

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY, 2021

A MEETING of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE was held through a MICROSOFT TEAMS MEETING on THURSDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY, 2021 at 9.30 AM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Jane Kidd

Councillors Mark Houlbrook, Richard A Jones, Majid Khan and Andrea Robinson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Debbie Hogg, Director of Corporate Resources
Faye Tyas, Assistant Director of Finance
Phil Holmes, Director of Adults Health and Well-being
Dan Swaine, Director of Economy and Environment
Riana Nelson, Director of Learning and Opportunities
Rupert Suckling, Director for Public Health
Lee Tillman, Assistant Director Strategy and Performance
Allan Wiltshire, Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Healy and Neil Gethin

		<u>ACTION</u>
8	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	There were no items.	
9	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	Councillor Kidd declared that she worked for the voluntary sector.	
10	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS.</u>	
	There were no public statements made.	

CORPORATE PLAN

Prior to consideration by Cabinet and Full Council, the Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence presented the updated Corporate Plan for 2021/22. He outlined that the Corporate Plan reflects the transition to a new Borough Strategy which would replace the Doncaster Growing Together Plan.

The Committee addressed a number of areas as set out below.

Six well-being goals – the Committee noted and supported the six emerging well-being goals for a new Borough Strategy and the delivery approach.

Linkages with the Council and Partnership Priorities – Members discussed and noted the importance of the Corporate Plan’s links to other significant Council and partnership priorities such as the Environmental Strategy and recommendations made through the Climate Commission. It was recognised that this agenda was supported through the inclusion of the ‘Cleaner and Greener’ goal within the plan.

Resources to deliver the Plan – it was recognised that it was not always set in stone how proposals could be funded over the next 10 years however the ambition to deliver was strong therefore resources could be used creatively and efficiently to achieve key goals.

Communication of the Corporate Plan – Members were pleased to learn more about the innovative proposals being considered to be as wide reaching as possible in terms of audience and to explain the plan in different ways. For example, the use of videos which had been used by the Youth Council in recent months.

Focus on Inequalities – in response to queries relating to how Covid had impacted on the Corporate Plan, particularly the disruption created across all areas of life, Members were assured that the plan would seek to reduce inequalities, whether it be wealth, health or education. This would be addressed through its ‘Fair and Inclusive’ goal, providing a focus on ‘tackling inequalities and improving social mobility’. Members made reference to the work required, particularly around BAME inequalities.

Changes in how we work – Members acknowledged the advances made through digital ways of working, how our approach needs to be more intelligence-led and to be more agile and responsive.

Emergency Planning – The Committee appreciated the importance of prevention and preparedness in tackling emergency incidents as experienced more over previous years, for example, flooding.

Delivery of the Key Priorities – Members were reassured that progress towards delivering the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan’s goals

	<p>would be delivered and monitored through the Council’s own performance management framework.</p> <p>Due to the tight timescales involved, it was moved and seconded that the Chair be given delegated authority to write to the Mayor with the Committee’s response to the Corporate Plan presented.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u> that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) the Corporate Plan, be supported; and ii) the Chair be given delegated authority to write to the Mayor with the Committee’s recommendation. 	
12	<p><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CONSIDERATION OF THE MAYORS BUDGET PROPOSALS 2021/22 - 2024/25</u></p>	
	<p>The Assistant Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer provided the Committee with a brief overview of the Mayor’s budget proposals for 21/22 to 2024/25 including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gross Revenue Budget amounting to £501m; • Council Tax increase of 2.9% including a 1.5% Adult Social Care precept; • Funding gap of £18.9m over the next 3 years; • Savings targets of £16.3m; • Uncertainty and volatility with costs and income; • £341m capital investment over 4 years; and • HRA 1.5% rent increase. <p>To ensure the Committee added value to the Council’s budget setting process discussions focused on the following four issues:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To what extent are the Mayor’s proposals in line with Central Government policy, pressures and directives? ii. To what extent will the Mayor’s proposal ensure that the Council was able to contribute to the outcomes detailed within Doncaster Growing Together and the Corporate Plan bearing in mind the constraints detailed at i. above? iii. To what extent do the Mayor’s proposals demonstrate that the results of any consultation, research or other evidence have been taken into account? and iv. To what extent were the challenges in delivering the savings within the timescales. <p>The Committee acknowledged that the Council was continuing to operate in a challenging financial environment, but continued to demonstrate it had the flexibility and resources to meet unexpected challenges. It continued to recognise that particularly in 2021/22 and in future this would become increasingly difficult due to the greater</p>	

volatility of costs and income and continuing to deliver approved saving targets.

Members understood how the COVID-19 pandemic had placed unprecedented stress on Council services including responding to the pandemic restrictions and experiencing additional service budget pressures. This included additional costs to social care providers, for example payments for voids and PPE (personal protective equipment), children's social care, support for the Doncaster Cultural Leisure Trust and income from fees and charges, council tax and business rates. It has highlighted that local councils needed to be well resourced and funded to ensure a sound response to any emergency.

The specific pressures relating to working with "Covid as the normal" were highlighted and the impact it had on some services, for example, operatives not sharing the same smaller vehicles and the impact this had on work being undertaken. It was recognised that all service areas had been addressed and reprioritised as a result of the impact of the latest Covid-19 restrictions, to balance required resources.

It was acknowledged by the Committee that all Directorates were reviewing the way services were being delivered whilst managing and monitoring the significant challenges and risks in delivering within budgets. Additionally maintaining the organisation's capacity to innovate and meet service demands both now and in the future, was highlighted.

The Committee questioned a number of key areas relating to risk and challenges and existing and emerging pressures and challenges which were addressed in detail by all Directors. Evidence provided highlighted that the budget was adequate, however it needed to remain agile and responsive with a less traditional approach to meet immediate concerns and longer term aspirations. A number of areas addressed are set out below:

Financial challenges - The Committee recognised that there would be a significant challenge in delivering the budget proposals as were identified in the risks detailed within the various reports and the Chief Finance Officer's comments, on the robustness of the estimates in the forthcoming budget. The Committee accepted the risks but highlighted the Local Authority's reliance on income from Council Tax, business rates and fees and charges would continue to be a challenge. It accepted that the Council Tax base required stability and that the Authority would be under pressure to maintain its sources of income.

Economic and Growth Strategy – the Committee acknowledged that a large part of the Council's budget was reliant on these sources and that it was an important contributor, particularly the payment of business rates and Council Tax. However, it was stressed that it was important for Local Authorities to continue lobbying for a fundamental change in

how local councils were financed. For example, there were many funding streams for social care provision whilst reducing year on year.

Fly tipping – This was identified as a service pressure and the response required by refocusing resources was noted, following an increase of 36% in general littering and fly tipping. The need to address education with consumers and businesses to tackle this issue was acknowledged.

Environment and Sustainability Unit - it was noted that the budget supported the requirement for additional resources and level of expertise to deliver the Environment and Sustainability Strategy, and addressing some of the key impacts of climate change within the Borough such as flooding, was accepted. Bearing in mind the Climate emergency it was noted that all local authorities must address if the right level of resources were available to respond to the environmental challenges including new and existing efficient housing.

Buying Local materials – the use of local labour and providers was raised, and stressed that it must be undertaken as much as practicable to ensure money was fed into the local economy whilst avoiding an unnecessary need for travel.

Adult Social Care – further to the Committee’s questioning relating to how the budget would respond to emerging pressures, it was acknowledged that the funding stream was sufficient to address demand and continued strategy, to support people moving towards prevention, avoiding deterioration and living healthier lives. The work being undertaken within communities to live healthier lives to avoid specialist social care support was noted. There were some risks that required addressing which would be undertaken not only by the Local Authority but with partners across South Yorkshire.

Covid 19 pandemic - As reported in the Director of Public Health’s Annual Report there was concern that the pandemic would not be eliminated this year but would remain for a number of years.

It was noted that the multiple funding pots available were being accessed to support the Council, local businesses and residents. It was also noted that the Council had made effective use of the Contain and Test and Trace support grants establishing additional local testing sites, contact tracing and community champions to assist with for example, the uptake of vaccinations.

It was stressed that Directors of Public Health were seeking mechanisms to exit the lockdown safely through an increased local control of contact tracing and financial support for those people who were required to self isolate to change the direction of transmission.

It was accepted that some care homes were carrying vacancies due to

the Covid-19 pandemic and moving forward it could pose difficulties in returning to the pre-pandemic levels of occupancy. It was also acknowledged that infection rates were being managed through PPE and social distancing measures to stop the rapid spread;

Members accepted that continued resources would be required to support staff and the community with Covid-19 safe working practices, identifying adults and children who were at risk from social isolation, mental health issues in children and adults and supporting people with learning disabilities to build the skills they required;

Domestic abuse was an area of additional investment pre-covid. However, it was recognised that small funding elements for a limited time could not provide long term solutions. Any budgetary challenges would be addressed on an ongoing basis and acknowledged that 3 year settlements to run alongside other funding streams would assist future planning.

It was explained that the alert system Operation Encompass was in place to protect the Borough's children who could be subjected to a domestic incident, but it was only a small part of the support mechanisms in place. It was noted that unfortunately in lockdown this alerting system could not be used due to schools being closed to the majority of children. With regard to training it was noted there were various avenues through the Safer Doncaster Partnership arrangements. Under the Safeguarding Board a central pool of trainers were available to support practitioners.

Existing health pressures and inequalities – these were recognised by the Committee, for example support required for people and families across a number of areas but particularly children, who were suffering as a result of their parent's alcohol consumption. Measures put in place to assist were highlighted including support nationally, regionally and through "Aspire" to identify parents who may require support and assistance with alcohol and substance misuse;

Particularly relating to alcohol, it was noted that it was a modern day epidemic and many people were requiring treatment for support than could access services. An alcohol alliance had been established and was chaired by the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure and Culture. It was recognised that due to the support required for alcohol misuse, non recurrent monies and targeted investment could be used but it was not an ideal position.

Public Health Grant – at the time of the meeting it was noted that the settlement figure was still awaited from Central Government, however additional provision had been made available in the proposed budget for cost pressures, for example the pay rise for NHS staff that were commissioned to undertake specific public health services.

Childhood Obesity – it was noted that the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel had recently given consideration to this issue and noted that an individual approach to childhood obesity was not effective. Therefore a different broader approach was required entitled “Compassionate Doncaster” as it was not just a physical issue but often connected to psychological support and feelings of self-worth and value. This provided reinforcing actions for example, appropriate labelling, healthier school food with intervention focused on building better relationships between children and key workers.

Impact on Learning and Opportunities - The negative effects on families resulting from lockdown measures, including an increased demand and high level complexity of cases within children’s social care, were noted. This was due to increased cases of domestic abuse, neglect, exploitation and adult substance misuse and children not being able to access support services in the normal way. Due to the current lockdown, it was unclear as to how the current demand would change over the coming months but nationally it was indicating there would be an increasing need for children’s social care.

Support for the education sector - was recognised including actions to ensure children were re-engaging in education, school attendance, provision of education psychology and challenge to schools. A particular concern was to address child poverty as evidence showed the number of children receiving free school meals had increased.

As a result of the first lockdown, referrals had increased and when children were able to return to school the position levelled. It was acknowledged there was the anticipation that a similar position would appear following the most recent lockdown period. It was recognised that the complexity of support services required by children had increased therefore the challenge in providing early intervention and localities work was imperative. It was also recognised that there was a strong partnership across all services which was responding to and working effectively to address this.

To conclude the Committee thanked officers for their continued hard work, particularly throughout the Covid pandemic and flooding emergencies.

RESOLVED that:

1. the consideration of and support for the budget recommendations be supported;
2. The chair be given delegated authority to provide a response by way of letter to the mayor on behalf of the Committee.