

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 25TH JUNE, 2020

A MEETING of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE was held at the MICROSOFT TEAMS - VIRTUAL MEETING, DONCASTER on THURSDAY, 25TH JUNE, 2020 at 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Jane Kidd

Councillors John Healy, Neil Gethin, Mark Houlbrook, Richard A Jones, Majid Khan and Andrea Robinson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Jane Nightingale, Cabinet Member

Debbie Hogg, Director of Corporate Resources

Peter Dale, Director of Regeneration and Environment

Rupert Suckling, Director of Public Health

Lee Golze, Head of Strategic Commissioning and Transformation

James Thomas, Chief Executive Doncaster Childrens Services Trust

Rob Moore, Director of Corporate Resources and Company Secretary, Doncaster Childrens Services Trust

Claire Harris, Performance Analyst, Doncaster Childrens Services Trust

Paul Tanney, Chief Executive St Leger Homes of Doncaster

Andrew Sercombe, Governance Manager

Matt Smith, Head of Financial Management

Christine Rothwell, Senior Governance Officer

Caroline Martin, Senior Governance Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bev Chapman

		<u>ACTION</u>
1	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	None.	
2	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	Councillor Kidd declared that she was employed by an organisation	

	<p>financed by the Mayor’s Fight Back Covid-19 Fund. There was nothing directly associated with this on the agenda but bearing in mind the current covid-19 pandemic response Council grants could be raised as part of discussion.</p>	
3	<p><u>MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 6TH AND 21ST FEBRUARY 2020</u></p>	
	<p>The minutes of the meetings held on 6<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2020 were agreed as a correct record.</p>	
4	<p><u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS.</u></p>	
	<p>There were no public statements made.</p>	
6	<p><u>2019-20 QUARTER 4 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT REPORT</u></p>	
	<p>The Director of Corporate Resources provided an overview reminding Members that the Authority had responded to the Borough’s flooding emergency over the winter months whilst continuing to meet objectives, resulting in a favourable outturn position with a £1.3m financial underspend and strong performance.</p> <p>With regard to reducing the Local Authority’s reliance on residential care, this continued by supporting more people to continue living in their own homes through the use of Direct Payments and providing appropriate support to people discharged from hospital.</p> <p>It was highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment issues - the Council was on target to meet planned maintenance;</li> <li>• Supporting vulnerable people - targets had improved in relation to Council Tax support, housing support and benefit claims;</li> <li>• Mayoral priority on local spend - 70% had been used locally;</li> <li>• Agency spend – the Local Authority’s reliance on this aspect had reduced; and</li> <li>• Sickness absence – this had weakened slightly but would continue to be addressed.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee noted that despite the challenges faced, in particular 3 periods of flooding during the winter months, Quarter 4 performance resulted in a positive position.</p> <p>Continuing from the introduction, Councillors explored the following areas in more detail.</p>	

## **CONNECTED COUNCIL**

Sickness absence - Following a pulse survey, it was noted that staff had responded well to the current way of working, offering more flexibly and managing their work-life balance, with sickness reducing but, the position would continue to be monitored.

The performance target set for 2020/21 took into account a more virtual way of working and the investment made in technology. In response to concerns, it was explained that based on the sickness figures from the first three months of this financial year, it was hopeful that the 2020/21 target could be achieved.

Specifically in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic, Members were of the opinion that the virus was circulating in the UK in November, 2019 and stressed that people had been suffering with a continuous cough during December. It was noted that sickness data would be assessed to ascertain whether there had been an unusually high number of people suffering with a continuous cough, however, it was explained that there was the expectation for respiratory viruses to be higher at that time of year. It was also noted that in November/December 2019 following the Local Authority's response to the flooding emergency and the hard work undertaken resulted in a number of staff being exhausted, having an impact on their well-being.

Housing Benefit Claims – It was explained that there was no intention to reduce resources in this Service area following the restructure last year. The team was aiming to improve service with more people being able to access assistance online.

Health and Safety risk – Members were informed that as part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was a statutory requirement for each service to undertake a risk assessment prior to “stepping up” service delivery. For example, safe distancing.

Finance Quarter 4 outturn – In response to a question relating to the final position, it was noted there had been a positive variance with underspends across all areas, but particularly within the Childrens Trust. It was acknowledged the impact following the Covid-19 pandemic response could not be quantified at this stage, as all areas had been impacted upon, however details would be provided as part of the Quarter 1 finance and performance report. It was noted that there had been a number of factors contributing to the final position including reduced recruitment, flooding emergency and required expenditure towards the end of the financial year.

Therefore a combination of spending factors, additional to development of the Council's savings plan, formed part of the Budget framework presented to Full Council. It was stressed that a number of areas were non-recurrent financial activities in 2019/20 followed by the Covid-19

pandemic, but it was recognised that the Council must continue to maintain a sustainable base rather than one-off saving achievements.

Reserves – The Committee was reminded of the marginal underspend, transferred into general reserves, and in turn help to mitigate against the Covid-19 pandemic expenditure and manage general resources. The Finance Team was currently addressing recurrent and non-recurrent expenditure and ensuring they were factored into the budget cost pressures and financial management process.

Committed expenditure – In response to an example provided by a Member, it was explained that earmarked reserves agreed during Quarter 3 would continue.

### **DONCASTER LEARNING**

LEA Schools and Academies – In response to a question relating to Academies and the Local Education Authority's relationship during the Covid-19 pandemic period, it was explained that all education providers were working together, with shared ownership and full co-operation to respond to the emergency.

It was noted that nearly all schools had remained open, but where closed pupils had been transferred to a different school within their Academy Trust.

The Committee acknowledged that 6000 pupils had now returned to school however the challenges faced included capacity and ensuring safe social distancing rules were met. There was understandable anxiety from some parents about sending their children back to school.. Work was being undertaken with year 6 pupils for their transition to secondary school.

OFSTED – It was reported that the Ofsted Inspection Service would resume in late summer/autumn period with some assurance visits being undertaken in September, addressing how schools were coping with well-being issues and re-engagement of pupils. These visits would not be a formal inspection and result in the school receiving a letter not a judgement. The same procedure would apply for colleges.

With regard to the Inspection of Local Authority Childrens Services, this had been suspended. In connection with the Annual Conversation relating to children services the current proposals were for Local Authorities to choose whether they wished for this to go ahead.

Creating education bubbles – this would be dependent on Public Health advice, school and teaching capacity. Schools would always accommodate pupils where it was safe to do so.

Challenges with persistent absence – it was noted that there was

currently no obligation for parents to send their children to school however, they were actively encouraged to do so. No absence penalties would be made during the pandemic period. The key priorities at this time was ensuring pupils who were vulnerable, from key workers and nominated year groups were returning to school. The Local Authority and Schools were actively working with vulnerable children and their families providing support as they return to school.

In connection with persistent absence as schools return to some kind of normality, the Education and Welfare officers would continue to actively work with pupils and families.

Moving forward, persistence absence was an area that required addressing further, in October, when evidence was available on the number of children that had re-engaged in the education system.

Mental Health in children – The Local Authority and partners responded immediately by establishing a partnership children’s cell, managing the immediate response to the crisis and recovery. The partnership met 3 times per week addressing vulnerable children’s needs and providing wrap around support for children who had attended Accident and Emergency. CAHMs had continued to contact children they were already working with using different new technology methods.

It was noted that there were approximately 2000 children in Doncaster with varying levels of vulnerability and those who had an appointed social worker continued to be seen, for example, at home through house windows and/or phone calls.

School Uniforms – The question of flexibility by schools preparing for September was questioned when a Member outlined that parents could struggle to pay for new uniforms due to job losses, by the end of July. An answer to this query would be provided following the meeting when the issue could be investigated.

### **DONCASTER CARING**

Due to the Director of Health and Adult Social Care having to respond to the Pandemic emergency, two questions were posed and responses provided to the Committee, prior to the start of the meeting, relating to challenges with:

- a) continuing the mainstream change to service management; and
- b) homecare and supported living.

Following a query raised relating to aids and adaptations, particularly the number of hoists being used in some properties, the Director of Corporate Resources explained that the issue would be investigated and responded to following the meeting.

## **DONCASTER WORKING**

Business Rates – Following a question relating to the loss of business rates during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Director of Corporate Resources explained that this was being investigated and that the Government have, to date, required 3 estimates. The estimates had been different at each point of reporting due to the constant emerging position. It was noted that in the first couple of weeks of the pandemic a number of direct debits had been cancelled, however the position had settled slightly. During the year the Local Authority would be working with businesses to address their rates' payment plans.

In response to a Member explaining that a loss of business rate figure should be made available to plan and prepare, the Director of Corporate resources reiterated that the finance and performance Quarter 1 report in September, 2020 would provide clearer details with regard to loss of income figures. She reminded the Committee that Council Tax was the largest but only one part of Local Authority funding streams. The financial position was therefore addressed as a whole, understanding and quantifying for example the loss of income, delivering savings and impacts of cash flow.

With regard to the query relating to the number of direct debits cancelled, it was explained that the Government indicated that changes/an extension would be applied to business rate relief, therefore creating a knee jerk reaction. Re-billing to the business community was therefore required to be undertaken by the Local Authority. Throughout the year, once business rate relief has been applied, any business rate or Council Tax debt would be pursued and recovered as quickly as possible. It was noted that different approaches, depending on the level of debt, would be applied.

Business Support - In response to the significant impact the pandemic has inflicted on business it was reported that through Business Doncaster, with the Local Authority, a recovery plan was being developed as a priority, to protect Doncaster's businesses in the short term.

At the end of week commencing 13th July, 4,638 grants had been provided to Doncaster's business community with £56.2m being made available.

Along with other South Yorkshire Local Authorities and the Community Local Government and Housing Government Department, ERDF funding was being used to provide support primarily to small business enterprises on recovery and productivity, including one to one business support.

It was noted that the criteria for the incentive grants scheme would be

changing to provide support not only for new job creation but to safeguard existing jobs. Therefore it was planned to provide “survival sessions” for small businesses addressing issues such as cash flow and business continuity. Additional to the work being undertaken by the Local Authority, Doncaster Chamber of Commerce was also examining support programmes for employees including health and safety, well-being, assistance with supply chains, international trade and networking.

Town and Parish Councils – A Member reminded the Committee of his concern in relation to the support for Town and Parish Council’s during the Covid-19 pandemic response, stressing that they were continuing to operate, with a reduced funding allocation. In response it was accepted and understood that Parish and Town Councils were in the same financial position as Local Authorities. It was noted that following the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee briefing session in May, the Local Authority had approach Town and Parish Councils with assistance to seek out every opportunity for additional resources.

Regional borrowing opportunities – in response to a question, it was confirmed that Sheffield City Region (SCR) was not a lending organisation but currently a body that allocated money for specific projects.

Economy and Environment underspend – Following reference in the report at paragraph 39 and an underspend of £0.67m, it was explained that there had been less activity due to the flooding emergency response in November 2019.

Local Plan examination – The document had now progressed through a period of consultation with the examination in public scheduled later in the year. The delay was due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **DONCASTER LIVING**

Fly Tipping – in response to a question relating to fly tipping performance, it was stressed that improvements had been made following a number of service changes, for example, how requests were being progressed. During the recent weeks in response to activity in the Covid-19 pandemic period additional resources had to be established to respond to the amount of litter being deposited across the borough. It was noted that from 8<sup>th</sup> June, additional staff would return to their normal jobs. A Member commended the work undertaken by staff when responding to Members fly tipping reports during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Grass Cutting – with regard to how grass cutting could be re-programmed to respond to the change in weather patterns, it was outlined that the Covid-19 pandemic period had provided an opportunity to address how services could be adapted in future years.

	<p>Realigning capacity across different service areas and flexibly responding to differing climates was an area of importance, bearing in mind the Local Authority’s biodiversity objectives. For example, identifying areas across the borough to re-wild and produce improved natural habitats, with grass cutting being undertaken as required rather than on a set timetable.</p> <p>To conclude it was highlighted by a Member that the Climate Change report and recommendations was expected shortly.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED that:</b> - the following, be noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The virements per the Financial Procedure Rules, detailed in the Financial profile in Appendix A of the report;</li> <li>2. The carry forwards approved by the Chief Financial officer, detailed in Appendix A of the report; and</li> <li>3. The Strategic Risk Register detailed in appendix B</li> </ol>	
6	<p><u>ST LEGER HOMES OF DONCASTER LTD (SLHD) PERFORMANCE &amp; DELIVERY UPDATE: 2019/20 QUARTER FOUR (Q4) AND YEAR END OUTTURN</u></p>	
	<p>The Chair of the Committee welcomed the Chief Executive of St Leger Homes of Doncaster to the meeting and commended the organisation for the hard work undertaken when collect rents during the covid-19 period.</p> <p>In response to questions raised the following areas were discussed:</p> <p><u>Performance Improvement</u> – It was explained that where performance had improved it was a result of a key improvement plan for individual service areas linked to the correct level of resources being provided.</p> <p>A number of areas had received a specific focus in the last couple of years, including voids, rent arrears and reduction in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation with performance being regularly monitored.</p> <p><u>Bed and Breakfast accommodation</u> – It was recognised that the use of this type of accommodation had increased significantly to ensure all rough sleepers had been provided a safe place to live during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee was informed that advice provided by the Government Minister on when the Local Authority should return to providing a statutory service, was that this decision was to be taken at a local level.</p> <p><u>Void properties</u> - The Committee noted that with the exception of supporting people who had suffered with homelessness and domestic violence, letting properties ceased between 24<sup>th</sup> March and 8<sup>th</sup> June. Following this date working practices changed to ensure staff were</p>	

	<p>working in safe environments, for example, only one or two staff could work in a property at the same time, therefore taking longer for properties to be completed for occupancy.</p> <p><u>Rent Arrears</u> – Following the Mayoral announcement relating to a rent holiday for people who were not able to make payments, it was noted that a number of tenants had cancelled their direct debits. In response, everyone who had cancelled their payments were contacted with the offer of assistance and guidance. It was made clear to tenants that if their circumstances had not changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic then the rent holiday would not apply. All tenancies were assessed and, if it was felt people were at risk, then a tenancy sustainment officer would be appointed to provide support. The position was continually being monitored.</p> <p>It was stressed that Doncaster was performing well in this area due to the proactive work being undertaken by the organisation.</p> <p><u>Gas maintenance on Local Authority properties</u> – The Committee was informed that gas servicing had been reinstated. It was noted that there had been 120 refusals service refusals from tenants but it was recognised that some tenants were shielding.</p> <p>In response to concerns expressed, it was acknowledged that older people could become confused if different support services were wearing different PPE, for example, a community nurse would wear more PPE than a gas engineer. It was explained that St Leger Homes had undertaken, in line with public health requirements, full risk assessments for staff who visit and enter tenants’ homes and had been issued with the appropriate PPE and guidance for the task they were undertaking.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the progress and performance outcomes to support the Local Authority’s strategic priorities by St Leger Homes of Doncaster, be noted.</p>	
7	<p><u>PERFORMANCE CHALLENGE OF DONCASTER CHILDREN’S SERVICES TRUST: QUARTER 4, 2019/20</u></p>	
	<p>The Committee gave consideration to the report by addressing the following issues:</p> <p><u>Early Intervention</u> – Members recognised that partnership working had shown its strength during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Early Help Strategy Group had met very quickly, changing its Terms of Reference and Manual to assist partners engage in early help activity during the Covid-19 pandemic period.</p> <p>It was noted, within the quarterly performance reporting period, the majority of early help case work had been undertaken by schools or</p>	

early help staff. However in Quarter 1 provision, the change in response had been implemented very quickly. It was stressed that even though schools had closed they continued with their lead practitioner roles, with Health colleagues undertaking different roles to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore some progress had unfortunately been delayed.

Members were informed that the pandemic period had provided partners with the opportunity to address the local offer, strengthening and increasing partner engagement in response to early help. It was also noted that the pilot sites had evidenced and identified that families were being supported in their local area rather than requiring a referral into social care.

The Committee was reminded that in February, the Doncaster “With Me in Mind” campaign had been launched addressing how mental health care was provided in schools and local communities. This provision has continued throughout the pandemic period.

Referrals – It was reported that these had reduced compared to the previous year.

During the covid-19 pandemic referral comparisons to the previous year had been undertaken but Members noted, as services have been reinstated, more children were attending school enabling them to have contact with more professionals, resulting in an increase in referrals. There was an unexpected and worrying drop in referrals during the Covid-19 pandemic period, particularly, for example when domestic abuse cases had increased. It was highlighted that staff continued to work within the community, within Government guidelines, ensuring they could meet with children where it was safe to do so.

Care Leavers – Local Authority’s had a responsibility to ensure young people received support services up to their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was stressed that if a young person did not request regular contact the Children’s Trust would continue to communicate with them, but on a less regular basis. It was noted that some care leavers also chose not to engage with the service but staff would use every support mechanism available to ensure they were safe.

It was reported that there had been increased contact with care leavers during the Covid-19 pandemic to offer assistance with a number of issues but in particular, food provision.

Pathway Plans – It was confirmed that there were 7 plans that had not been completed however, it was noted that generally this was a processing error, for example, once work was completed, systems had not been updated with manager approval. The computerised system ensures each child or young person is regularly checked and required processes followed.

	<p><u>Tickhill Square</u> – Members were reminded that this provision had been closed. The children had relocated to alternative accommodation and were thriving in their new homes.</p> <p><u>Cash Flow</u> – In relation to the positive cash balance it was explained this was the result of a number of elements including the recognition of funding provided by the Local Authority.</p> <p>It was noted that the Council continued to invest heavily in the Trust, for example, providing funding for the future Placements Strategy. It was also noted that as part of the Contract with Local Authority money was front loaded into the Trust. Members were reminded that as from the 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2019 the Trust was an ALMO and therefore part of the Local Authority’s medium term financial strategy.</p> <p>It was stressed that the number of children in care had reduced requiring less resources, plus additional savings had also been achieved.</p> <p>Members recognised that when children were removed from care, hopefully returning to parents, there was a massive cost reduction to the Trust.</p> <p><u>Available care placements</u> - It was reported that the number of places available had reduced by 5, therefore additional care placements had to be provided out of authority. This cost had therefore increased. It was hoped in January 2021 the two new two bedroomed homes would be opened.</p> <p>To conclude it was reported that there were some cost pressures facing the organisation but they would be reported as part of the Q1 finance and performance report.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED that:</u></b> progress and performance outcomes for Doncaster Childrens Services Trust, be noted.</p>	
8	<p><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKPLAN JUNE 2020</u></p>	
	<p>The Chair highlighted that the Overview and Scrutiny work plans required developing for the 2020/21 period. She explained that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they may have a different focus to issues identified earlier in the year.</p> <p>The Committee was informed that Panels would be holding work planning meetings in July and August, and the areas agreed for consideration must add value to the Local Authorities aims. The Chairs of the Community and Environment and Children and Young People Scrutiny Panels outlined that they had identified a number of issues to be included within the Panel’s work plan.</p>	

The first formal Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting would be held on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> August, when the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel would be addressing Mental Health issues during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Governance Manager updated Members on the position relating to not holding meetings in the Civic Office at this time but to continue using the Microsoft Teams virtual meetings function.

**RESOLVED:** that the current position relating to developing the Scrutiny work plan, be noted