

# Minutes

## Corporate Scrutiny Committee

3<sup>rd</sup> April 2024



### Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J Abbott	Apologies	I Parker	Yes
J Beavis	Apologies	R Ramage	Yes
J Bond	Yes	W Taylor	Yes
G Courtauld	Yes	E Williams	Yes
P Heath (Chairman)	Yes	T Williams (Vice-Chairman)	Yes
D Holland	Yes	J Wrench	Apologies
J Martin	Yes		

In the absence of Councillor J Wrench, Councillor R van Dulken was appointed as substitute.

### 21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**INFORMATION:** There were no Interests declared.

### 22 **MINUTES**

**DECISION:** The Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024 were approved as a correct record.

### 23 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

**INFORMATION:** There were no questions asked, or statements made.

### 24 **THIRD QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24**

**INFORMATION:** The Chairman invited T Williams, Corporate Performance Coordinator, to present the report on the performance of the Council as at the third quarter, following its presentation to Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

Members were advised that performance in the third quarter continued to show progress across the projects undertaken during the year. Six projects had been completed with 41 projects on track, whilst ten projects had an amber status. It was explained that the amber status of these projects was a result of issues such as delays experienced in obtaining planning permissions, as well as budgetary constraints.

In respect of performance indicators, ten had either met or exceeded target, with one performance indicator having missed target by less than 5%, and three performance indicators having missed target by more than 5%. It was noted that the areas of

underperformance were in relation to Council Tax collection rates, the cumulative number of homes being granted planning permissions, recycling rates and the number of enquiries resolved at the first point of contact in the Customer Service Centre.

Reference was made to the key achievements of the Council in the third quarter, which included completion of the work to refurbish the wildlife garden in Halstead Public Gardens; environmental improvements to Cutthroat Lane, Witham; the Council's contribution to the Greater Essex Devolution Deal; the awarding of Councillor Community Grants to the value of £10,286; the delivery of 162 affordable homes; continuing improvements to participation levels at leisure centres; 84 residents assisted through the Council's 'Handyman' scheme; the prevention of 50 cases of homelessness; and the start-up of 258 new businesses across the District.

The Council had also seen a reduction in the number of complaints received in the third quarter when compared with the second quarter. The majority of the complaints received were in respect of missed bin collections, whilst others related to Customer Services, Finance, Planning and Housing.

In terms of the financial performance of the Council in the third quarter, the review of income and expenditure against budget and forecast for the year indicated a net overall positive variance of £494,000. Staffing expenditure was currently projected to be underspent at service level, which included the corporate efficiency target and followed a budgetary transfer of £600,000 agreed at the meeting of Full Council on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023 between Treasury Management income and all service staffing budgets to offset the annual pay increase for employers offered from April 2023.

Other expenditure was forecast to be £730,000 over budget, and the Council was also accruing legal costs in relation to the Wethersfield Asylum Centre appeals. Offsetting the projected forecast for other expenditure was an overachievement of income currently forecast to be £1.3million, which was mainly attributed to treasury management investment income.

Finally, it was added that capital spend as at the end of the third quarter was £3million, which was mainly incurred through the disabled facilities grant programme. It was noted that capital spend generally increased during later quarters of the year. There was currently an estimated positive variance against the capital projects of £223,000. The estimated movement of the General Fund unallocated balances was a net withdrawal of £471,000.

Members were then invited to raise their questions in relation to the report. The following actions were subsequently agreed by officers in response to the questions raised:

- A query was raised in regard to the rates projected for household waste collections. T Williams agreed to speak with officers in Operations to obtain more detail around the projected figures, and a response was circulated accordingly to all Committee Members of the Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2024. It was highlighted that the suspension of the garden waste collections service over the Winter months always returned a lower percentage of recycling rates.
- A query was raised in relation to the town centre improvements in Witham and Halstead and whether the project was still on track. In response, T Williams advised he would contact the Lead Officer for the project in order to confirm the revised end

date. An update was subsequently provided to all Committee Members following the meeting: the anticipated delivery date for the project was July 2024.

**DECISION:** The Corporate Scrutiny Committee noted the performance of the Council following the presentation and noting of the report at Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To demonstrate the performance of the Council at the end of the third quarter (September 2023 to December 2023).

## 25 UPDATE ON DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

**INFORMATION:** The Chairman provided an update on the Committee's draft Work Programme for the period 2024/25.

Members were advised that the Council was currently in the process of reviewing the Scrutiny Work Programme. Accordingly, the Chairman had met recently with Councillor Courtauld, in his capacity as Chairman of the Corporate Policy Development Committee, to discuss the topic suggestions that had been brought forward by Management Board for anticipated Scrutiny Review. One such topic was the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP), a current subject of interest for the Council which could have wider impacts on the District.

It was noted that the topics suggested by Management Board for the purposes of Scrutiny Review were in the draft stages of development. Further feedback was now due to be received from Management Board, after which point the topics would be brought forward to the Committee for comment and finalisation. It was added that Members would have an opportunity to comment on the topics and draft Work Programme ahead of its presentation to the Committee at the next meeting in June.

Following the update, Members enquired whether the topics brought forward for inclusion within the Work Programme reflected the views of the wider Committee. It was suggested that there be further discussion around potential topics for Scrutiny Review before the finalisation of the Work Programme. Some uncertainty was also expressed about the value of 'NEPP' as a topic for Scrutiny Review.

Members were advised that although the topic selection process had been approached differently this year, Management Board were keen to work closely with the Chairmen and their Committee Members in order to develop a comprehensive Scrutiny Work Programme. The initial topics suggested by Management Board, such as NEPP, had been brought forward as they were known to be topics of current interest, both for the Council and wider District, and there was as such merit in pursuing them for the purposes of Scrutiny Review. Furthermore, the Work Programme was intended to be a 'live' document, able to be added to or amended throughout the year by Committee Members. Topic suggestions from the Committee could be submitted by Members at any stage and would be assessed on their merit and value to the Council and wider District, should they be taken forward for Scrutiny Review.

Further to the discussion, the Chairman agreed to follow up with Governance about the possibility of holding an informal meeting of the Committee to discuss Members' topic suggestions in respect of the Work Programme for 2024/25. It was added that such a meeting should be held before the next scheduled meeting of the Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> June.

26 **DECISION PLANNER – 1<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2024 TO 31<sup>ST</sup> JULY 2024**

**DECISION:** That the Decision Planner for the period 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024 was noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To note the Decision Planner for the period 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 7.47pm.

Councillor P Heath  
(Chairman)