GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 27 November 2023

PRESENT: Councillor(s): C Buckley, R Beadle, D Bradford, B Clelland, J Green, S Green, I Patterson, J Simpson, J Turner and J Wallace

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): J Eagle, D Burnett, D Duggan, T Graham, M Hall and K Wood

CR15   MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 16 October 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

CR16   PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT & IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK 2023-24

The Committee received a report on the Council's Performance Management & Improvement Framework, reporting performance on the delivery of Council priorities for the period 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023. An overview was given of performance relevant to the role and remit of Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee The framework has been put together to support Gateshead Council's THRIVE strategy. It was noted that some metrics included in the report are annual measures which are reporting figures at a six-month mark.

A presentation was also given to the Committee on making data accessible for scrutiny, including a demonstration of Power BI and how this can be used to track data for the Office for Local Government.

The Committee noted that a more visual view of the data would support better public and scrutiny understanding of the presented content.

There was discussion by the Committee of the consideration of cyber attacks and other impacts to online systems and the effect this would have on residents. This issue is high on the Council's strategic and operational register and these risks are being assessed. It was noted that Gateshead Council has a particularly robust IT security infrastructure.

REVOLED:

i.   The OSC commented on and discussed the report.

ii.   The OSC recommended an item on school exclusions be discussed by Families OSC.

  iii. The OSC recommended the performance report to Cabinet for consideration in January 2024.

CR17 ANNUAL BUDGET REVIEW REPORT

The Committee was given a report reviewing the 2022/23 budget and updating on the achievement of the 2023/24 budget savings to date.

Budget Review 2022/23

The revenue budget set was delivered. There were no savings delivery to report on in 2022/23.

The overall 2022/23 revenue outturn position for the Council including non-service budgets and financing this resulted in a net revenue positive balance of £3.4m. This position is after the application of agreed reserves funding to support financing of the budget and resulted in a net addition to the Council's general fund re-serve.

Active budget management and additional scrutiny took place during the year in order to help achieve this outturn. Although the overall outturn was positive, the position masks overspends in some services and includes a number of year-end transactions that have impacted on the final position. The positive outturn remains a significant achievement given the financial pressures faced by the services and enables the Council's sound financial position to be maintained within an extremely challenging economic and financial context.

Budget Review 2023/24 – six-month position

The projected revenue outturn for 2023/24 at the second quarter following management intervention is £2.7m over budget. (First quarter was £1.1m over). The position per Group and Service was reported to Cabinet 21 November 2023.

The most significant budget challenge is in relation to children's social care placements and home to school transport.

It is the intention to deliver within the overall revised budget by the financial year end and progress will be reported at quarter three.

Savings Review 2023/24

Cabinet agreed £13m of savings in the 2023/24 revenue budget which will be challenging. Financial control and monitoring of budgets is crucial. Progress is being closely monitored and those requiring further consultation and engagement will be the subject of future reports to Cabinet.

The Committee commended the report and requested a further look at the spending for child placements in the Borough in the 2024/25 work programme.

CR18 EVIDENCE GATHERING AND INTERIM REPORT

A presentation was given to the Committee on the emerging recommendations from the closure of two leisure centres. A full report was presented to the previous meeting of the committee.

The emerging recommendations outlined are as follows:

1. Consider the lessons learned from this review and incorporate them into the procurement process as appropriate.
2. Be clear about the risks the Council should retain as part of the procurement process.
3. Share information from this review with the community asset groups to enable them to learn from the Council's experience.
4. Apply future price increases to all customers and not just new customers for all traded services unless there is a commercial reason to do something different.
5. Review the council's contingency planning arrangements for sudden and potentially catastrophic reductions in income (e.g. pandemics, unplanned major work etc) based on the Council's experience of Covid.
6. Ensure appropriate monitoring of the impact of sector competition and market trends within the Council's trading services.
7. Conclude future service reviews as quickly as possible to prevent the situation from worsening.
8. Ensure appropriate contract management is undertaken for all procured sites.

The Committee asked for an addition to recommendation 6 on employment conditions.

RESOLVED:

i. The Committee accepted the recommendations.

CR19   ANNUAL REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF WORKFORCE STRATEGY

A presentation was giving an update on the performance management workforce strategy was given to the Committee. The presentation focused on:

- Sickness absence

- Employee wellbeing and equality, diversity, and inclusion

- Employee turnover

- Health and safety update

Sickness absence

Covid, viral infection and stomach/digestion concerns account for the highest number of days lost up to the date of the meeting covering 2022 and 2023. While there has been a spike in COVID absences recently, however overall there is still

positive change.

The top reason for absence in 2023 was stress/depression/anxiety. There has been a significant decrease in COVID absences in 2023 compared to the same period in 2022.

Most of the sickness days are caused by short term absence rather than long term absence. The service with the highest number of sickness absence days was Adult Social Care, where 22.18 days were lost. Within ASC there is a requirement to remain away from work for so many days if the cause of absence is covid which impacts on the number of days an employee needs to be off work.

Children's Social Care have the highest number of days lost due to work-related stress absence (1,502 days). A work stress audit has been planned for this department. The audit of Children's Social Care will be used help identify solutions on a wider scale for workplace stress. Adult Social Care have the highest number of non-work-related stress days (3,835 days).

Ongoing work is being done on stress in the workplace, this is focusing on culture change. The key to success is supporting absences due to non-work reasons as this is the higher cause.

Work related and non-work-related stress days lost by grade show a higher number of days lost in lower grades, however this will be presented by percentages in future meetings due to a higher number of workers on lower grades.

Employee wellbeing and equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)

A permanent staff member has been recruited to focus on EDI. Alongside this change, a number of initiatives are being worked on:

- A workforce EDI policy has been drafted

- A single source has been made for employees to get information on health and wellbeing, via the intranet and there is also a plan to make one for councillors

- Training is available for managers in identifying an employee who has a problem with their emotional health

- Posters have been created showing free information and organisations available to help with mental health

- Launched VivUp benefits platform, and exploring a package with them to get an employee wellbeing programme

Have begun a disability passport initiative, for employees to outline their to be given information about an employee's health without them having to repeat sensitive information routinely

The EDI maturity model was explained in that level 5 outlines what an exemplar employer does to facilitate positive EDI in the workplace which is what Gateshead

Council is aiming to achieve., It was explained that it is recognised that society is fast changing and that maintaining a level 5 standard will require constant work.

Employee turnover

As of 30 September 2023, employee turnover was 9.28%. This is similar with other local authorities and higher than many other sectors. The highest percentage turnover is in the Office of the Chief Executive and that this is is relative to the total headcount and that within this Service the headcount is low..

It was explained that resignation as a coverall rationale is the highest reason given for employee turnover in all teams except for Environment and Fleet Management, which was end of fixed term/temporary contract. Property and Assets had the highest number of leavers (98). However, was not understood was the reason behind why an employee resigned.

It was explained that as a result of not having detailed understandings as to why an employee resigns, that a new exit interview was launched in August 2023. 142 surveys have been sent to employees since this date, with a response rate of 37.32% as completing an exit interview is voluntary.The rate of responses is expected to grow as the survey becomes more established, which will help the results to become more encompassing. The current top reason for leaving is opportunities to grow professionally and enhance career. No employees who responded to the survey have left due to stress.

Health and safety

School reporting rates of near misses over the last six months (from 1 April to 20 September 2023) were at 13%. Overall the rates of verbal abuse have reduced, but threatening behaviour has increased. The data also indicates that schools need development on why and how to report this.

An audit was conducted of the Council Warning Alert System (CWAS). The action being taken from the audit is:

- Ensure that the right people have access to the CWAS system, with clearer guidance on how to use it.

- Personal Safety Training has been revised following work with the Workforce Development Team.

- The Personal Safety Procedure is being reviewed and consulted on to provide:

  o Managers with more detailed guidance about how to minimise the risks of threatening behaviour within their teams through risk assessment.

  o Greater clarity on the steps to take to deal with an incident should one occur (this in turn will hopefully reduce future incidents).

- Libraries have introduced a 'code of conduct' for customers to follow. If

general behaviour is unacceptable then customers may be suspended from the library service. This will be considered by other services and how to apply a similar model of prevention.

- In broader terms - Colleagues in the Safer Communities team have also been involved with the Safer Streets project, to look at understanding and reducing ASB problems in parts of our community.

The Committee previously requested an update on risk assessments. The council's approach to risk assessments follows the Health and Safety Executive five steps to risk assessment and are carried out in accordance with council procedure CGS-HS-40 Risk Assessment.

Service Directors, head teachers, managers, and supervisors are responsible for ensuring work-related hazards are identified and suitable and sufficient risk assessments are undertaken and recorded.

Council services and schools are required to identify and train some staff as competent risk assessors. There is a requirement for risk assessments to be reviewed at least annually. Risk assessments audited as part of the Service Director/ Head Teacher Audit process (HS39).

The presentation was commended by the Committee.

RESOLVED: -

i.   The Committee noted the presentation.

ii.   For the next presentation to include updates on the following:

o Examples of personal growth training and support for staff

o A closer look at absences in social care, particularly on short term absences being repeated or singular.

CR20   WORK PROGRAMME

The committee reviewed the work programme and noted the following changes;

A report on Old Town Hall will be brought to the January meeting of the Corporate Resources OSC.

The Committee agreed it was no longer necessary to have a standing item on world affairs.

RESOLVED: -

i.   The committee noted the proposed amended programme.

ii.   The committee noted the work will be brought to the Committee to identify any additional policy issues, which the Committee may be asked to consider.

Chair………..……………..

This page is intentionally left blank