

Cabinet

12 March 2024 – At a meeting of the Cabinet held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present:

Cllr Marshall, Cllr J Dennis, Cllr Hunt, Cllr A Jupp, Cllr Lanzer, Cllr Russell, Cllr Urquhart and Cllr Waight

Apologies were received from Cllr Crow

Also in attendance: Cllr Boram, Cllr Linehan and Cllr Montyn

Part I

35. Declarations of Interest

35.1 No declarations of interest were made.

36. Minutes

36.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

37. Performance and Resources Report - Quarter 3 2023/24

37.1 The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Support Services (copy appended to the signed minutes).

37.2 Cllr Hunt, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property, introduced the report and highlighted an overall reduction in portfolio overspend. Within the Children and Young People, Learning and Skill's Portfolio there was an increase in estimated overspend, but a reduction in the number of children cared for. Within the Adults' portfolio the overspend mitigating grants had now been depleted and officers were working hard to reduce overspend where possible. Red, Amber and Green statuses were applied to the Capital Programme to assist scrutiny committees in their oversight of projects. Inflation impact on construction was noted for the pressure it was adding to the programme.

37.3 Taryn Eves, Director of Finance and Support Services, confirmed that work was beginning on account closure. It was confirmed that no reserves had been used to balance the budget, but the accounts would need to be monitored to see how the £2.8m deficit would be mitigated. If reserves were used for this then a plan would be needed to replenish them. High interest rates were noted as a temporary assistance with investment returns.

37.4 The following points were made by Scrutiny Committee Chairmen.

- a. Cllr Montyn, Chairman of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee raised concerns on the high risk status for recruitment. The Committee had been looking into actions relating to staff

sickness. The Committee had also stressed the importance of giving assurances of a balanced County Council budget.

- b. Cllr Boram, Chairman of the Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee, reported that a Task and Finish Group had concluded on retained fire fighters. The budget overspend was being monitored.
- c. Cllr Linehan, Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee, confirmed that the Committee had looked into overspend and the impact of high cost placements, the mitigation work for which was being monitored. The Committee had provided comment that figures (rather than percentages) in the report may be more effective for scrutiny purposes. The Committee were concerned with delays in the Woodlands Mead project and would be monitoring the situation until final handover.
- d. Cllr Wall, Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee, had considered the mitigation work for risk. The financial position and forecasted overspend for adult social care had also been noted.

37.5 The following points were made by Cabinet Members in discussion.

- a. Cllr Russell, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Learning and Skills, reported on the stable improvement trajectory for the Childrens' portfolio. The recent social worker appointments were welcomed. The Special educational needs and disability (SEND) alternative provision programme pilot was working to improve experiences for children and families. The £24m overspend was noted and its link to the demand for high cost placements and home to school transport. Officers were working on mitigation plans to assist with budget pressures whilst maintaining statutory functions. Within the education portfolio, the dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) overspend was noted. Plans were in place to increase service need assessments.
- b. Cllr A Jupp, Cabinet Member for Adults Services, reported on the identified improvement plans following the self-assessment work. A contract had been awarded in January for Carers Support West Sussex, which would continue support for families for five years and include extension options. Increased projected overspend was noted. Mitigations had been used via grant funding and staff vacancies.
- c. Cllr Waight, Cabinet Member for Support Services and Economic Development, reported on the green key performance indicators. In year financial pressures had been mitigated, leading to a projected underspend. Capital programme measures were also mostly green. The level of staff vacancies was noted, however it was confirmed that the figure had dropped from 1,000 to 400 within two years. Sickness and absence figures were highlighted, with the County Council average being 16 days per year against a target of 15. Work was being done to look at long term causes. It was noted that this was a national issue. The Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development was working on this.

37.6 The Leader reported that the quarter three headcount for West Sussex was over 6,400, and that 98% of senior roles had been appointed. The quarter three challenges reflected the challenges for the whole year,

specifically the challenges for adult and social care, and high cost placements. High need education costs were also exceeding the DSG level. The County Council budget had been delivered to reflect the anticipated demands and therefore fulfil the needs of the Council Plan.

37.7 Cllr Hunt felt a vacancy figure of 400 was reasonable for an authority the size of West Sussex. Staffing remained the largest cost for the Council. Long term vacancies needed to be considered with regard to value for money.

37.8 Resolved, that the Cabinet notes the Q3 Performance and Resources Report and in particular, the financial challenges set out in paragraphs 18 - 36 and the overall financial position which shows that some use of reserves may be required at the year-end if the mitigations in place are not sufficient to reduce spend in line with the overall budget envelope of £708.8m.

38. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND): Area SEND Inspection Initial Briefing on the Outcomes and Next Steps

38.1 The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Children, Young People and Learning (copy appended to the signed minutes).

38.2 The Leader welcomed Caroline Tozzi, Joint Director for Children and Young People NHS Sussex, to the meeting.

38.3 Cllr Russell introduced the report and reported that the SEND inspection had been carried out by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission at the end of 2023, focussing on the partnership arrangements with the NHS on service delivery. The results had been published in February. The inspection had resulted in a score of two out of three. Twenty-four partnerships had been tested with seven scoring three, ten scoring two, and seven scoring one. The inspection had been rigorous and identified areas for improvement. The results had not revealed any unknown concerns, and improvement actions had already been identified where required. Recruitment issues were noted as impacting service delivery. Plans were in place for long term improvements, with a plan to republish the improvement plan to reflect this. A progress update would be considered at the June scrutiny meeting.

38.4 Lucy Butler, Director of Children, Young People and Learning, reported that a score of two highlighted both areas of strength and areas requiring improvement. Five areas for improvement had been identified, and it was noted that the follow up inspection would be undertaken in three years time. The inspection findings aligned with a prior self-assessment and it was confirmed that investments had been made within the budget for the improvements.

38.5 Caroline Tozzi welcomed the collaboration that had taken place before and during the inspection process. A pan Sussex Board was in place, with key representatives to monitor the improvements. A dashboard had also been used to assist monitoring. The planned action would help assessment times and see improvements for all children.

38.6 Cllr Linehan highlighted the circulated document which reflected the comments from the scrutiny committee (copy appended to the signed minutes). It was confirmed that SEND was a key focus for the scrutiny committee and would remain a standing agenda item for the foreseeable future. At the June meeting the committee would consider the updated improvement plan. The committee had noted that the areas for improvement had already been identified prior to the inspection, and so Cllr Linehan had felt an extra scrutiny meeting was not required. It was observed that some areas would cross over with the work of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee, and so cross cutting activities with the committees may be required.

38.7 The Leader recognised that demand had outstripped capacity which had been recognised within the Performance and Resources Report. The Council is committed to making improvements to shared outcomes.

38.8 Cllr Russell confirmed that all parties were required to work at pace against limited resources and large demands to achieve the level two score.

38.9 Resolved that the Cabinet notes the report and approves the plan for the Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning to receive an improvement plan for endorsement.

39. Emerging Issues

39.1 The Leader invited Cabinet Members to provide any verbal updates on current, significant issues from their respective portfolios that may benefit from discussion.

39.2 No updates were required.

40. Date of Next Meeting

40.1 The Cabinet noted that its next scheduled meeting will be held on 23 April 2024.

The meeting ended at 11.45 am

Chairman