

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 28 March 2018

Present:

Councillor P Stuart (Chair)

Councillors	S Foulkes	T Usher
	T Jones	W Ward
	B Kenny	A Sykes
	C Muspratt	I Lewis
	T Smith	C Carubia
		L Rennie

Apologies

Councillors	L Reecejones	A Hodson
	B Berry	T Pilgrim

50 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP

Councillor Warren Ward declared a personal interest in agenda item 3 'Financial Monitoring Report quarter 3 2017/18 by virtue of his employment with the Department for Work and Pensions, insofar as reference was made to the roll out of Universal Credit within consideration of that item.

51 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair, noting that Members' would have been aware that the Council had recently received a letter which stated that the Secretary of State was 'minded to' intervene in the Council's Local Plan, advised that Officers had been in dialogue with the Chief Planner and the Civil Service lead and discussions would be ongoing with Departmental for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) planners ahead of a likely meeting in London between Wirral Council and the Chief Planner.

The main issue appeared to be the timetable to complete the Local Plan and the desire of the Secretary of State for that completion to be speeded up. Once the meeting between the Council and the Chief Planner has taken place, the Council would undertake to ensure that appropriate resources and robust governance is in place and, along with DCLG Civil Servants, write to the Secretary of State with a clear view on what was needed to be done to meet DCLG requirements and expectations.

Members needed to be aware that the government have not said they are intervening in the Local Plan, but have said they are 'minded to' get involved and the Council would continue to work closely with civil servants to agree a timetable and approach to deliver a Local Plan for Wirral which is appropriate, timely and meets residents' needs.

The Chair indicated that an update report had been requested for submission to the first meeting of the Committee in the new Municipal Year.

52 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 31 January 2018 be approved and signed as a correct record

53 **FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 3 2017/18**

Mark Goulding, Principal Accountant, introduced a report presenting financial monitoring information for Environment as at close of the third quarter of the 2017/18 financial year that gave a consideration of performance against the revenue budget, including savings, income and debt, and a commentary on performance against the capital budget. The report noted budget movement in the third quarter, notably the move of integrated transport from Children and Families to Environment with a budget of £5.6M. The report was supported by a presentation addressing issues highlighted within the report and considering the anticipated financial position for the following financial year.

The Committee was advised of a predicted current year £981k overspend arising principally from issues related to implementation of savings proposals in Waste and Environment in respect of the waste contract and in Sports and Recreation in respect of delays to operational changes and capital works at Woodchurch and Leasowe Recreation Centres respectively; and to a shortfall of advertising income under Localism and Engagement. Underspends were advised in Housing Strategy, homelessness and housing benefit assessment teams, each, in part at least, as a result of staffing vacancies.

The Chair queried a reported £70k shortfall in respect of the Floral Pavilion Theatre, noting that the reporting of such financial issues appeared to be recurrent and querying what actions were being taken to make the Theatre more sustainable. The Committee was advised that income and charges were reviewed to increase income, and staff deployed for efficiency, but that budgetary targets remained a struggle.

The Chair further queried the reasons for reported staff vacancies in the housing benefit assessment team, commenting that staff needed to be in place to deal with the roll-out of Universal Credit.

Councillor Chris Carubia sought clarification on any connection between the Aids and Adaptations / Disabled Facilities Grant and the Supporting People budgets, further noting that the £30k cap on aids and adaptations had been in place for several years. The Aids and Adaptations / Disabled Facilities Grant budget was advised as a capital budget that assisted people to make required structural changes to properties, while the Supporting People budget funded supported housing, including contracts let by the housing teams for supported living.

Councillor Lesley Rennie, noting that charges now applied for garden waste collection and that a discount for on-line payment had been removed, queried what marketing was to be done to get further people to sign up. Mark Smith, Strategic Commissioner – Environment, undertook to recirculate (including to substitute members) the slides circulated to members of the Committee after the budget scrutiny workshop.

In response to a query from Councillor Brian Kenny, it was advised that it was hoped the anticipated savings in relation to the establishment of the Coroner service on a city region basis would accrue in time.

Councillor Adam Sykes queried the reported overspend / non-achievement of planned savings on the waste contract, and queried whether there was a risk of not achieving an ongoing saving. The Strategic Commissioner advised that preliminary work had been undertaken on potential savings on the waste contract that had proved to be non-achievable on implementation. Work was being undertaken on identifying comparable savings.

Councillor Adam Sykes queried whether the shortfall in the Localism and Engagement budget related to Wirral View not achieving advertising targets and asked for a breakdown of the shortfall. The Committee was advised that ambitious targets had been set across Communications, Marketing, Press and PR services. Councillor Lesley Rennie referenced comments made on previous occasions indicating that Council advertising would be through Wirral View only, but noting that wraparounds were appearing with other local media. Councillor Christina Muspratt further commented on the previously reported advertising strategy and the need for Members to know how successful that strategy had been, together with the related financial position.

In response to comments from Councillor Tony Smith advising of a report from a constituent indicating that a cash or card payment of an Invigor8 membership instalment had been declined at Woodchurch Leisure Centre and a direct debit facility only offered, the Strategic Commissioner undertook to respond directly to the Member.

Councillor Foulkes noted that the financial reports only allowed Members to consider issues in hindsight at a specific time but suggested that there were some issues known to Members, such as the Floral Pavilion Theatre, that had existed for some time. Officers were asked to look at including opportunities for Members to consider particular persistent overspends or service issues in the Committee work programme to allow for a more in-depth analysis of such matters. Further to a request from Councillor Chris Carubia for sight of the Theatre Business Plan, Councillor Tony Jones suggested that information such as the Business Plan could be made available as part of one of these more detailed reviews.

RESOLVED – That

- (1) the quarter 3 revenue forecast overspend for Environment of £1M be noted;**
- (2) the performance of the capital projects and amendments to the capital programme under Environment be noted;**
- (3) the Head of Communications report to the next meeting of this Committee on Wirral View, including the financial position with regard to advertising and the reach of the publication across the Borough;**
- (4) the Committee Work Programme include an option to include specific reviews or consideration of identified persistent overspends or service issues, such as the Floral Pavilion Theatre as referenced above.**

54 2017/18 QUARTER 3 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE

The Committee received a report presenting the 2017/18 Quarter 3 (October - December 2017) performance report for the Wirral Plan Pledges under the remit of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The performance report, which was included as an Appendix to the submitted report, provided a description of progress in Quarter 3 as well as providing available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

The performance report contained details of the progress made, and overviews of that progress from the respective Lead Cabinet Members, in respect of individual measures being pursued with regard to the following Wirral Plan Pledges pertinent to the Committee -

- Leisure and culture opportunities for all;
- Wirral residents live healthier lives;
- Community services are joined up and accessible;

- Good quality housing that meets the needs of residents;
- Wirral's neighbourhoods are safe; and
- Attractive Local Environment for Wirral residents.

Mark Smith, Strategic Commissioner – Environment presented the performance report and invited comment from Members on the content contained therein –

Councillor Adam Sykes noted the reported reduction in recycling rates and queried what measures the Council had in place to increase rates. The Strategic Commissioner commented that declining recycling rates was a national, rather than just a local, trend and that a number of actions and interventions were planned for the year ahead. Further to a query from Councillor Lesley Rennie as to whether the decline was consistent across the Borough, it was advised that, with the assistance of the contractor, intelligence was being built up about recycling activity in various parts of the Borough that would allow for targeted intervention in specific areas.

Following comments from Councillor Steve Foulkes that recycling targets were set by government and that if the Council spent money to achieve these targets other projects could not be pursued, Councillors Chris Carubia and Ian Lewis sought clarification of Council policy in respect of food waste collection and related funding. The Strategic Commissioner indicated that there would be a cost implication to implement a food waste collection service, and should the Council be able to secure grant or other funding it would look to move in that direction. Further to a query from Councillor Ian Lewis related to a possible bid to the capital programme and the Committee being advised of £3M capital costs and £1.8M running costs for implementation, Councillor Adam Sykes queried whether a cost benefit analysis had been undertaken since non-recycled waste was sent to landfill which attracted a tonnage charge. The Committee was asked to note that the City Region had cost effective ways of dealing with waste, including a Waste Disposal Authority waste recovery contract and a SITA energy from waste scheme, which impacted on the case for the rollout of recycling schemes.

Councillor Christina Muspratt noted the measure of the number of residents who say they regularly volunteer / support community groups which showed a lower proportion at December 2017 compared to October 2015, querying what was gained from this measure as different people were asked and the ability therefore to conclude that there really were fewer people volunteering. The Strategic Commissioner reported that the figure was based on the Residents' Survey which was seen as a representative sample, and the measure was trying to understand how many people volunteered. By the nature of the survey, different people were sampled and the data needed to be considered as to whether it was statistically representative.

Councillor Muspratt further queried the statistics for the issue of fixed penalty notices, and whether it would be better to not to be issuing so many due to improving situations, or worse because of the loss of income. The Strategic Commissioner indicated that success would be a reduction in necessary enforcement activity.

Further to the reported 11% reduction of anti-social incidents compared to the third quarter 20-16/17, Councillor Tony Smith noted that there appeared to be pockets of anti-social behaviour appearing for no obvious reason. In this regard he thanked those Council Officers who had provided assistance recently in the Upton area, but considered there was a lack of visible policing in the area. Councillor Chris Carubia spoke similarly of a spate of car thefts in the Eastham and South Wirral area where the police had managed to apprehend a team of thieves, suggesting that concerns could be raised with the Police and Crime Commissioner and Merseyside Police to consider funding and the effect on Wirral.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

55 ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Chair introduced his report advising that this Committee, in co-operation with the other three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual scrutiny work programme. The work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the Wirral Plan Pledges which were within the remit of the Committee.

The Chair's report provided an update regarding progress made since the Committee meeting held on 31 January 2018, and the current work programme made up of a combination of scrutiny reviews, workshops, standing items and requested Officer reports was appended. It was noted that the work programme would require amendment pursuant to decisions taken at this meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED -

That the updated Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme 2017/18, as submitted and to be amended as agreed previously at this meeting, be approved.