

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 29TH JUNE, 2023

A MEETING of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on THURSDAY, 29TH JUNE, 2023 at 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Jane Kidd

Councillors Jake Kearsley, Gemma Cobby, Steve Cox, Leanne Hempshall, Richard A Jones and Glynis Smith

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Phil Cole, Cabinet Member for Finance, Traded Services and Planning
Councillor Mark Houlbrook, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Waste
Debbie Hogg, Director of Corporate Resources
Phil Holmes, Director of Adults, Health and Wellbeing
Scott Cardwell, Assistant Director of Economy, and Development
Lee Golze, Assistant Director of Partnerships and Operation, CYPF
Dave Richmond, Chief Executive, St Leger Homes
Richard Smith, Head of Sustainability

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Majid Khan, Antoinette Drinkhill and Bernadette Nesbit

		<u>ACTION</u>
6	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	No declarations were reported at the meeting.	
7	<u>MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 30TH MARCH 2023</u>	
	<u>RESOLVED</u> that the minutes of the meeting held on 30th March, 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.	
8	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS.</u>	
	There were no public statements made at the meeting.	

2022-23 QUARTER 4 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE
IMPROVEMENT REPORT

The Committee considered the Quarter 4 Finance and Performance Report for 2022-23, and highlighted significant issues faced by the Council that included inflation levels, 'Cost of Living', pressures on the wider housing system and the ability to achieve good economic growth. Despite all the challenges the recent Local Government Association Peer Review visit suggested that the Council continued to operate effectively as a council and provided good value for money.

It was reported that the Council was not immune from inflationary pressures which was reflected in the revenue budget outturn position. The outturn had reduced to a £3.0m overspend compared to £7.8m in quarter 3 in part due to the managerial decisions taken to delay and reduce non-essential spend. The report stated that the Council continued to explore all options to retain a functioning airport in Doncaster.

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

Regenerative Council

Members noted the lower than expected overspend in the current quarter and asked whether these decreases would continue in the next quarter. It was also asked whether any additional strategies or measures would be put in place to further reduce the overspend. In response, it was advised that the outturn was better than expected for several reasons. As the Council were part owners in the Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham (BDR) Waste facility, which sells electricity, the prices regarding waste and electricity rose and as a result the Council received a dividend of £1.3m which improved the financial position.

This year, the Council would start from zero and services would need to build up with a new capital programme outlining a whole set of new projects to start. The Council would then endeavour to work to a balanced budget by the end of the year.

In terms of the risk rating, it was explained that the failure to deliver the Medium-Term Financial Statement (MTFS) was showing as red as this was about threats and barriers in the MTFS being delivered and what was put in place to mitigate those risks. In terms of the MTFS, the Council must plan its financial strategy over a 4-year timeframe allowing it to outline its vision and priorities.

Discussion took place regarding the increasing costs associated with Out of Authority placements which was continuing to rise. It was reported that this was a concern and in part was something that was

very difficult to manage and control. It was advised that there were measures in place to reduce the financial burden by creating more appropriate residential support within the borough. In terms of cost, it was clarified that some of the challenges around keeping children within the City were related to the recruitment and retention of staff which was significantly cheaper than out of authority placements and was a national issue.

A query was made regarding homeless placement claims and whether there were concerns around the level of claims coming forward, why claims were taking longer to be processed and what improvements had been made. Regarding the homeless provision, it was explained that the cost had increased and the ability for the Council to recover that via a subsidy had lessened. In terms of demand, the number of people to whom the council owed a duty around homelessness had increased significantly.

Discussion took place regarding the workforce profile and how the Council was encouraging more diverse candidates. It was reported that there was a lot of work being carried out regarding this in terms of recruitment processes, the reach, and the approach that the Council takes to ensure that the advertisements were inclusive and as simple as possible. In terms of the approach taken, discussion had taken place on those positions that were hard to recruit to and the service had learnt that the recruitment and selection process had evolved with the increased use of social media, job fairs and through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). It was advised that other forums for advertising were being used such as schools, community and faith groups and a Job Centre Newsletter. Members were also advised that the Council has the logo about being a disabled employer and because of this anyone who meets the minimum criteria for a position they will be interviewed for the role.

Paragraph 195 shared information in respect of Market Asset Management (MAM) Doncaster Ltd, and it was advised that details on income and expenditure were commercially sensitive and unable to be disclosed. Members were informed that MAM did provide such information with the Council as part of their arrangement. In relation to the markets, clarity was sought regarding footfall and whether it was being monitored different to previous times. It was advised that the data was consistent and used from the camera near the market. However, this could be checked following the meeting and a response provided.

Clarify was provided around why Great 8 priorities were not ticked and it was explained that this was due to the nature of the report this was not needed here. It was noted that this could be taken out from the report.

Developing the skills to thrive in life and work

Members were informed that persistent absence in secondary schools had risen across the country. Reasons included some parental disengagement post pandemic, which included parents not sending their children for illnesses they would have sent them with beforehand, and the recruitment and retention of staff creating capacity issues within some schools. It was reported that the Attendance Panel brings together Primary and Secondary Schools, with public health colleagues and leaders in education across the Council. The Panel looks at what strategies can be put in place to try and understand the scale of the problem, to understand it at a local level and to develop a targeted approach. It was advised that green shoots were now being seen and that this was heading in the right direction.

In terms of the high targets for children missing in education and the number of Children and Young People in elected home education, it was explained that this was due to the many benefits for children learning in a school surrounding. It was acknowledged that for some children, a school environment was not always the best place, however, this does remain a Council ambition to have all children and young people accessing a setting where it is in their best interests.

Regarding high numbers of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) being issued (highlighted at page 28) of the report, Members were advised of the challenges around EHCPs, and it was noted that before the pandemic, Doncaster were above the national average in terms of completion within 20 weeks. The increase in demand for statutory assessments for EHCPs had risen significantly and there had been a lag in the Councils response in being able to respond to that demand. This had been recognised and the Council had put in place a fixed term resource to help carry out the assessments. In addition, there was also some work being undertaken with schools around the need for a high number of statutory assessments and whether support could be managed by the school without the need for an EHCP. This would continue to be monitored and further work would be carried out regarding Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which was one of the priorities for the year. It was noted that a SEND inspection was expected imminently.

Nurturing a child and family friendly borough everyone belongs

Members heard that the 'Fostering for Doncaster' campaign had progressed well since its launch in April 2023. It was advised that last year there had been 17 enquiries for potential foster carers, 17 in Quarter 1 and 35 so far this year with 6 families being approved. It was felt that children were better placed with in-house foster care provision for the wrap around support provided and the Council would continue to promote that.

Further clarity was sought as to whether the new Social, Emotional and

Mental Health (SEMH) buildings planned on 4 school sites in Doncaster were part of the Dedicated Schools Grant overspend detailed at Paragraph 174 of the report. In response, it was advised that the Dedicated Schools Grant presented a challenge. It was explained that the opening of the SEMH buildings would help to support more children in Doncaster to be educated in Doncaster schools, providing them with better outcomes and also to be more cost effective.

Members were advised that transport costs had risen due to 'cost of living' pressures and that there were too many children out of area that required taxis. In terms of managing this, the Council had established a detailed efficiency plan which was linked to the agreed MTFS. Included in the measures were a number of independent travel trainers, to train young people on how to be independent and enable them to travel by bus, the use of personalised budgets and that single use taxis were being reviewed. It was also advised that the tender for transporting children to special schools was due to be renewed in April and the Council were looking at options such as block booking arrangements with providers. Further discussion took place on reviewing the taxi providers and the charges made to the Council. Members were assured that this will be undertaken.

Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting and heritage opportunities

Members were told that this remained a priority for the Council and the reason why it was less prominent in the report was because the Council acted as an enabler, for example, facilitating cultural events and supporting others agents such as Cast and Doncaster Cultural Leisure Trust (DCLT). In addition, Members were also advised that the Council produced an annual visitors guide and promoted the City as best as it can. It was noted that whilst the Council needed to be careful in terms of resources, it was committed to those events.

Details of a group ran by Councillor Steve Cox were shared with the Committee, who outlined the work carried out in engaging young people and giving them a sense of place. A short discussion took place around Cusworth Hall and its limitations around holding events due to health and safety reasons. It was acknowledged that such feedback needed to be picked up on how the Council can make overall use of this asset within the borough.

Building opportunities for healthier, happier & longer lives for all

Concerns were raised regarding healthy life expectancy figures and reference was made to work within the Council's control that was being undertaken via the Health and Well-Being Board by focussing on aspects of healthy living. It was acknowledged that further work could be done alongside NHS colleagues who have that commitment to

inequality but perhaps more funding in terms of inequality and prevention was needed. It was advised that overall Doncaster was very similar to Barnsley and Rotherham and that our officers were committed and focussed on the issues of inequality.

Reference was made to the number of carers assessments at Page 37 of the report and it was advised that a target had not been set other than to continuously improve. Members were advised that a different model was being used compared to last year, giving carers more access and less bureaucracy which had resulted in more carers assessments being completed. At present, there were 109 people waiting for a carers assessment, and people tended to be seen within 4 weeks. It was noted that whilst challenges came particularly with increased awareness, the service would continue to do all that it could for those waiting lists not to increase.

Discussion took place regarding discharges from hospital and the adaptations for properties. It was reported that in terms of the performance information for Occupational Therapy (OT) assessment times, it was noted that the figures remained quite high. It was advised that improvements would be shown in Quarter 1 when the backlog had been removed and new people were now being seen within days. However, this backlog would be pushed from the OT service into the major adaptation service which had also been challenged by access to skilled installers. It was advised that at present the Adaptations Team were working to increase that supplier base as well as improving efficiency. In relation to hospital discharge, it was noted that these would be prioritised although there were challenges because staff in hospitals were more aware of risks perceived in getting a person home than those for that person remaining in hospital (particularly with older and disabled people by losing physical and mental dependence).

Creating Safer, Stronger, Greener & Cleaner Communities where everyone belongs

In exceeding the target for fly tips being investigated and removed, it was reported that the management of the street scene and fly-tipping service had improved through the introduction of an immediate short term action plan and investment. It was noted that investment in front-line services included increased Street Scene Operatives and Enforcement Officers which had improved services and new technology now helped operatives to address Council enquiries quicker. In relation to enforcement and an increase in resources, staff could pick up and address the fly-tipping incidents proactively with increased social media also playing a part. Investment had also been made into covert and overt cameras within hotspots for fly-tipping in urban and rural locations.

In terms of the rate of recycling going down, it was noted that waste tonnages had gone up and the Council had found that increased

contamination has had an adverse effect on the recycling rates (as it must be dealt with separately). It was noted by the Council that a higher number of furniture that were being found in rural areas also required separation and decreased the amount of tonnage being measured. Another area was green waste which stopped being collected in the autumn and winter months and had an adverse effect on tonnages. It was noted that there was a lot of contamination that occurred on Council land such as play parks although the forthcoming Play Parks Strategy included a specific section on recycling.

It was reported that the Council had seen a rise in air pollution possibly due to increased use of vehicles and a return to daily life since the pandemic. It was also noted that the uptake of electric vehicles had taken a hit due to challenges such as affordability. Members were advised that a cross service area group had been set up that regularly met to discuss air quality. It was outlined that there was an Air Quality Action Plan, setting out target areas and steps to tackle the measures, which could be shared with Members. Members were assured that work was being done although as a Local Authority, it can only do what was within its powers. It was noted that the team dealing with air quality also feeds into planning applications.

Discussion took place regarding the current increase in Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) including off-road bikes and vehicle nuisance. One of the positives seen was that publicity campaigns around raising awareness had resulted in more people coming forward and reporting ASB. The Council had greater confidence in the CCTV network as it was targeted and deployed, using images to pursue convictions. There had also been increased sharing of data between partners such as the Police and SLHD around trends that required a targeted approach.

Members were provided with details of the action plan to deal with rough sleeping within the city. It was advised that the Complex Lives Alliance, had been hugely effective on rough sleeping, however, with the 'cost-of-living' crisis, the Council was experiencing an increase. It was noted that there continued to be too many people who had a route to rough sleeping from prison release, which identified the need for further collaborative work with the prison service. It was advised that part of the action plan was addressing those people with underlying vulnerabilities using bed and breakfast accommodation and when the accommodation had expired this could become a route to homelessness. The Complex Lives service was working with SLHD and those people to ensure a plan was in place.

Tackling Climate Change

It was advised that the tree planting target had certain challenges although the Council had improved tree planting in the city (107,000 over 2-year period) and would continue to do so over the next 8 years. It was explained that there were limitations in that trees could only be

planted from November to March (which equated to 10,000 trees per month). It was reported that there had been successful partnership with schools with 20 tiny forests and then also Queens Green Canopy. Members heard that improvements could be made through better engagement with key stakeholders such as landowners and businesses. It was noted that an action plan was in place and the next stages for year 3 were being considered.

It was advised that tree inspections had previously been carried out by a company called Tree Wise before being transferred to a company called Alloy and this had resulted in a backlog of inspections. It was explained that the Council had a tree register and encouraged residents and businesses to register newly planted trees. It was envisaged that this data would feature in the Quarter 1 report.

Regarding energy efficiency, it was highlighted that to a certain degree the Council was reliant on Government funding coupled with monies from the Council itself to address the insulation social housing decarbonisation needs for council houses and private homes. Members were informed of the unrealistic timescales stipulated to use the funding provided and undertake the work. There were also contractual issues that may arise, alongside potential complexities with each project. It was advised that an action plan was in place and lessons would be learnt from experience. Further details regarding funding schemes through government funding were provided to Members, who were assured that the Council would continue to utilise every opportunity.

Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs

In terms of completing planning applications, it was advised that the Council currently completed 19 out of 20 applications within time, which was above the national standard. It was explained that the Council faced the same difficulties as other authorities such as the loss and retention of staff (often due to competitive salaries offered elsewhere). Further details were provided regarding innovative work being carried out by the Councils Planning department aimed at improving the experience for people and providing a more efficient system.

Regarding increasing the number of higher paid jobs, it was reported that the Council had been proactive in putting together performance indicators within the Economic Strategy to support (set at £31K). It was shared that those salary levels had not been delivered over the last 12 months. It was noted that at present the market in Doncaster was moving around the logistics industry which did not pay as well as the manufacturing industry. Work was being undertaken to bring companies into Doncaster which would offer higher salaries.

Building transport and digital connections fit for the future

	<p>In terms of digital connections, it was advised that work was being done to establish appropriate indicators for digital connections and it was hoped that some of those indicators would be included in the next report.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u> that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee noted the Quarter 4 Performance and Financial Information.</p>	
10	<p><u>ST. LEGER HOMES OF DONCASTER LIMITED (SLHD) PERFORMANCE AND DELIVERY UPDATE QUARTER 4 AND YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023 (2022/23)</u></p>	
	<p>The Committee received the Quarter 4 Performance and Delivery Update 2022/23.</p> <p>The following areas were raised through discussions and consideration of the report: -</p> <p>Staff Sickness - It was recently noted at a Southwest Area Councillor forum that it was a concern to St Leger that the number of staff missing work for stress/mental health issues was considerable. Members queried whether this was a contributing reason for certain work not being completed. In terms of issues around installing ramps, it was advised that this was not a St Leger function.</p> <p>It was explained that this performance was thereabouts in-line with that of the Councils, although had worsened since before the pandemic. It was highlighted that SLHD was averaging 11.5 days a year (days lost through sickness per FTE) which was considered as too high. It was clarified that a third of that number was related to stress/depression and mental health-based issues which had both grown considerably throughout the public sector during the last two years. It was acknowledged that such a high average number of days absent would likely have an impact on performance. It was advised that this could be mitigated by using additional measures such as contractors carrying out repairs where possible.</p> <p>Regarding KPI2 Void Rent Loss, it was advised that the target days for turning around properties was ambitious. Members were advised that SLHD was currently in Quartile 1 (top 25%) for performance. Other issues that impacted this indicator included difficulty in recruiting and the retention of staff, for example, electricians. This in turn had an impact on the ability to turn around properties. It was stressed that SLHD continued to make small incremental improvements.</p> <p>In view of KPI4, the number of residents undertaking training or education, it was explained that SLHD had seen a difference in performance from last year and had taken the decision 18 months ago to offer training to residents in addition to SLHD tenants. SLHD was</p>	

	<p>looking at considering the training they were delivering and what could be done to change and develop it.</p> <p>In response to a question raised regarding KPI18 Tenant Satisfaction with property condition %, and the decline in the % from 86.5% to 75.7%. Members were advised that St Leger had a number of tenant satisfaction measures in place, which had been monitored for years and had dropped last year (as part of a national trend) although now sat slightly above the national average. During the pandemic, people had spent further time in their properties which had resulted in more repairs coming forward resulting in a backlog which had now settled.</p> <p>It was reported that resources had not been boosted to cover this increased demand for repairs. It was acknowledged that some frustrations arose from not knowing when repairs were going to be carried out. It was explained that work was being done to mitigate certain issues through a one repairs service, where repairs were triaged.</p> <p>It was highlighted that one of the biggest decreases in satisfaction was around Value for Money. It was commented that this was a difficult area to unravel as St Leger was the 9th lowest in the country in terms of rent and did not have service charges unless a tenant was on district heating scheme. However, this was not to say there was work to be done around this KPI.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>RESOLVED</u> that the progress of SLHD performance outcomes and the contribution SLHD makes to supporting City of Doncaster Council's (CDC) strategic priorities be noted.</p>	
11	<p><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN 2023/24 AND APPOINTMENT OF UNION REPRESENTATIVE TO REGENERATION AND HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL</u></p>	
	<p>The Committee received the Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan 23/24 (latest version circulated by email). Members were asked to appoint a union representative to the Regeneration and Housing Scrutiny Panel.</p> <p>In terms of Appendix C of the report which outlined the Terms of Reference for the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee, it was advised that once the dates for those meetings had been finalised, Members would be informed accordingly.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>RESOLVED</u> that:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The 2023/24 Overview and Scrutiny work programme be approved; (2) The Council's Forward Plan of key decisions be noted; 	

	<p>(3) The terms of reference and the appointment to the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (South Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire) Appendix C be noted; and</p> <p>(4) Mark Whitehouse of UNITE be appointed to the Regeneration and Housing Scrutiny Panel.</p>	
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