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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CORPORATE SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 29th November 2018

Present: Councillor Gulfam Asif (Chair)
Councillor James Homewood
Councillor Hilary Richards
Councillor John Taylor
Councillor Will Simpson

Co-optees Philip Chaloner

In attendance: Cllr Graham Turner, Portfolio Lead for Corporate
Eamonn Croston, Service Director - Finance, IT and
Transactional Services
Carl Whistlecraft, Head of Democracy

Apologies: Councillor Marielle O'Neill
Linda Summers (Co-Optee)

1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2018 be approved as a correct record.

2 Interests

No interests were declared.

3 Admission of the Public

It was agreed that all agenda items be considered in public.

4 High level overview of Quarter 2 financial monitoring reported to Cabinet on 13 November, and current budget progress

Eamonn Croston, Service Director for Finance, IT and Transactional Services, presented a report which provided a high level overview of Quarter 2 financial monitoring reported to Cabinet on 13 November, and a summary of the current budget progress.

The report outlined the key highlights from quarter 2 financial monitoring report which that the General Fund year end predicted a £4.8m overspend vs a revised budget of £290.8m. He explained this was a marginal adverse shift compared to the Quarter 1 forecast overspend of £4.4m but that he anticipated that the overall variance would start to reduce over latter part of the year.

Eamonn advised that good progress had been made against planned savings with anticipated delivery of £12.6m being made against the £16.2m planned saving

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requirement in-year. The savings that would not be achieved included deferred timing of out of district external placements savings at £1.1m, pressures on schools transport at £1.6m and car parking at £0.3m.

It was advised that the planned overspend on high needs of £7.9m, would be offset in part by release of £5m unallocated minimum revenue provision budget in-year. The General fund reserves year end forecast was broadly in line with the budget strategy update report which showed £37m available financial resilience reserves.

Overall, Eamonn explained that the Quarter 2 forecast highlighted no surprises compared to Quarter 1 and advised that all key issues had already been picked up and fed into the budget strategy update report; other than the winter pressures funding announcement, which was new funding.

The Panel questioned how the increase in overspends and 20% of planned savings were being addressed within the budget. Eamonn explained that budgets were tight and there wasn't very much room for manoeuvre. He explained that a decision had already been made to look at the treasury management process and £9m had also been released to the base budget as part of the financial resilience flexible pot.

The Panel also questioned how the autumn budget announcement relating to business rates would impact on the budget. Eamonn explained that this related to government relief and as such, would be funded by central government.

In relation to the overspend within the Learning Service, Eamonn further expanded to advise that the increasing pressure was being considered as part of the children's plan and potential savings were being identified that would assist in closing the gap whilst not detrimentally impacting on these children.

RESOLVED -

- (1) Eamonn Croston, Service Director for Finance, IT and Transactional Services be thanked for attending the meeting;
- (2) The costs associated with children excluded from school be brought to the next meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Panel as part of the finance update;
- (3) The Panel recommend that schemes relating to the development of the high street be developed in readiness for the distribution of the pot of money being made available by Government for "changes to local high streets".

5 Democracy Commission Update

Carl Whistlecraft, Head of Democracy presented a report which provided an outline of the progress since 19 April 2018 from an Overview and Scrutiny perspective. The report also requested the Panel to explore the ways in which further contributions could be made to the next phases of the work.

The report set out a high level summary of the work commissioned since the initial meeting of the working party in March, which included updates on the following areas:

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- The Changing Councillor Role and How it is supported;
- Developing a Citizen Engagement Framework and Place Based Working;
- Improving Electoral Registration
- Putting Councillors at the Heart of the Organisation
- Networked Councillors – Digital Skills, Confidence and Content for Civic Good
- Regional Devolution – Supporting our Councillors and Citizens
- Opening up our Meetings
- Recommendations for External Organisations

The Panel highlighted concerns regarding the progress being made in relation to “Councillor at the Heart of the Organisation”. They outlined personal experiences in which they have not received responses from officers and explained that they did not feel officers understood the councillor role. Carl explained that the issues highlighted had been echoed across the council. As such, the working party was attempting to address the cultural approach across the council and highlighted that clear expectations being outlined from the start, officers not “gatekeeping” information and councillors being at the heart of their wards were three of the biggest challenges that the working party was up against. The Panel suggested that as part of this work, a clear set of standards relating to responsiveness when working with councillors be developed to outline clear expectations from the start.

The Panel moved on to recognise that if the council as an organisation is being requested to understand the requirements of councillors, this also should be reciprocated. To assist in understanding the role and requirements placed on an officer, the Panel advised that they would undertake “a day in the life of an officer” and feedback their experience to the Democracy Commission Working Party. Carl welcomed this and advised that members of the working party had already undertaken this role with some officers.

The Panel also highlighted their concern regarding the ability to interact with the public and the dated technology currently available. Carl advised that there was a recommendation relating to utilising the full capability of webcasting facilities but that this would incur a capital spend impact.

The Panel queried where the work with the public would fit in with the process and Carl explained that this was a key ingredient in the process and was already being undertaken. He did however advise that the dialogue with the public would increase as the working party progressed throughout the project. Carl also outlined that a pilot had been undertaken in the Golcar ward using the “Place tool” to evaluate the tools impact on increasing the dialogue with citizens and assisting citizens to be involved and active in ward based issues.

The Panel concluded by advising they were extremely encouraged by the work being undertaken with councillors, officers and citizens and requested that a further update be presented to the Panel in the new year, with a highlight of the changes that have taken place as a result of the Democracy Commissions, examples of tangible results and the outcomes of these changes, including positive stories and examples of difficulties experienced.

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RESOLVED -

- (1) Carl Whistlecraft, Head of Democracy be thanked for attending the meeting;
- (2) A further update be presented to the Panel, outlining the target dates and deadlines set in relation to the work currently being developed to meet the recommendations of the Democracy Commission Working Party;
- (3) The future update should also include examples of changes made as a result of the work commissioned by the Democracy Commission Working Party so that the impact can be clearly interpreted;
- (4) The Panel recommend a schedule be created to outline a set of standards to be adopted by the council in relation to appropriate principles for responsiveness to councillors;
- (5) Members of the Corporate Scrutiny Panel will endeavour to undertake “a day in the life of an officer” and feedback their experiences to the Democracy Commission Working Party.

6 Work Programme for 2018/19

That the work programme and agenda plan presented for the Corporate Scrutiny Panel for 2018/19 be noted and agreed.

7 Future Meeting Dates

That the future meeting dates for the Corporate Scrutiny Panel for 2018/19 be noted.