of the heat produced by data centres, this could be considered. However, the current equipment used substantially less energy than in the past and was not generating a significant level of heat. There would also be a need to take into the potential longevity of this as an asset.
- There was an awareness of the environmental impact of data centres and this was included within the climate plan. The authority's data centre was naturally cooled and no air conditioning was required.
- The current hybrid/flexible model of working was considered to be the right one for the authority to offer, both in terms of competition for recruitment and the personal wellbeing of staff. It was believed to be working both well and effectively. It was noted that the accommodation at Civic Centre I was now much improved.
- The service worked closely with other teams to ensure alignment with other Council strategies such as those related to the environment and people.
- PSTN lines were the traditional telephone lines and once that infrastructure was removed telephone calls would only be possible over the internet. This would mean that during an internet failure it would not be possible to make telephone calls and a back-up option, such as a mobile phone, would therefore be necessary. Further issues could be caused in the event of a power cut, in areas served by smaller mobile phone masts, and this was being discussed at national level to ensure that people were protected. The authority was mindful of this.

Resolved –

That the Service Director – Strategy and Innovation and the Head of Technology be thanked for attending the meeting and providing the update on the Technology Strategy.

79 Lead Members' Updates

Updates were submitted in respect of the work of the Growth & Regeneration and the Environment & Climate Change Scrutiny Panels.

80 Work Programme 2023-24

The latest version of the Committee's Work Programme for 2023/24 was submitted for consideration.