

Draft Notes

of the informal Meeting of the

Partnerships, Corporate Organisation and Overview Management Scrutiny Panel

Thursday, 15 July 2021

held as a Virtual Meeting on MS TEAMS.

Meeting Commenced: 14:00 Meeting Concluded: 16:30

Councillors:

P Geoff Richardson (Chairman)
P Stuart McQuillan (Vice Chairman)

Gill Bute
P John Cato
P James Clayton
P Peter Crew
P Mark Crosby
P Huw James
P John Ley-Morgan
Robert Payne
Terry Porter
Vacancy

P: Present

A: Apologies for absence submitted

Other Members in attendance: Councillors Mike Bell, Ash Cartman, Catherine Gibbons, Sandra Hearne, Bridget Petty

Officers in attendance: Brent Cross, Michèle Chesterman, Emma Diakou, Philippa Penney, Amy Webb (Corporate Services), Nicola Webb (Place)

PCOM Election of the Vice-Chairman (Agenda Item 1)

Recommended: that Councillor Stuart McQuillan be elected as the Vice-Chairman of the Partnerships, Corporate Organisation and Overview Management Scrutiny Panel for the Municipal Year 2021/22, to be ratified at the formal Panel meeting on 11 November 2021.

PCOM Minutes (Agenda Item 3)

Recommended: that the minutes of the COCO meeting held on 4 March 2021 be approved subject to being ratified at the formal Panel meeting on 11 November 2021).

PCOM Policy and Scrutiny Overview and Work Planning (Agenda Item 5)

The Electoral Services and Scrutiny Manager presented a report on Policy and Scrutiny Overview and Work Planning. The report provided an overview of the policy and scrutiny function and ways of working, scrutiny of Executive and Executive Member decisions, confirmed the remit of the panels, considered the scrutiny overview and management role and invited discussion and agreement on the work plan.

Members noted that with the introduction of PCOM as a new panel there was an opportunity to examine the changes taking place in respect of policy and scrutiny both within the council directorates and the Executive Member portfolios and panels and the changes to the way that scrutiny was being structured. PCOM panel had a new remit and there was a new role to North Somerset scrutiny which was the overview and management perspective which involved co-ordinating and prioritising the work plans across all policy and scrutiny panels.

Members were advised that the Centre for Public Scrutiny had become the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and were directed to the link to website at the end of the report.

In the discussion that followed, Members sought and received clarification that with the panel remit changes there would be an audit trail of previous decisions; that the crime and disorder requirements of the Police and Justice Act were being enforced but discussions were still taking place under which panel the crime and disorder role sat and whether there was some degree of crossover with other panels.

In the discussion on the PCOM Work Plan a number of working groups and steering groups were agreed as follows:

ICT Scrutiny Steering Group:

Heightened importance given accelerated reliance on ICT due to COVID pandemic and home working
Modern Gov implementation
To lead on related strategy development – IT, Information and Digital
Review of Agilisys contract

Accommodation Strategy Working Group:

Development of a strategic framework setting core principles for the future use and management of the council's assets in order to enable the successful delivery of council services
Council's ways of working and use of office accommodation

Investment, divestment or disposal for our potential development sites, including legal and financial advice on delivery mechanisms

Financial planning

Engagement in the rolling financial planning programme and in the budget setting process.

Consider the Council's approach and policy for any bid funding applications, including match funding requirements

MTFP

Capital programme

Bid funding process

Concluded:

(1) that the report and information provided on policy and scrutiny engagement be received and considered and Members' comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes

(2) that the Panel agrees the PCOM work plan

(3) that the Electoral Services and Scrutiny Manager contact panel members in relation to their interest in becoming members of the agreed working groups and steering groups (above).

PCOM Medium Term Financial Plan Briefing Note (Agenda item 6)

The Director of Corporate Services provided Members of the panel with a summary of the main points contained in a briefing note on the Medium Term Financial Plan. Members noted that the briefing had been prepared to provide an opportunity for the Panel to take part in some pre-engagement. The briefing note had also been shared with the Executive and the internal management team to introduce and provide context around the MTFP in response to feedback that earlier engagement would be helpful.

The Council was currently developing an action plan and detailed MTFP timetable to determine its next steps which would feature engagement with senior officers, Members and broader engagement with the public and other stakeholders. A communication plan would also be developed to support it. Members were directed to Appendix A which contained detailed timetables and engagement plans.

An interesting challenge that had been posed was how the Council achieved pre-engagement while the budget was being assembled. The intention was to seek support from town and parish councils in the lead up but also to present some meaningful options to the Citizens Panel. Members noted that the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Engagement led on those interactions specifically and how the Council engaged thoroughly across the demographic. There were ideas, for example, about using more visual representation and to implement a soundbite shorter approach.

Members agreed there had been a shift in the way the council engaged with the public on budgets and finance in terms of being more open and transparent about the financial situation. Members stressed the importance in the run up to the budget in relaying the message to the public that the Council did not have control of everything as some parts were statutory. There was control over a very small amount of the budget and there should be engagement on that element of the budget.

Members also discussed the need to provide a very simple overview of how finances worked in a Council. One opportunity was the annual financial statement, a short version of which could help people to understand why the Council was subject to such budget constraints. Members were aware that a constant improvement journey was in place and advised that some infographics were provided as part of last year's budget consultation which the Authority would continue to provide in the future.

Concluded:

(1) that the 2022/23 timeline and engagement plan for officers, members and public engagement be received and considered with comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes;

PCOM Accommodation Strategy (Agenda Item 7)

The Director of Corporate Services presented the report which provided an outline of the main project activity, future decision points and associated timeline in delivering the Accommodation Strategy approved by the Council in February 2021.

The Council, with its consultant Arcadis, was working to support the spatial planning and some of the culture and people aspects. Different work streams had been established to inform the workplace stream (physical buildings). There had been considerable engagement with Council staff to establish what they might need to be doing and where, the policies that the Council would need to support it, the ICT infrastructure and then finally inform what the Council might require in terms of space before any changes were made. The business case for Castlewood rested in the property team and the Place directorate but would be supported through Corporate Services and Finance.

Members commented and received clarification on the following: touch points in communities for officers and what they would look like and the importance of people being around others to provide a break from working from home; improving the libraries to provide a better service to the community and providing a possible drop in for staff; the timescales involved in the Smarter Working Transformation Map (Appendix 1).

Members were informed that currently the Council was looking at its terms and conditions and how its staff worked which was the element being consulted on and not specifically what those customer interactions would look like or what the Town Hall accommodation would look like as that would be subject to formal decisions, which was when the member

involvement would come in. Members were asked to provide any observations or comments.

Concluded:

(1) That the report be received and Members consider the main project activity as outlined in the report along with the associated timeline and future decision points, comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

PCOM Bid to Levelling up Fund (Agenda Item 8)

The Head of Development presented the report which provided information on the submission of a bid to the government's Levelling up fund to support placemaking and regeneration in Weston-super-Mare, including information on the process for deciding and authorising the content of the bid. The report related to a bid to the national levelling up fund which was opened in April with a deadline for submissions of 18 June. The purpose was to bring some areas which suffered from disadvantage and deprivation up to the standards of living in other parts of the country.

Members were informed that the local MP for Weston John Penrose along with Liam Fox had hosted a parliamentary debate on the Weston bid specifically in Westminster Hall attended by the Minister responsible for the decision making. A decision was expected in the autumn although not confirmed. If successful work would be required to start on site with one of the projects before the end of the financial year.

Members asked whether the bid was an all or nothing one; the element of community engagement in the projects selected and whether carrying out this work would mean the council would need to give up doing something else.

It was noted that although the guidance suggested it was an all or nothing bid previous bids had had similar terms and the Council had received 80% of the bid or similar. Members were advised that the reality of any funding bid was that they could take up a lot of time but these were projects in the Weston Placemaking strategy which had been widely consulted on with the public and local businesses in support so it was considered there would be pressure on the Council to work on them regardless.

Concluded:

(1) that the report be received and the Members' comments on the submission of the bid to the government's Levelling up fund be forwarded to officers in the form of minutes

PCOM Climate Emergency Six Month Progress Report (Agenda Item 9)

The Climate Emergency Project Manager presented the Climate Emergency Six Month Progress Report. The report provided members

with a progress update on a few key activities related to the Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan. It summarised the annual update of council carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions for the area. Members were directed to more detailed reports on emissions updates for the council carbon footprint and area emissions (Appendix 2 and 3) and an annotated version of the climate emergency action plan, giving brief descriptions of progress (Appendix 1).

Members welcomed the report and agreed it was important to keep Climate Emergency on the agenda and have sometimes challenging conversations about how the Council was progressing. It was suggested that it would be helpful for the Council to advise all of its partner organisation in North Somerset that progressing through a carbon literacy programme was the way forwards. Members also stressed the importance of increasing the number of electric vehicles in the Authority and providing additional charging points and bays for visitors.

A discussion took place on metrics and at what stage the Council was at in terms of carbon reduction and not reducing quickly enough. The report referred to achieving 2% per annum for the area of North Somerset between 2005 and 2019, 13.9% per annum is required from 2020 to get to net zero by 2030. It could take 75 years (2095) to get to net zero at the current percentage reduction per year. A discussion also took place on the merits of trying to reduce the speed on motorways by 20% to 50 mph.

Members noted that although the Council declared net zero it could not control every element. A suggestion was made that there should be more data about the consequences of the actions the Council had taken in relation to how much carbon had been saved and would also provide data in relation to benchmarking.

Concluded:

(1) That Members receive the report and consider the progress with specific initiatives within the Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan; the annual update of council carbon footprint; the annual update of North Somerset area emissions and comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

PCOM End of Year Performance Update 2020/21 (Agenda Item 10)

The Head of Business Insight, Policy and Partnerships presented an update on the End of Year Performance 2020/21. Members were informed that the Business Planning and Performance Management Framework was designed to monitor progress against the Corporate Plan priorities and against the vision for an open, fairer, greener North Somerset. This was done on an annual basis by developing, implementing and monitoring Annual Directorate Statements which were the business plans for the directorate and gave the key strategic commitments for the year ahead. Progress against these commitments was monitored by Key Projects and Key Corporate Performance Indicators.

Members asked for clarification on the open data platform. The Head of Business Insight, Policy and Partnerships explained that this was an interactive dashboard and attached a copy in the Team Chat of the Covid 19 interactive dashboard as an example. Members noted that ward profiles were in the process of being transferred into it. It had been launched as a platform on the website for residents and businesses to access as much data as possible. Members also requested to be provided with details on the annual directorate statements for the five service areas.

Concluded:

(1) that the report on the end of year performance update 2020/21 be received and considered and comments be forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

PCOM Executive Members' Scrutiny Report (Agenda Item 11)

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Cartman, Executive Member for Corporate Services spoke in relation to his portfolio area and confirmed that he agreed with the importance of consultation with the Council's scrutiny panels.

He referred to the challenges in his portfolio which included:

- HR in terms of homeworking during Covid,
- how residents access their services on a digital first basis.
- Finances – next month engagement would be taking place with scrutiny panel chairmen which has worked well last year
- Assets, capital strategy – an area where the Council could influence change in the community make quite a bit of change in the community

He welcomed any feedback and was open to discussions with the Chairman on future topics for discussion.

Concluded:

(1) that the oral report of the Executive Member for Corporate Services be received.

(2) Executive Members to contact the Chairman to discuss the subject matter of future Executive Member Scrutiny Reports to PCOM Panel.

Chairman
