

Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday 4 February 2020

in Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby

Present: Councillors Watts (Chair), Brown, Beeby, Dalziel, Ferguson, Reay and Watt
Sarah Brant, Parish Councils
Gloria Ellenton, Corby Business Group
Kate Booth, Tenants Voice
Lyn Buckingham, Neighbourhood Associations

40. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Caine and Dady (substitute Cllr Ferguson) and also from Owen Davison, Parish Representative (substitute Cllr Brant).

41. Declarations of Interest

Members were asked to declare any personal interests they may have in the business to be discussed and/or indicate whether these were prejudicial or non-prejudicial, the nature of the interest, and whether they intended participating in the relevant agenda item. No declarations were made.

42. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Members were asked to approve the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 19 November 2019, copies of which had been circulated.

RESOLVED that:-

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 19 November 2019, copies of which had been circulated to Members, be agreed as a correct record.

43. Lead Member/Service Area Update – Finance/Corporate Services

The Lead Member for Finance, Cllr Elise Elliston, and the Corporate Services Director, were present to update Members on their areas of responsibility. A briefing paper had been circulated covering strategic finance and all service areas within the department. The following key areas were highlighted.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy outlook was stable for the next 2-3 years but risks were increasing after 2020/21, particularly in relation to the termination of New Homes Bonus and new Business Rates processes. Other significant risks included the loss of a major business or a downturn in investment income.

A Council Tax freeze for 2020/21 was being proposed along with a 2.7% HRA increase to help meet investment needs. In terms of General Fund reserves, current demands would leave a balance of approximately £3m to cover any additional requirements.

A report on the final legal advice in respect of the Cube Litigation had been considered by the Cube Sub Committee on the previous night. Proposals for a North Northants shared legal service were well advanced and would be considered by One Corby Policy Committee on 18 February. If agreed, four members of staff would be subject to TUPE transfer.

Procurement was ongoing in relation to the £5m additional capital programme but it was likely that several projects would slip into 2020/21.

The formal transfer of staff into the HR Shared Service was due to be completed by 1 April 2020 but it had been operating on an informal basis since April 2019.

It was also noted that work was ongoing to develop a Towns Fund bid which could become a significant project in the coming months and a significant amount of officer time was being taken up on Unitary work.

It was confirmed that shared service arrangements would help to make the transition to Unitary easier and would also provide increased resilience and opportunities for employees.

The position on Local Housing Allowance was queried. This would be checked and a response circulated. The policy in relation to rent reviews on void properties was queried and it was confirmed that current practice was to revert to formula rent and there were no proposals to change this at present.

Members thanked the Lead Member and Corporate Services Director for their attendance and input.

44. Lead Member/Service Area Update – Housing

The Lead Member for Housing, the Head of Housing & Neighbourhood Services and the Business Transformation & Improvement Manager were present to update Members on their areas of responsibility. A briefing paper had been circulated in advance covering the Safer Corby team, Repairs & Maintenance, Housing Options & Strategy, Landlord Services, New Build projects and Business Transformation & Improvement.

Comment was made that the Wilby Close and Neville House properties were excellent additions to the stock but the cost of the Wilby Close development compared with traditional builds was queried. The Head of Service explained that £100k was a typical price per unit, subject to complexities on site, build type, Planning requirements, etc. Social value was also taken into account and there was a lot of added value on both these schemes which had been considered in the decision-making process.

Queries were raised in relation to ongoing issues with youths and anti-social behaviour (ASB) around the town centre and it was asked if there were any statistics available on hate crime. The Head of Service confirmed that the police were leading on the ASB issues with support from Neighbourhood services as appropriate. Information in relation to hate crime would be sought and circulated but officers were not aware of any particular trends at present. This information was also reported to Crime & Disorder Committee which would meet later in the year.

It was asked if any progress had been made on an accreditation scheme for private landlords and tenants. This was outside of the Head of Housing's remit but he was aware that discussions had taken place and private sector housing was a work-stream under Unitary preparations.

The reasons for the rising housing waiting list was queried and it was confirmed that the main drivers were growth in the Borough and pressures arising from private rents. S21 notices from private landlords were the main cause of homelessness. The picture was complicated but it was clear that pressure on the Council's ability to accommodate those in need was growing.

Members thanked the Lead Member and officers for their attendance and input.

45. Scrutiny Work Plan

The work plan had been circulated for Members' consideration. There were no additional comments.

Queries were raised in relation to the climate change Motion adopted by Council in 2019 as a six month update was overdue. It was noted that the Environmental Sustainability Strategy – Action on Climate Change was due to go to One Corby Policy Committee in March 2020.

46. Items from Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was updated and circulated with the agenda papers for each meeting to enable Members to select items they wished to see brought to the Panel, in addition to key policy items which were brought forward to the Panel automatically.

No items were selected.

47. Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at 7.38 pm.