



Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held virtually on Tuesday 14 September 2021 at 2.00 pm

Members Present: Mrs C Apel (Chairman), Mrs T Bangert (Vice-Chairman), Mr G Barrett, Mrs N Graves, Mr T Johnson, Mr A Moss, Mr D Palmer, Mr C Page, Mr H Potter, Mrs C Purnell, Mrs S Sharp and Mrs S Lishman

Members not present:

In attendance by invitation:

Officers present: Ms P Bushby (Divisional Manager for Communities), Mr A Buckley (Corporate Improvement and Facilities Manager), Mr J Mildred (Divisional Manager for Corporate Services), Mrs D Shepherd (Chief Executive), Ms K Standing (Divisional Manager, Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services) and Mr J Ward (Director of Corporate Services)

20 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed members and guests to the meeting and thanked Cllr Moss for his chairmanship and hard work he had completed during his time as chair of the committee.

There were no apologies.

21 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2021 were approved as a correct record.

The recommendations made to Cabinet from the previous meetings of the committee were read out with Cabinet's decision on each included.

There were no matters arising.

22 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

23 **Declarations of Interests**

Cllr Lishman declared a personal interest ahead of any discussion involving Southern Gateway as an employee of Stagecoach and Cllr Sharp declared a personal interest as a member of West Sussex County Council.

24 **Public Question Time**

There were no questions from members of the public.

25 **GP provision in Chichester**

The Chair welcomed and thanked Simon Clavell-Bate, Head of Estates from West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group (NHS) for attending today's meeting. She then expressed her dissatisfaction that Dr Mtharu was unable to attend today's meeting given the advance notice that had been given for this meeting. The Vice-Chair was then invited to address the Committee before Mr Clavell-Bate provided members with a presentation where he highlighted the current situation, the difference between a commissioner (CCG) and a provider (GP), Estate Overview, ICS Primary Care Strategy and West Sussex summary and Strategic Planning. The chair requested that questions that had been submitted by members in advance of the meeting were answered prior to any further questions being taken.

The Chair then took further questions from the committee were the following points were raised;

- Concern was raised regarding the issues that members had, had reported to them by their constituents, in the difficulty they were having attempting to obtain an appointment with their GP surgery. This was a topic that the Committee had strong opinions on, stating that face to face access with a GP was important to many residents and that currently the service that residents were faced with, was poor, from long wait times when calling to make an appointment to being given a telephone triage call back where instances had been reported that the call was either disconnected before being able to be answered by the patient or the call was not made.
- Issues raised with the lack of parking availability at Langley House and Cathedral car parks
- Discussions were had regarding the Southern Gateway Project, confirmation was sought as to where in the process the CCG were with the project and how far away, they were from completion of the project. It was confirmed that the project was still in the preparations stages which was expected to move on in approximately 6 months' time. The project is planned for completion in 2025, it was stressed that this was wholly dependent on what happens with the pandemic over the next few months.
- It was queried what was planned in terms of communication regarding residents being encouraged to contact their GP should they need to. It was commented that many residents did not want to burden the NHS/GP's during the height of the pandemic, however, this had been detrimental to some and should a resident need to see a GP, it is important they feel they can. It was confirmed that Government were taking a top down approach, local GP's would be completing local campaigns to reinvigorate making contact with

your doctor. It was stated that there was no one single approach to resolving this concern. It would require multiple approaches at all levels.

- A question on how GP's in the Witterings and Selsey areas prepare for seasonal resident number increases, particularly over the summer months when a large number of tourists are staying for holidays. An answer to this was unable to be given as this would be something that the GP's in the area would be aware of and would manage locally.
- A question regarding the future of virtual GP appointments was raised, where it was explained that 'tele medicine' would be something that would require medical sign off and in order for that this would need to be trialled and tested. It was also commented that this would provide an alternative way to move forward and help with the offering of services.
- A query regarding a possible extension to Selsey's practice was made where it was confirmed that the practice would need funding and once that was confirmed they could approach the CCG who would look to move forward with any applications, it was also confirmed that there may be applications in production and that these would be seen to come to fruition over the next few months.
- Discussion was had regarding a surgery's budget being linked to the number of patients that it had registered to it.
- The topic of Community Hubs was also addressed, specifically the hub planned for Chichester City centre, it was confirmed that greater capacity could be achieved in this area, which would allow for additional services to be completed, as well as this opportunity providing many more benefits than that of Whitehouse Farm. Mr Clavell-Bate also confirmed that this location was only ever one option, he explained to members that the City centre location was fundamental and a better option that was preferred by the local GP's. The future of community hubs would be to aim to have them located within a 10-minute cycle route for all.
- A question regarding community transport and was the CCG looking to improve this, it was confirmed that this would be managed by a primary care manager and would be built to support the specific area, with each area requiring different solutions dependant on the individual needs of residents in that area.

The Chair invited comments from officers, who confirmed that they had no additional points to make at this time. She gave thanks to Mr Clavell-Bate asking him if he could ensure that he could obtain answers for the questions submitted in advance of the meeting by members from Dr Mtharu and have these returned to officers for members to receive outside of the meeting.

26 **Cabinet member for Finance, Corporate Services and Revenues and Benefits**

The Chair invited Cllr Wilding to present his verbal report to members.

Where he explained that this Portfolio includes the following divisions:

- Business Support (ICT (Information and Communications Technology), HR, Corporate Improvement and Facilities, Elections and Land Charges)– Joe Mildred
- Legal and Democratic Services (including Procurement) – Nick Bennett

- Finance, Internal Audit and Treasury – Helen Belenger
- Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services – Kerry Standing

These fall under the management of John Ward, Director of Corporate Services and Louise Rudziak, Director of Housing and Communities.

This report, as well as addressing the normal activities of the Portfolio, includes additional activities undertaken due to the COVID activities.

Business Support

Business Support played a key role in the Council adapting to COVID.

- At the start of the Pandemic, most of the Council's office-based staff started working from home. This created a range of challenges in terms of ICT, HR and staff wellbeing. Over the last 18 months many staff were re-deployed away from their normal roles into areas where extra support was needed in our response to COVID. A significant number of our staff have not been able to undertake their roles from home and we have had to ensure that they were able to work in a safe way, whether that was in the Depot, in the offices or out in the community. Despite the challenges, the council has continued to deliver all of its services throughout the pandemic.
- There is currently coordination of a gradual return to work in the office with the expectation that there is likely to be a blend of home and office working.
- It is clear that the council's finances have and will continue to be affected by COVID, but it is still not clear to what extent. In response to this, we have developed the Future Services Framework which has created a three-year programme of efficiency savings that will aim to reduce the council's spending budget by in excess of £1.5m per annum (details of which are being covered later on the today's agenda). Alongside this, a service prioritisation exercise is taking place so that we have a plan in place for whatever the future financial position might be.
- The organisational response to COVID has been overseen by the Organisational Recovery Group which with attendance from the Portfolio Holder and two members of OSC.
- Moving on to other areas, in May this year, the Elections Team successfully delivered a major election that included elections for the delayed 2020 Police & Crime Commissioner, West Sussex County Council and several Neighbourhood Plan and Parish by-elections. Running these was more challenging than normal due to the Covid related restrictions and social distancing requirements at the polling stations and the count.
- The ICT Department have completed the Disaster Recovery server room which is based at the Depot at Westhampnett. This is already allowing us to create real time back-ups of our systems and is now in the final stages of testing to enable us to get all of our ICT systems up and running in the event of our server room in East Pallant House failing. The team have also had to

deal with a large increase in the number of cyber security threats and attacks whilst the additional remote working has created an even greater reliance on the network and systems having sufficient capacity to support a large number of staff working remotely.

Legal & Democratic Services

Key Achievements:

- The council's Democratic Services team established and put into place the required technology and policies to enable remote meetings to be held throughout the pandemic.
- Several significant policies have been drafted and adopted to ensure we continue to act efficiently and legally – for example the new Code of Conduct which has been brought into line with the National Code of Conduct and new CCTV policies.
- The council's legal team gave support to Arun District Council and for many months and provided Monitoring Officer and Data Protection Officer support to that authority.

Finance & Internal Audit & Treasury

Key Achievements:

- The team achieved the key deadlines for the completion of the 2019-20 Statutory Accounts and their subsequent protracted external audit, along with delivering the 2021-22 budget.
- The Finance team completed additional budget monitoring and regular financial forecasting on expenditure and income as a consequence of the impact of COVID. They also compiled information to support the council's claims under the Government's Sales, fees and charges compensation scheme.
- The Finance team ensured the continuity of key financial systems with the renewal of contracts (i.e. CIVICA and Income Management System).
- Treasury – Total investments varied from £75m to £120m in 2020-21; this created a challenge for finding suitable high-quality counterparties. Whilst the return on internally managed funds was very low at 0.1%, the external managed funds achieved a stable return of 4.4%, generating £1.3m of income to support front line services.
- We maintained prompt payments to council suppliers during the early stages of COVID to help support businesses.
- Both Finance and the Internal Audit and Corporate Investigations teams facilitated the payment of COVID business relief and other grants.
- The annual Empty Home Review by the Investigations Team brought in £288,395 for the Council, whilst also undertaking the larger bi-annual Premium Data Match in 2020-21 for the National Fraud Initiative reviewing

Single Person Discount, Council Tax Reduction and other matches. The full detailed results are reported annually to the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.

- The Internal Audit Team were able to complete 5 audits along with 3 follow up as part of their 4-year audit plan, plus the annual testing and review of the Council's 9 key financial systems to ensure compliance to procedures and internal controls.

Key areas of work for 2021-22 include:

- The procurement of a new insurance contract, working with our appointed broker for a new contract to be in place by 1 November 2021.
- The Finance Team will support the delivery of the Council's Future Services Framework and its financial recovery plans which will aid the budget setting for 2022-23.
- Treasury – The 2021-22 strategy has relaxed the overall investment ceiling for Money Market Funds addressing one of the challenges in the previous year. Officers are also assessing if any further core cash can be placed in external managed investments to improve future yields.

Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services

This division administers the setting and collection of Council Tax and the payment of Housing Benefit. It also runs Customer Services.

Key Achievements in 2020/21 with a focus on COVID related activities

Businesses benefitted from: -

- 10,014 Business Rate grants totalling £64.4m paid out to support 3,900 individual businesses across the district.
- The council's Additional Restrictions Grant (£3.49 m) was fully spent by 30 April 2021 which qualified us for a further Additional Restrictions Grant top up of £1.1 m. With the exception of £139k all funds have been spent. The remaining underspend will be administered by the council's Economic Support team to further support businesses. Work is currently underway to develop proposals for this area of work.

Residents benefitted from: -

- The council made £350k of Hardship Fund payments out of the total £699,209 during 2020/21 to support residents with their Council Tax who have been financially affected by Covid-19. The remainder of the fund (£349,209) is being used in 2021/22 to provide a further scheme. This included an initial payment of up to £150 in line with the 2020/21 scheme for eligible residents. A discretionary scheme is also being

administered up to 31 March 2022 or as soon as the fund has been fully spent.

- Since going live on 12 October 2020, £144,500 has been paid out to eligible people forced to Self-Isolate under Test and Trace Support Scheme; the scheme is continuing to 30 September 2021.
- £250,000 has been paid out in Discretionary Housing Payments during 2020/21 and the scheme has been bolstered with Contained Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) funding for 21/22. This includes paying for a Money Advice Support Officer through Citizens Advice and providing a further Hardship Fund in 2021/22 and being as flexible as possible when negotiating payment plans with people who owe the Council money.
- The Customer Services reception has been reconfigured and re-opened from 21 June 2021. Whilst its early days, the numbers of visitors are low (30 per day on average) and this coincides with online service usage increasing which is encouraging.

Key challenges for 2021/22

- Maintaining high levels of Council Tax and Business Rates collection. Currently Council Tax collection is forecasted to be 97.43% at 1 April 2022 and Business Rates collection is forecasted to be 96.31%.
- Ensuring that residents continue to use the Council's online services where they can as their first choice freeing up resources to help more vulnerable residents both over the telephone and in person.
- Addressing the implications of the end of the furlough scheme at the end of September; this could result in an increase in unemployment, and a further demand for the Council's services.

The Chair then invited members to ask questions, where the format of the report provided was discussed. It was felt by one member that having a detailed update provided verbally at the meeting, limited the opportunity for members to scrutinise the information provided. It was confirmed that the report format had been requested by the Committee some time ago and that it had been running in this way since. It was also confirmed by Mrs Shepherd that would be no issue with circulating Cabinet member updates with the agenda should that be what the Committee wants going forwards.

A question regarding the Corporate Efficiency Programme was raised, in that it queried that at the Cabinet meeting held on Tuesday 7 September, additional resource for Planning was agreed and this seemed to be a conflict with the programme. It was confirmed that some vacancies within the Planning team had been removed previously, however the pandemic had seen a significant increase in workload for this area that required recruitment. The Committee were also reminded that when the original review had been completed, it was a 'stretch review' and when the report was presented to Council it was stated that officers could only account for 75% of the plan. Mrs Shepherd explained to members that they will see from the report at agenda item 11, the council had over performed and are on target for many areas. Mr Buckley added that there were planned savings in relation to staffing at a later date within the programme and that this had been clearly detailed in the report to be discussed later.

Cllr Purnell thanked Mr Wilding for his verbal update and stated that she was in favour of Cabinet member updates being included as a report within the agenda. She then proposed that Cabinet member updates should be in written format and included in the agenda which was seconded by Cllr Sharp and the Committee;

RESOLVED

That Cabinet member updates should be in written format and included in the agenda.

Returning to the remaining speakers the following questions were raised;

- The number of individual's that attended the reception area of the council was documented as 30 within the update, what were the figure pre the pandemic. It was confirmed by Mrs Standing that approximately 50 per day would attend.
- On the matter of employees working from home, it was asked if there had been employment of individuals who would work from home permanently and had all new employees recruited throughout the pandemic been to visit the office and meet their co-workers. It was confirmed by Mr Mildred that all staff had started coming back into the office and work together again. This had been rolled out in a safe and steady approach across the council with distancing still being required around the building. Staff had also been actively encouraged to meet up with their co-workers outside of work and last Friday a staff lunch was held where many attended.
- A query regarding cyber security and if there had been any additional cyber security issues with staff working from home was raised.

Further discussion on staff working at home and what the future of staff working from the office looked like for the council, would it be a 50/50 council moving forward. Mr Mildred explained that the council would not have a one size fits all approach, it would be entirely dependent on the needs and requirements of each individual team. It would be a hybrid approach to working with each team assessing their requirements and reaching agreement via a Team Charter. Once the Charters have been finalised, they will be shared with members and other stakeholders. Mrs Shepherd stated that it was important that staff are in the office and most are. Performance over the last 18 months has been good and working from home does allow for a blended approach to work and aides recruitment. Ultimately the customer has to be served and services must not fall.

The Chair thanked Cllr Wilding for his verbal update and confirmed with him that written version of his update would be circulated to the Committee after the meeting.

27 Corporate Plan Review Task and Finish Group

The Chair invited Mr Buckley to present the Corporate Plan Review Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference. He explained that members were required to agree the membership along with nominating a Chairman.

The Chair then invited members to agree the membership by nominating themselves or others. Cllrs Moss Palmer and Purnell agreed to make up the membership with Cllr Palmer taking the role of Chair.

RESOLVED

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the membership for the Corporate Plan Review Task and Finish Group as 1) Cllr Moss, 2) Cllr Palmer and 3) Cllr Purnell with the Chairman being Cllr Palmer.

28 Late Items

Cllr Apel read the part II resolution in relation to agenda item 11. This was proposed by Cllr Purnell and seconded by Cllr Bangert. The Committee;

RESOLVED

That with regard to agenda item 18 the public including the press should be excluded from the meeting on the grounds of exemption in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 namely Paragraph 3 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)) and because, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption of that information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

A 10-minute adjournment was had until 4:15pm.

29 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Cllr Apel read the part II resolution in relation to agenda item 11. This was proposed by Cllr Purnell and seconded by Cllr Bangert. The Committee then voted to move into part II.

RESOLVED

That with regard to agenda item 18 the public including the press should be excluded from the meeting on the grounds of exemption in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 namely Paragraph 3 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)) and because, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption of that information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

30 Corporate Efficiencies Programme - Monitoring Report

Mr Buckley introduced the item.

Members then asked a number of questions and these were answered by Mr Buckley, Mr Ward and Mrs Shepherd.

The Committee unanimously approved the recommendations.

RESOLVED

The Committee agrees the recommendations as stated in section 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 of the report.

The meeting ended at 4.45 pm

CHAIRMAN

Date: