

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2020

PRESENT: Councillors James Robbins (Chair), Steve Weisinger (Vice-Chair), Junab Ali, Matthew Courtliff, Jane Milner-Barry, Barbara Parry, Kevin Parry, Roger Smith, Andy Spry, Timothy Swinyard, Rahul Tarar and Robert Wright.

Also in attendance were: Councillors Dale Heenan (Cabinet Member for Town Centre, Culture and Heritage), Rob Jandy (Cabinet Member for Organisational Excellence) and Maureen Penny (Cabinet Member for Highways, Maintenance and Waste Services).

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Emma Bushell and Jim Grant.

28. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations of interest were made.

29. Public Question Time

There were no questions submitted under this item.

30. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Organisational Excellence

Councillor Rob Jandy (Cabinet Member for Organisational Excellence) was in attendance and presented to the Committee a report summarising progress and performance in respect of the key objectives of his role, which are to:

- Provide the political leadership for Organisational Excellence.
- Provide the strategic direction for the Council's customer access strategy.
- Ensure that the Council's agreed priorities within the portfolio are delivered.

The Cabinet Member has delegated responsibility for Corporate Services including:

- Legal.
- HR.
- IT.
- Customer Services.
- Facilities Management.
- Performance.
- Corporate.
- Improvement.
- Democratic services.
- Operational Income Generation including Car Parks: Policy, Fees and Charges.

Councillor Jandy introduced his report and highlighted the following points:

- How the report covers the whole infrastructure which supports all other services provided by the Council.

- The new analyst in post who is helping to ensure that effective processes are put in place, meaning that the correct information is sent to the correct person at the correct time.
- The support provided to all staff in going in to lockdown, and how it was ensured that core services were provided that were not to the detriment of residents and staff wellbeing.
- How officers were brought back to work safely, and the learning points which should help improve work patterns going forward.
- The plans for entering lockdown again, with expectations being better managed and there being more of a 'business as usual' feeling.

Councillor Jandy responded to questions put by Councillors Matthew Courtliff, Jane Milner-Barry, Roger Smith, Bob Wright and the Chair on the following matters:

- The lag in complaint response times as a result of Covid-19 which was around 10 – 17 days a few months ago, and is now down to around 2 – 4 days. The Committee noted that the number of complaints overall has reduced over the last 6 – 8 weeks due to the work undertaken in the operations service (missed waste collections being improved for example).
- How there have been no delays for the Legal Team in taking matters through to the Courts recently as they have been successfully operating remotely, but that there may have been some delays at the start of the lockdown process when court procedures were being changed to virtual and hybrid meetings.
- What measures the Council has taken through DSE assessments to ensure that its staff has the correct working environment at home, and is not at an economic disadvantage from doing so.
- A review of the Council's building needs going forward should 'home' be incorporated as the primary place of work for digital workers, and what the offer will be to those staff.
- The recruitment issues within the Legal Team which mainly relates to there being a relatively small pool of professional staff working for local authorities which is smaller than the numbers needed.
- Increasing concern from residents regarding the possibility of trees falling on houses, and the level of insurance in place for such accidents should the proper regime of tree maintenance not be kept up, the details of which will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- The current caseloads for Planning Officers, the details of which will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- That a training session will be offered to members on 25th February 2021 regarding climate change awareness, sustainability and air quality.
- The behaviours, skills and experience expected from officers appointed to positions at the Council, and how it is ensured that people applying for jobs understand what will be expected from them.
- The numbers of people paying to park all day in the Bristol Street car park, the details of which will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting. The Committee noted that parking prices are being re-evaluated at the moment, with different options for permits being considered.
- The plans to increase the numbers of apprenticeships within the Council (ensuring the best use of the apprenticeship levy) and those within a graduate trainee scheme.

- The reasons behind why a third of council staff were unable to work for approximately five months of the year due to shielding and other associated matters connected with Covid-19, mainly due to the lack of technology and their inability to be redeployed in to a frontline role.
- The percentage of young disadvantaged people who are being helped in to the workplace as a result of the strategies developed for collaborative resourcing approaches, the details of which will be circulated subsequent to the meeting.
- The importance of ensuring that those residents with no online access still have the ability to telephone the Council to do things such as book a visit to the Household Waste and Recycling Centre.
- How building ventilation should also be an important part of getting the campus buildings Covid-safe as well as the other measures that have already been taken.
- How the asset valuation of the Council's housing stock (completed annually for accounting purposes) is carried out in line with government requirements whereby a significant discount is put on the market value of those properties to reflect that it is social housing.
- How the Performance, Intelligence and Insight Team will assist those officers dealing with the Carbon Reduction Strategy by monitoring progress via dashboards.
- That the Council does not currently include climate change risk on its Corporate Risk Register but that this matter will be reviewed to ensure there is sufficient emphasis in the future.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor Jandy be thanked for attending the meeting to present his performance report and for his full and open responses to members' questions and observations on the issues raised.

(2) That information requested by members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to them via the Committee Clerk.

31. Review of the 2019/2020 Municipal Year - Scrutiny Committee Annual Report

The Committee considered its Annual Report for 2019/2020 prepared by the Chief Legal Officer.

The Annual Report highlighted the work of the Scrutiny Committee and its five Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the Municipal Year 2019/2020, in their role of supporting the Council's decision-making and policy development processes and the work of the Cabinet and the Council as a whole.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee highlighted in his foreword to the report that he had taken over as Chair during the Covid-19 global pandemic, which had changed how everyone works and interacts, but noted that Scrutiny had continued almost uninterrupted during that time. The Chair thanked the Committee Services Team for its help in his handover and the transition to virtual meetings, and paid tribute to his predecessors in the role, Councillors Bob Wright and Kevin Small. The Chair also thanked the officers and members that had responded to his request for ideas and opinions on Scrutiny in Swindon.

The Chair had also highlighted his determination to increase and improve the public's role in Scrutiny, so that the people of Swindon can have confidence in the Council's actions and the decision-making function. He also referred to the current challenging times for local

government, with the need to continue core services whilst playing a key role in fighting the pandemic and keeping people safe and healthy as well as planning for post-Covid, all carried out in a very challenging financial situation. He stated his hope that the Overview and Scrutiny function will be a force for good in meeting these multiple challenges and effectively plotting a course through them.

The Committee discussed the opportunity presented by the Equality Advisory Group as a potential forum which could look at improving accessibility to the Council's democratic process for the most disadvantaged in our society, and the latest position with regards to the Task Group set up to look at reviewing the Scrutiny process in Swindon.

Resolved – (1) That the Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for 2019/2020 be noted.

32. Work Programme 2020/2021

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer, which set out the topics for inclusion in the 2020/2021 Scrutiny Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 7th July 2020, and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.