Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Tuesday, 21 September 2021 at 6.00 pm
at Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor L Giles (Chair)
Councillors Anandou, E M Giles, Mabena and Shackleton.

Also present: Councillors Abrahams and Bhullar.

In attendance: Neil Cox (Director Business Strategy and Transformation), Simone Hines (Director of Finance), Surjit Tour (Director of Law and Governance), Rebecca Maher (Head of Finance), Charlie Davey (Business Partner - Adults, Finance), Steve Lilley (Finance Business Partner), Sarah Sprung (Senior Lead Officer) and Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager).

45/21 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Moore.

46/21 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

47/21 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2021 are approved as a correct record.

ONE COUNCIL
ONE TEAM

48/21 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider as a matter of urgency.

49/21 **Corporate Plan 2020-2025 - Refresh 2021**

Consideration was given to the refreshed Corporate Plan, which set out the strategic priorities for the council and details future service provision to achieve them.

The Corporate Plan would inform how each directorate would spend the target budget available to them.

Following approval of the Corporate Plan by Council on 10 March 2020, it was proposed to work with staff, members, partners and the community to develop delivery plans detailing the action needed to achieve the strategic priorities. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Council's and partner focus had been diverted to the initial response and establishing longer term support mechanisms.

A series of engagement events with members, staff and partners had subsequently been undertaken to understand the impact of the pandemic on our communities and to develop actions to address key issues affecting residents.

A refresh of the detailed actions that underpin the delivery of the strategic objectives was required at this time to ensure that the Corporate Plan took into account the impact of the pandemic on Sandwell as a whole and on the organisation.

In developing the revised actions that underpin the strategic outcomes, all Directors had been provided with individual comments received during the engagements sessions in order that these were considered to help shape each outcome.

In addition, conversations had led to changes from the original iteration of the Corporate Plan and had now strengthened:-

- our commitment to improving standards of cleanliness across the borough;

- our drive to ensure that everyone feels safe in the communities they live in;
- our commitment to whole life care and choice.

It was proposed to go back to stakeholders, including each school's that had been visited, in the autumn to tell them how their feedback had helped to shape our plan, and get their help to develop a young person's version of the Corporate Plan.

Having considered the refreshed plan, members of the Board commented that:-

- work was now needed to develop business plans with key milestones and timelines identified so as to measure progress against tangible outcomes. It was noted that this was the next phase of the plan Directorate business plans would be realigned to the financial plan and would be would be considered in February 2022;
- more engagement was needed with members on the Corporate Plan and knowledge of what was happening in each ward. It was felt that more Member Briefings should be carried out to keep members informed;
- periodic reporting on the Corporate Plan to be provided to the Scrutiny Board for consideration;
- that the Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board be invited to further engagement sessions with young people at schools;
- that further work be done with residents to ensure that as many residents as possible are responding and that responses are representative of the communities in Sandwell.

Resolved:-

(1) that the progress and the steps taken to co-produce the refresh of the Corporate Plan 2020-2025 be noted;

(2) that the comments of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board in relation to the refresh of the Corporate Plan 2020-2025 be considered by the Cabinet.

50/21 **Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring 2021/22**

At its meeting on 1 September 2021, the Cabinet referred the financial monitoring for individual directorates as at 30 June 2021 (Quarter 1 2021/22) report to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and comment.

The Board noted that services were projecting an over spend of £4.621m against allocated budgets, however, after adjusting for reserves, corporate resources, RCCO and the application of centrally held Covid-19 grant funding, the adjusted projected outturn was an under spend of £6.185m.

Services were continuing to experience the financial impact of Covid, most significantly a loss of income due to suspended or significantly reduced services. Pressures of £7.610m were expected to be managed through the centrally held Covid funding which was from the unused balance of grants received in 2020/21 and additional grants received or anticipated for part of 2021/22.

In addition to the Covid related issues, services were reporting a number of significant ongoing operational pressures which would need to be incorporated into the next refresh of the corporate medium term financial strategy.

In relation to questions raised by the Board, the Director – Finance clarified that:-

- There had been an underspend in Adult Social Care due to:

  - the receipt of NHS funding to support hospital discharges in the sum of £900,000, however, after quarter 2, this funding would not be available;
  - at the height of Covid-19, Sandwell had seen significant deaths in nursing homes and therefore the number of people in care had decreased by 15%. Numbers were now increasing and was expected to go back to pre-Covid levels;
  - during the pandemic, residents were reluctant to come to the Council to receive care and with many family members staying at home, they were looking after vulnerable residents;

- a further report would be submitted to Cabinet to quantify the underspend in Adult Social Care and recommend how it should be used.

In response to concerns raised regarding seeing a roadmap on budget spend, it was reported that this report being considered outlined the Council's current financial monitoring position. In relation to the budget 2022-23, this work was in progress. A report would be considered by Council in December to ensure that the budget was sustainable and would be submitted to Cabinet and to the Scrutiny Board for consideration as part of the budget setting process.

51/21 Cabinet Forward Plan

The Scrutiny Management Board noted the Cabinet Forward Plan as at the time of the meeting.

52/21 Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board Work Programme 2021-22

The Scrutiny Management Board noted its work programme for the remainder of the 2021-22 municipal year.

Further updates were sought on the Sandwell Leisure Trust to ensure that progress had been made following consideration of issues by the Board in the 2020-21 municipal year.

Meeting ended at 6.37 pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk