

Scrutiny Performance Working Group

Note of a meeting held on Friday 24th July at 2pm via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Cllr Mark Wilson

Cllr Hilary Carrick

Cllr Stan Collins

Cllr Val Tarbitt

Cllr Geoff Cook

Officers in attendance:

Julie Crellin, Director of Finance (s151 Officer)

Emma Graham, Performance & Intelligence Manager

Clare Killeen, Strategic Policy & Scrutiny Advisor

Hayley Reay, Policy & Scrutiny Officer

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Carni McCarron-Holmes and Cllr Bill Wearing. Cllr Wilson agreed to Chair the meeting in place of Cllr Wearing.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The notes of the last meeting held on the 7th January 2020 were agreed as correct, although members raised questions about some of the outstanding actions. These were relating to the action on an officer from the Highways Service to attend the next meeting to respond to Members questions, however the following meeting due in March was postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak. Members agreed that it would still be valuable to have this input at the next meeting of Performance Working Group.

- **Action** – Phil Greenup to attend the next meeting to answer member questions relating to the Highways hotline and Highways England.

3. Performance & monitoring during the Pandemic

Emma Graham took members through a presentation on the changes that have happened in performance and monitoring reporting due to the pandemic. This included how performance reporting has been reprioritised and new reporting structures that have been set-up. Examples included new processes being set-up that all need reporting on, such as monitoring school attendance, to ensure

vulnerable children were not falling through the net, and systems for track and trace, the provision of PPE and the new helpline for vulnerable people.

Discussion took place with Members about assurances to scrutiny on what the risks are and that everything is addressed accurately and thoroughly. Emma talked about the new Council Plan Delivery Plan which will be going to Cabinet in September, and that the measures will continue however there will be a different lens in which they will be viewed as a result of the response to and the recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emma informed the Members of the good working relationship with Public Health England which has been established by the team and are doing data quality checks which are documented and followed-up.

Julie Crellin talked Members through the financial monitoring, impact and budgetary planning in the light of the pandemic. This included the funding received from government and the processes for monitoring via working with national bodies including the LGA, Society of County Treasurers, County Councils Network and MHCLG, and providing briefings to CMT, Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet. Julie also talked through the financial impact faced by the County Council, explaining the core areas of impact. The financial impacts of the COVID-19 are emerging and evolving, and will be ongoing beyond the current financial year. These include one-off and exceptional response costs, changes and increases in demand for social care, re-prioritisation of resources, delays to transformation activity and lost income in both sales, fees and charges and more significantly, expected decreases in core funding of Council Tax and Business Rates. Based on the June 2020 return this is estimated at £50.2million, assuming there is no second wave, the financial challenge being faced for the year is currently estimated at £15.2million.

Member questions and discussion included whether the funding being received now will reflect the funding potentially received in the future after the fair funding review. Also whether the funding reflects the deprivation component of rurality, this was a concern with the third tranche of funding and will continue to be lobbied via national bodies. Cllr Carrick questioned whether the rural services delivery grant will continue in the same way and what the opportunities here could be. Julie explained that the funding arrangements for 2021/22 and beyond have not been announced from central government. The expectation is that this detail will follow in the autumn and Members will be updated. The potential decrease in Council Tax and Business Rates in the medium term were referred to, but more work is being undertaken with the District Councils in this area. There is much uncertainty in respect of core funding.

Discussion also took place on losses from sales, fees and charges, and Julie informed Members about the announcement of a scheme being introduced for 2020/21 only. The details of the scheme are awaited. The government has made it clear that commercial income losses will not be compensated for and those Councils that have pursued particularly ambitious and more risky commercial strategy, particularly in respect of property investment for return

have been advised to have separate conversations with government. The broad parameters of the scheme indicate local government funding the first 5% of income losses compared to budget, and then above that, the government funding the next 75%. The current estimate of the grant support to the Council from this c 70% scheme is in the range of £2-3million, but all will depend upon what basis the budget against which the assessment will be determined is decided.

4. Corporate Performance Report Q4

Cabinet considered Quarter 4 of the performance report on 23rd July 2020. In terms of the key messages, the overall position at the end of the year was that 35 of the 54 actions had been delivered and rated green, 16, or 30%, were in progress and rated amber, and 3, or 6%, of our actions were rated red and had not been fully delivered as intended.

In terms of the measures used to track performance, the overall position for Quarter 2 was that 26 of 38 measures, or 68%, demonstrated a positive outcome or within 10% of the target.

Cllr Carrick referenced the outcome 'new ways of working and achieving financial sustainability', and questioned whether the approach to new ways of working are appropriate. The point was raised that as recording took place from March 2019 to March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic could only be attributed to the final three weeks of the financial year. It was suggested that the Chair and Vice-Chair have a discussion and take forward. Members emphasised the key role scrutiny has in looking at the financial savings achieved and priorities going forward.

- **Action** – Cllr Wearing and Cllr Wilson to have a discussion on the point raised by Cllr Carrick and come back to the next meeting to inform Members of the next steps.

5. Future Agenda Items

The role of Performance Working Group is to ensure that the appropriate future agenda items are on the relevant Scrutiny Boards to consider going forward. Members were confident that at the next round of Scrutiny Board meetings the following items will be on the agendas - DTOC arrangements and Cumbria Care, the increase in the number of Children Looked After as a result of the pandemic, and ways in which working has changed as a result of working from home and sickness and absence management.

The next meeting of Performance Working Group will look at the new Council Plan Delivery Plan that will go to Cabinet in September, and an item on an update from the Highways Service.

6. Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting is:

- Thursday 8th October 2020, 2pm via Microsoft Teams (link in diary invite)