

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Tuesday 28 May 2019

Present

Cllr M Mackrory (Chairman)
Cllr J Abbott
Cllr J Aldridge
Cllr M Buckley
Cllr M Garnett
Cllr J Moran

Cllr R Pratt
Cllr A Sheldon
Cllr M Steptoe
Cllr A Turrell
Cllr J Young

Apologies

Cllr G Butland
Cllr M Hardware

Cllr V Metcalfe
Cllr W Schmitt

Richard Buttress, Democratic Services Manager was supporting the meeting.

1. Membership, Apologies and Declarations

Apologies were received from Cllr G Butland, Cllr M Hardware, Cllr V Metcalfe and Cllr W Schmitt.

Cllr J Aldridge was substituting for Cllr G Butland.

Following the May meeting of Full Council, the change in committee membership was noted and Cllr G Butland and Cllr J Young were welcomed on to the committee.

No declarations of interest were received.

2. Election of Vice-Chairmen for 2019/20 municipal year

The committee elected Cllr V Metcalfe and Cllr J Young as Vice-Chairman of the committee for the forthcoming municipal year.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 30 April 2019 were approved by the committee as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public received.

5. Organisation Strategy

The committee received a verbal update from Patrick Guthrie, Head of Profession, on Essex County Council's (ECC) Organisation Strategy.

- ECC works to a four year strategy in line with the County Council election cycle
- The organisation plan was adopted at Full Council in February 2019
- The strategy has four aims:
 - Enable inclusive economic growth

- Help people get the best start and age well
- Create great places to live and work
- Transform the Council to do more with less
- The strategy is more focussed and evidence based
- The strategy is ambitious but realistic
- It recognises that the role of the council needs to change
- The performance aspect of the strategy will be reported on in ECC's Annual Report in July 2019
- It was felt that an mid-point review was not required as the strategy is kept under review continuously
- There have been no changes to the strategic environment that required any changes being made to the strategy
- Delivery of the strategy is embedded through business plans
- Business plans for 2021 – 2024 will start being put together from the end of this year.

High level strategies are moved into specific policies which are scrutinised.

Strategies around living well and keeping fit and good but in some cases, ECC are charging for people to do Parkrun's in its Country Parks.

The report in July 2019 will be shared with the committee.

Updates on how the strategy is performing are presented to PLT on a regular basis.

There seems to be a lack of consistency in ECC around producing qualitative data. It is difficult to record data on non-service delivery topics but the key messages are extracted.

Benchmarking is a core measure of performance against other councils.

Engagement with Members and employees was undertaken when formulating the current strategy. External consultants were not used as part of this process.

Actions

- 1) Report on the performance of the strategy that will be published in ECC's annual report in July 2019 is to be shared with the committee.
- 2) Engage with the committee in October 2019 when formulating future business plans.

6. Business Rates Retention and Fair Funding Review

The committee received report CPSC/09/19. Cllr Gagan Mohindra, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Housing provided the following introduction:

- Business Rates Retention (BRR) and the Fair Funding Review (FFR) have been a longstanding issue for ECC
- The money received into ECC from these is not significant but it does encourage growth within the County

- BRR consultation has been impeded by current international matters (Brexit)
- People are living longer and rely on more expensive services if they are required
- ECC is liaising closely with MP's in Essex to gain their support for BRR and FFR
- ECC may receive a larger share of BRR in the future but as a result would no longer receive the revenue support grant.

Employment land is the responsibility of the District and Borough Councils as part of their local plans.

Cash machines are liable for business rates.

ECC have been in conversations with central government around the disparities between what Counties receive compared to inner London authorities.

ECC are continuing to press central government for a response as to when a decision on BRR will be made.

Until the consultation results are available, there is not a figure on what the BRR growth will be.

ECC needs to be proactive in policies going forward to maximise the amount of funding received into the authority.

Fair Funding has an impact on the majority of ECC's budget.

Actions

- 1) A copy of ECC's response to the Fair Funding Review is to be shared with the committee.

7. 2018/19 Provisional Outturn

The committee received report CPSC/10/19. Cllr Gagan Mohindra, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Housing provided the following introduction:

- Thanked officers for the input into the production of this report
- There is a 1% underspend on the revenue budget
- The underspend has been attributed to the mild weather
- The budget was overspent in quarter one but fell back under budget by the end of the year
- The re-phasing of works attributed to this
- Since quarter three, the £4m contingency fund was not used (mild weather related)
- Capital programme was £8.8m underspent – 97% of the programme has been delivered which is on target
- Auditors will be making a review of accounts on 29 July 2019.

The committee noted that there appeared to be very little work carried out to reduce carbon emission.

Trading account issues in Essex Music Services meant it received a £63k loan. The account shows as it being removed as the money was repaid.

ECC is unable to re-finance loans from the PWLB and have to borrow in line with the capital finance requirement and are unable to extend borrowing beyond this.

Actions

- 1) Committee to receive copy of ECC's response to the Fair Funding and Business Rates Retention consultation.
- 2) Committee to receive additional detail on the Carbon Reduction reserve.
- 3) Committee to receive information on what action is being taken to reduce carbon emissions.
- 4) Committee to receive additional detail on the Mercury Theatre capital scheme.

8. Work Programme

The updated work programme was noted by the committee.

A further update on the Organisation Strategy has been added to the work programme for the committee's October meeting.

9. Date of next meeting

10. The date of the next meeting will be held on Tuesday 25 June 2019 at 10:30am.

11. Urgent Business

No urgent business was received.

12. Urgent Exempt Business

No urgent exempt business was received.

The meeting closed at 3:30pm.

Chairman