

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 30TH MARCH, 2023

A MEETING of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on THURSDAY, 30TH MARCH, 2023 at 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Jane Kidd

Councillors Jake Kearsley, Gemma Cobby, Leanne Hempshall, Richard A Jones and Sarah Smith

Co-optees – Antoinette Drinkhill (Church of England Education representative)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Deputy Mayor, Councillor Glyn Jones

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Co-optee Bernadette Nesbit.

		<u>ACTION</u>
42	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	There were no declarations made at the meeting.	
43	<u>MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 9TH FEBRUARY 2023</u>	
	<u>RESOLVED</u> that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.	
44	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS.</u>	
	There were no Public Questions asked at the meeting.	
45	<u>2022-23 QUARTER 3 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT REPORT</u>	
	The Committee considered the Quarter 3 Finance and Performance	

Report for 2022-23, which highlighted the main issues faced by the Council at the current time. The Cost of Living crisis continued to dominate with the scale and intensity of this having risen considerably.

Pressures on food, energy and other goods have meant that costs of living have risen much faster than income, which in turn has placed more demand on services across the Council, with tough choices to face in terms of priorities. The Council was facing some serious challenges, with currently, a £7.8 million overspend, meaning some difficult decisions would have to be made in terms of making savings whilst still providing the best for the borough.

The following areas were raised through discussions and consideration of the report:-

Regenerative Council

Members noted that the overall financial position had improved since Q2, yet there had been increased overspends in numerous areas and hoped the expenditure controls put into place would start to have the desired effect. There were many challenges faced across all areas, which continued to put a strain on resources. It was viewed a challenging time, with overspends continuing to increase, despite the controls in place and now, at Q3 when most expenditure for the year had been incurred, meaning that the next couple of months the spend controls would not have a great impact on the overall outturn. By looking at reserves, additional income and other areas of expenditure and income, there were steps being undertaken to review options to offset and reduce the overspend. Officers were confident that the reserves would be sufficient to meet the overspend and there had been many conversations and meetings regarding the robustness of the budget. It was noted that there would be further ongoing pressures moving into 2023/24, which would need to be considered. It was noted that reserves remained healthy, with £17million in general reserves and £70 million earmarked reserves. It was felt that these were substantial amounts to support the Council where needed when facing the upcoming challenges. However, also recognised that these sums are one-off, so when they are spent they are gone.

In terms of Treasury Management, some queries were raised as to whether or not there were risks of either under or over borrowing. Officers reported that advice was taken from our treasury advisors Link Treasury Services Limited (Link) in all aspects of this, and the strategy was approved by Council, Treasury Management Strategy Statement. Where possible, internal resources are being used to avoid borrowing, thereby reducing borrowing costs. It was considered that all borrowing and investment undertaken, was of low risk in order to ensure the security of the Council's finances. Members were informed that training on this issue was due to be given in the coming months, which may help Members have a better understanding of the issues.

Developing the Skills to Live and Thrive in Work

It was reported that long-term sickness continued to be an area of concern. It was noted that within the SEND Team there were issues regarding capacity, although this was not solely down to illness but also due to the secondment of staff to other areas.

With regard to absence in schools, secondary schools in Doncaster were performing particularly badly, and Members were concerned as to what strategies were being used to support the issues. It was noted that a large amount of responsibility lay with the schools themselves, but the Authority supported where possible, and the new attendance guidance that had been created aimed to further help this. There were a number of hotspots across the borough that were being targeted with allocated funding and inclusion projects but was challenging when it was difficult to establish the original reasons as to why children were not in school.

Closely linked to this, it was noted within the report that the number of children missing in education had reduced. This was due to the hard work of a dedicated officer using a number of strategies, interventions and inclusion projects which had proven successful.

Nurturing a Child and Family Friendly Borough Everyone Belongs

A brief update was provided to Members on the MOSAIC System, which had been faced with obstacles from its first introduction. Training had been rolled out, and it had been considered a steep learning curve but it was hoped once it went live that this would be positive. Training would be both compulsory and ongoing and it was hoped that this would be an effective and efficient system. Reference was also made to the introduction of more simplified forms, which had been coproduced with staff using the system.

Members were informed by Riana Nelson, Director of Children, Young People and Families that performance reporting was much more robust. It was explained that there was high level reporting that was reliable and on track which provided reassurance in relation to concerns around this area.

One of the major concerns raised was that of the financial position of children, young people and families as it continued to be in a position of overspending which continued year on year. The Committee was assured that the budget has been rebased in recent years, taking all possibilities into account but it was an area that continued to be challenging with many issues driving the overspend up. It was explained that financial planning, whilst carefully thought out and budgeted, could not always cover the unforeseen issues that often arose in children's services, which continued to be a volatile area.

It was requested that a briefing note be provided on the remainder of questions put forward by Members, that had not been asked at the meeting.

Promoting the Borough and its Cultural, Sporting and Heritage Opportunities

Members asked what work could be done to further promote the Borough now it had been given City Status, as it was important that this be built on further. The Director of Economy and Environment, Dan Swaine informed Members that work was being carried out to attract people to the area, and encourage events and attractions to feature in Doncaster. It was also noted that there was a vacancy within Visit Doncaster and sometimes there was not the resources needed to assist with events. Whilst it was recognised that people had less money to do nice things, there was still a lot that could be done to promote the area, which was ripe with history, sport and culture.

Building Opportunities for Healthier Happier and Longer Lives for All

Members were pleased to note the Adult Social Care Needs Assessment was on target. It was explained that this had been the product of a great deal of hard work with focus and grip placed upon it in order to achieve success. Staffing however, continued to prove problematic in the social care sector, which continued to challenge teams although there had been a slight improvement with recruitment across the service area.

Further improvements to note in this area included the safe discharge of patients from hospital. Members heard that although progress was slow, there was a significant reduction in comparison with previous years and more support was being offered to patients as they returned to their homes.

In terms of waiting times for speech and language therapy, information on this would be provided outside of the meeting.

Creating Safer, Stronger, Greener and Cleaner Communities

One area of concern that Members wished addressing was in relation to the Safeguarding Service, and what strategies were being put into place to make improvements. The Committee noted that an action plan had been produced and recruitment had been ongoing to put further improvements into place. It was explained that the Head of Service and Team Leader of the Safeguarding Service would report to the SLT monthly in order to ensure that everyone was aware of any issues. This was an extremely volatile area, as the number of referrals continued to be high and it was challenging to ensure that individuals were correctly referred to the most appropriate service area.

A particular concern voiced within discussions related to crime and its increasing levels. It was explained that crime had been affected by a number of external issues including the cost of living crisis, which would often shift the nature of crimes. It was noted that the number of people experiencing Anti Social Behaviour as a victim had increased and that sentencing could create challenges. Members heard that there was some elements of gang related and organised crime in the area and it was important to try and deal with this at the root cause. The Director of Economy and Environment commented that he had forged a positive relationship with the District Commander of South Yorkshire Police and it was hoped that whilst there was a lot to be done, they were working to achieve improvements.

Tackling Climate Change

Climate change continued to be a point of discussion and Members queried if the tree planting was on target to be achieved. The Committee heard that there was currently no data in place to view if this was progressing as well as the tree inspections that were being carried out. It was further explained that this was largely reactive work and trees would only be removed where unavoidable and when removed would always be replaced.

There was a brief discussion around the decline in the number of homes retrofitted to improve energy efficiency. It was explained that there had been delays in its delivery partly due to completion of asbestos surveys and other challenges such as general market pressures and take up in private homes.

Making Doncaster the Best Place to do Business and Create Good Jobs

In the Economy and Environment Directorate, staff absence continued to be a worry, with the target of 8.9% being surpassed by 11.79%. However, it was noted that a couple of long-term problems could have a great impact on these figures, and whilst it was concerning, Organisation Development continued to support staff and service areas where issues were noted in order to make improvements.

The Committee heard that a lot of work was being done to encourage investment and creation of jobs in the borough and that it was being focused as an 'investment zone' within South Yorkshire that would hope to bring further economic regeneration. It was recognised that there needed to be consideration of investment into other areas outside of the town centre. Members stressed their concerns that more locally within Doncaster, huge cuts to budgets could have a huge impact and the loss of staff could affect service delivery. Additionally, with funding there were often time restrictions in delivering the project which resulted in its own challenges.

	<p>There was a brief discussion of the chosen location of the Great British Railway headquarters and potential future opportunities for Doncaster.</p> <p>It was noted that these issues would be discussed in greater depth at the Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.</p> <p><u>Building Transport and Digital Connections Fit for the Future</u></p> <p>Discussions continued with the Committee and Officers in attendance, and moving onto Building and Transport, concerns were voiced with regard to the Borough's roads and the desperate need for repairs. Members noted that there was a system of prioritisation and there simply was not enough funding and money in the budget to do all the necessary improvements, and therefore it was prioritised in terms of need. Unfortunately, it was an ageing highway network and roads were maintained to the best possible standard., In relation to a query regarding whether the receipt of any funding from Government to the Mayoral Combined Authority could be used for highway resurfacing in Doncaster, it was explained that this was not a possibility and was utilised for other investments. In terms of the quality assurances following the resurfacing of roads, Members were informed that there were mechanisms in place to ensure that this was being complied with.</p> <p>Following all the discussions and a robust questioning session, the Chair thanked all officers for their attendance at the meeting and for the valuable information provided.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u> that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee note the Quarter 3 Performance and Financial Information; 2) Further Scrutiny be given to the Cultural Strategy to ensure this was progressing; and 3) Note that the committee will receive information on the impact of the actions being undertaken to reduce spend, in relation to the budget, as soon as possible. 	
46	<p><u>ST. LEGER HOMES OF DONCASTER LIMITED (SLHD) PERFORMANCE AND DELIVERY UPDATE QUARTER 3 ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022 (2022/23) AND VALUE FOR MONEY STATEMENT (VFM) FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2022 (2021/22)</u></p>	
	<p>The Committee received the Quarter 3 Performance and Delivery Update, which gave Members the opportunity to raise any concerns on successes and challenges faced by St Leger Homes against the Key</p>	

Performance Indicators for 2022-23. It was noted that Doncaster remained one of the lowest in the country for rental prices at approximately £76 per week last year, rising to £81 per week next year. This placed SLHD at the 8th lowest housing authority in the country providing value for money.

Additionally, the report also contained SLHD's Value for Money (VFM) Annual Statement for the financial year ending 31 March, 2022. This demonstrated that SLHD was operating within a challenging budget but was robustly managed and exhibited good or improving operational performance, with improving trends against KPIs in most areas, and represented the best performance ever achieved by SLHD.

Members were invited to put forward any questions to Dave Richmond, Chief Executive of St Leger Homes of Doncaster, who was in attendance at the meeting to present the report.

Members queried how the rising costs of materials was being impacted by the rise in inflation as this was a risk that could lead to further challenges. Officers reported that whilst costs had risen, this was now starting to level off, and work was being done to shop around. It was outlined that one of the main problems was with supply, and this was not consistent with it sometimes proving difficult to get hold of the materials needed.

A query was raised with regard to the 'One Voice' Forum and how this worked as there had been a decline in tenant satisfaction. The Committee was informed that there had been a decline in this nationally, and it was not straightforward to understand what the issues were causing this. It was recognised that this was possibly due to frustration in terms of repairs being completed in a timely manner. It was viewed important that SLHD listens to the tenants views and act upon them. SLHD continued to have tenant representatives on the Board. It was considered important to ensure there was adequate engagement taking place and moving forward, making sure this was linked up. The one voice forum is a new umbrella group that has an oversight of all engagement activity taking place and can ensure that customers perspectives are collated for the consideration of the board.

Void properties continued to be an area of major attention, particularly around the turnaround time for re-letting void properties. The Chief Executive of SLHD reported that Doncaster continued to be one of the top performers in the country on this issue, however the locally set target was a very exacting one. It was explained that while many void properties were re-let quickly, there were however a number of delays waiting for repairs to be undertaken before this could be carried out. The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Glyn Jones, Portfolio Holder for Housing, also in attendance at the meeting, informed the Committee that both he and the Mayor continued to hold SLHD to account in order that they performed to the highest standards.

	<p>Members voiced concern in terms of domestic abuse victims and how they were dealt with following reports of abuse. It was outlined that many times, it was the victim and not the perpetrator who was removed from the property and taken away from their home. Officers commented that these were often very complex and volatile situations, and more often than not, it was the wish of the victim to move and sometimes safer and/or preferable for the victim to leave and be rehomed rather than remain in the property whilst they were at risk or where the home had unpleasant connotations.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u> that Members note the progress of St Leger Homes of Doncaster Performance Outcomes and Value for Money statement and the contribution that SLHD made to supporting Doncaster Councils Strategic Priorities.</p>	
47	<p><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKPLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u></p>	
	<p><u>RESOLVED</u> that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan and the Council's Forward Plan be noted.</p>	