

Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 21 July 2021

PRESENT:

Councillor Penberthy, in the Chair.

Councillor Jordan, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Aspinall (substitute for Councillor Lowry), Burden, Collins, Dann, Derrick, James and Stevens.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Hulme and Lowry.

Also in attendance: Councillor Nick Kelly (The Leader), David Northey (Head of Integrated Finance), Councillors Mrs Bridgeman (Cabinet Member for Environment & Street Scene), Councillor Deacon (Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Culture, Leisure & Sport), Councillor Drean (Cabinet Member for Transport), Councillor Mrs Pengelly (Cabinet Member for Homes & Communities) and Councillor Riley (Cabinet Member for Governance, HR, IT & Community Safety), Alan Knott (Policy and Intelligence Advisor), Chief Inspector Matt Longman (Chair of Safer Plymouth), Jackie Kings (Community Connections Strategic Manager) and Anna Moss (Technical Lead – Safer Communities).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 5.10 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

1. **To Note the Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair for the Municipal Year 2021/ 2022**

The Committee noted the appointment of Councillor Penberthy as Chair, and Councillor Jordan as Vice Chair for the municipal year 2021/22.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest in accordance with the code of conduct.

3. **Minutes**

Members agreed the minutes of 17 March 2021 subject to the following change:

Minute 15 'work programme' – should read 'Members discussed the work programme for 2021/22'.

4. **Chair's Urgent Business**

Under this item the Chair, Councillor Penberthy, advised Members that the order of items on the agenda was required to change to accommodate Chief Inspector Matt Longman's availability to attend the Safer Plymouth update.

5. **Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Committee**

Members noted the terms of reference for the Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

6. **Finance Monitoring Report Month 2**

Councillor Nick Kelly (The Leader) and David Northey (Head of Integrated Finance) presented the Finance Monitoring Report Month 2 to Members. Members were advised that the report set out the revenue finance position of the council to the end of the financial year to the end of 2021/22, as at the end of May 2021, however it was highlighted that the financial position would fluctuate. The forecast revenue outturn after the application of Covid grants and council mitigating actions was estimated at £1.276m over budget. A full disclosure of savings targets and delivery was included in appendix A of the report.

Questions from Members related to the following key areas:

- (a) overspend was linked to customer services; was a better breakdown available? Was the budget set too low or was income generation not sufficient?
- (b) did the £600k in increased costs with Street Scene and waste due to increased tonnages and staffing costs include the £250k net pressure into the Place Directorate budget?
- (c) was it considered that the council's budget was sufficient to address the increase in budget pressures due to Covid 19; were further grants expected from government?
- (d) were all current risks in the budget linked to Covid 19 pressures?
- (e) what risks and challenges were associated in the customer and corporate support budget?
- (f) how much of the children's budget had been written off or was impacted by Covid 19?
- (g) risks were referred to in the executive summary of the report; Members requested that those risks be identified in order to enable more detailed scrutiny.

The Performance, Finance and Customer Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the report and agreed to recommend that future financial reports would

specifically include risks in the budget and what might cause them to happen in order to enable better scrutiny and promote transparency.

7. The Year Ahead - The Leader and Cabinet Member Verbal Update

The Chair, Councillor Penberthy, introduced The Year Ahead agenda item and advised Members that the Leader and relevant Cabinet Members with portfolios linked to the scrutiny panel's terms of reference were present in order to help inform the work programme for the coming year by highlighting areas of focus and priority.

Councillor Kelly (The Leader), Councillors Mrs Bridgeman (Cabinet Member for Environment & Street Scene), Councillor Deacon (Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Culture, Leisure & Sport), Councillor Dreaan (Cabinet Member for Transport), Councillor Mrs Pengelly (Cabinet Member for Homes & Communities) and Councillor Riley (Cabinet Member for Governance, HR, IT & Community Safety) highlighted the following key areas:

- (a) the manifesto consisted of 86 commitments with each falling under priority areas; over one third had been confirmed and delivered;
- (b) digital transformation and infrastructure was being considered as part of a drive to make savings in IT;
- (c) the People Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in March 2020 and policies would be launched in May 2021;
- (d) infection rates linked to Covid 19 were increasing in the city; a cautious approach was required in order to keep customers and staff safe; the contact centre was open as usual and the registration service was open with a high demand of marriage enquiries;
- (e) work was taking place assessing how the city's libraries operated, especially in terms of virtual working and services offered;
- (f) there was an increase of 30% in the garden waste collection; Members were encouraged to consider ways in which commercial waste collection could be increased;
- (g) homelessness prevention and initiatives were a priority;
- (h) the transport section was supporting the city's recovery from the impact of Covid 19 by encouraging residents to feel safe when using the city's car parks; investment in a new parking system using the latest technology would also offer customers greater choice. A trial was due to start regarding perpendicular parking in two areas of the city.

From the update provided, panel Members discussed:

- (i) digital connectivity and inclusion and the importance of reaching out to all

aspects of the community;

- (j) the customer service strategy and how possible changes to the library service would require early scrutiny intervention;
- (k) ways to increase commercial waste collection;
- (l) the impact of street scene and waste collection on the climate emergency;
- (m) the potential for a joint scrutiny session with Adult Health and Social Care OSP regarding alliance work, housing and support and homelessness;
- (n) car parking, the importance of public perception and how the parking trial would maximise street use.

The Chair thanked The Leader and Cabinet Members for their update.

Order of Business

The order of business on the agenda was changed in order to facilitate good meeting management.

8. Policy Brief

Alan Knott (Policy and Intelligence Advisor) presented the Policy Brief and highlighted the following key areas:

- (a) The Declaration on Government Reform – outlined how the Civil Service and Ministers would reform government together to deliver better for citizens reforming three main areas around people, performance and partnership;
- (b) Elections Bill introduced in Parliament – new legislation to strengthen the integrity of UK elections to protect democracy and protect elections from foreign interference;
- (c) with regards to housing, homelessness and debt – there was more support for victims of domestic abuse at risk of homelessness, and there was a Government drive to end rough sleeping building on the success of Everyone In.

Members discussed:

- (d) the Elections Bill and the impact on democracy due to requiring identification to vote;
- (e) Government funds made available to the city linked to the rough sleeping strategy;
- (f) the impact the Domestic Abuse Act would have on homelessness in the city.

It was agreed that –

1. figures regarding government funding received by the Council linked to the Move On Fund would be provided to Members;
2. clarification as to whether the Council had submitted a response to the ‘Domestic Abuse support within a safe accommodation: statutory guidance and regulations consultation’ by the close date of 27 July 2021 would be provided to Members.

(Members took a brief comfort break at the completion of this item)

9. **Safer Plymouth Update - to follow**

Chief Inspector Matt Longman (Chair of Safer Plymouth), Jackie Kings (Community Connections Strategic Manager) and Anna Moss (Technical Lead – Safer Communities) presented the Safer Plymouth Update to Members. Members were advised that Safer Plymouth was committed to becoming a trauma informed community safety partnership that focused upon reducing violence, abuse and exploitation, reducing re-offending, early intervention and prevention of harm, and building community resilience, reducing inequalities and improving lives. Priorities for the partnership for the year were formed having considered the Local Strategic Crime Assessment with domestic abuse and sexual violence (DASV) being the key priority for 2020/21 based on data rising significantly in this area.

Key areas of questioning from Members related to:

- (a) diversity and discrimination specifically in the gay community and what could be done to help;
- (b) how were harder to reach communities and groups being communicated with and prioritised?
- (c) the importance of sharing the information contained within the Safer Plymouth Update with all Councillors;
- (d) had there been a reduction in the OPCC grant funding and what was the impact?
- (e) was it considered that Plymouth had sufficient police force with the appropriate skills to deliver Safer Plymouth’s priorities?
- (f) what examples could be provided of successful prevention and early intervention work;
- (g) how were schools being engaged and communicated with, in terms of mental health discussions and other Safer Plymouth priorities?
- (h) what could be done to further strengthen the links between the Council and

Safer Plymouth and its partners.

The Chair thanked Chief Inspector Matt Longman and officers for their attendance and their report.

Members noted the update.

10. **Work Programme**

Members discussed the inclusion of items for the draft work programme 2021/ 22 and agreed to add the following items:

- (a) to consider the Council's Environment Bill response;
- (b) finance to be discussed at each scrutiny meeting;
- (c) Rough Sleeping Strategy;
- (d) how Plymouth would be policed with current Police resources;
- (e) homelessness and domestic abuse;
- (f) Digital transformation;
- (g) Controlled Parking Zones;
- (h) the Elections Bill and the implications for the Council;
- (i) Parking, including electric vehicles and charging points.

Members were encouraged to email the Chair with further items to be included in the work programme.