

EFFICIENCY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 11 July 2019

PRESENT – Councillors Allen, Bartch, Cossins, Durham, Harker, Mrs D Jones, Keir, K Nicholson, Paley and Renton

APOLOGIES – Councillor L Hughes

ABSENT –

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Johnson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Elizabeth Davison (Assistant Director Resources), Luke Swinhoe (Assistant Director Law and Governance), Anthony Sandys (Head of Housing and Revenues) and Shirley Burton (Democratic Manager)

ER1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019/20

RESOLVED – That Councillor Durham be appointed Chair of this Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2019/20.

ER2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019/20

RESOLVED - That Councillor Bartch be appointed Vice-Chair of this Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2019/20.

ER3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED - There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

ER4 TO CONSIDER TIMES OF MEETINGS FOR THIS COMMITTEE FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019/20, ON THE DATES AS AGREED ON THE CALENDAR OF MEETINGS BY CABINET AT MINUTE C110/FEB/19

RESOLVED – (a) That, with the exception of (b) below, meetings of this Scrutiny Committee be held at 9.30 a.m. on the dates as agreed on the calendar of meetings by Cabinet at Minute C110/Feb/19.

(b) That the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on 19 December 2019 and 6 February 2020 be held at 5.30 p.m.

ER5 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 MARCH 2019

MINUTES – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 14 March, 2019

RESOLVED - That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

ER6 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 4 2018/19

The Head of Strategy, Performance and Communication submitted a report (previously circulated) together with information on the quarter 4 performance against those key performance indicators for 2018/19 which were within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee.

The submitted report outlined the background to the agreed reportable indicator set, which were aligned with the key priorities and the majority of which were used to monitor the Corporate Plan 2017/21.

The appendix to the submitted report gave detailed information and analysis of the ten indicators which were reported to the Scrutiny Committee, six of which had year-end targets and four of which a comparison was made against the same period last year.

The Assistant Director Resources gave an overview of the current position in relation to the three indicators within her remit, namely, sickness absence, reportable accidents and staff turnover.

A positive position in relation to sickness absence was reported, with the year-end outturn showing 8.34 days, which was a reduction of 0.88 days from last year. The Assistant Director outlined the positive and proactive work which had been undertaken within the Authority over the last few years in relation to the health and well-being of its staff which it was felt was helping with the reduction in sickness levels.

Following questions by Members, the Assistant Director Resources reported that a full statistical report, including the cost of sickness absence was reported to the Council's Joint Consultative Committee and was available for Members to view.

Again, a positive position in relation to the number of reportable accidents was reported with the number of reports being submitted to the Health and Safety Executive being reduced by one on the previous year. The Assistant Director Resources outlined the on-going support and commitment of senior management to raise the profile of health and safety within the organisation and confirmed that although work would always continue to improve the figures, she was happy with the current reported position. It was also confirmed that there would be other minor accidents which were not reportable.

Discussion ensued on the number of 'near miss' incidents and it was reported that there had been an increase in the numbers during 2018/19 to 206, it was particularly pleasing to see increased reporting in Children and Adult Services.

In relation to indicator FHR 019 – staff turnover, it was reported that staff turnover had reduced slightly and that levels were consistent with a healthy turnover rate. Reference was made to the proactive work done in Children's services to recruit permanent social workers to reduce the reliance on agency staff.

The Assistant Director Law and Governance gave an overview of the current position in relation to three indicators within his remit, namely the number of complaints

upheld by the ombudsman, the number of complaints upheld by the Information Commissioner's Office and contracted spend as a percentage of total non-salary spend.

It was reported that the number of complaints upheld by the Local Ombudsman had reduced with six cases being upheld, five as a result of changes in the eligibility criteria policy for Adult Social Care and one in relation to arrangements surrounding a Child Protection Conference. The Assistant Director Law and Governance reported that although the figures were relatively low, any complaints were concerning and processes and procedures were updated as a result wherever feasible.

Discussion ensued on those complaints received which were investigated internally and it was reported that a more detailed report and analysis of those was submitted to Cabinet on an annual basis. Officers confirmed that the Council always aimed to resolve any complaints locally however, there was a right to refer the issue to the Ombudsman if the complainant still remained dissatisfied with the outcome.

Following a question by a Member, it was reported that comparable information with other authorities in relation to complaints was not currently held, however, this was something which could be looked into.

In relation to Performance Indicator FHR009 – number of complaints upheld by the Information Commissioner's Office, it was reported that the number of complaints from the same period last year had reduced from three to one. Following questions by Members about why this indicator was reported as it involved fairly low numbers, the Assistant Director Law and Governance reported that although the referrals were low any breach could have considerable financial impact on the authority so it was an important indicator to monitor.

Indicator LGP008 referred to the contracted spend as a percentage of non-salary spend and it was reported that this indicator was under performing and the Assistant Director Law and Governance outlined the reasons for this and the work which was being undertaken to address those reasons.

The final four indicators referred to the amount in £'s of Council Tax arrears collected, the amount in £'s of Housing Benefits overpayments recovered, the percentage of Council tax collected in year and the percentage of business rates collected in year and the Head of Housing and Revenues gave an overview of those areas, all of which had met or exceeded the year-end target.

Following a question by a Member in relation to comparable statistics with neighbouring authorities, it was reported that it was difficult to compare as the levels of support between authorities Council Tax Support Schemes were different.

Reference was made to the impact of Universal Credit on the collection rates and it was reported that there had been an increase in housing rent arrears since the roll-out of Universal Credit, however, Council Tax arrears had not seen a particular increase. It was also reported that it was more difficult to recover arrears as the collection of Council Tax arrears was low on the Department for Works and Pensions list of priorities for recovery.

A Member requested further information in relation to the bad debt provision figure which was included in the Housing Revenue Account and it was suggested that the Assistant Director Housing and Building Services be invited to a future meeting to discuss this further.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

ER7 WORK PROGRAMME

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the proposed work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Committee and to give consideration to any additional areas Members would like to include.

It was reported that, in future, all items to be considered by Cabinet would be included on the Forward Plan and it was suggested that this could be a useful plan for this Scrutiny Committee to use in agreeing its work items going forward. Reference was also made to the Quad of Aims process which was in operation.

Members also requested that an informal session be held to enable Members to better understand the scope and remit of the Scrutiny Committee and it was also suggested that Members look at previous agenda items to gain information and understanding.

In relation to the Performance Indicator information, it was confirmed that the ten indicators which it had been agreed would be reported to this Scrutiny Committee was not an exhaustive list, additional indicators were reported and monitored by Officers and that it was useful for Members to be aware of those indicators which were performing well as well as those which were below target.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.