

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

At a meeting of this Committee held on
22 April 2024

(Present) **Councillor D Long (Chair)**
Councillors Bell, Johnson, T Long, McCormack, Osundeko,
Spencer, Sweeney, and Tasker

(Not Present) **Councillors Hattersley, Mussell, and Richards**

Mr D Thorpe – Church of England

36 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hattersley and Mussell.

37 **MINUTES**

* **Resolved that the Minutes of the meeting held on 05 February 2024 be approved and signed.**

38 **DECLARATION OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

No Declarations of Interest from Members were made.

39 **DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP**

No Declarations of Party Whip were made.

40 **CHAIRS UPDATE**

The Chairs' of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee, and the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee gave verbal updates on the work that had taken place within the Committees over the course of the 2023/24 Municipal year. The areas covered were as follows:

Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee

- Performance Monitoring of the Council's Priority 2- 'Promote Good Health, Independence, and Care Across our Communities' over the period of the 2023/24 municipal year.
- Mental Health Provision in St Helens.
- Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Partnership Updates.
- Progress on the Care Communities programme.
- Inequalities Commission.
- SEND (Adults) including how the transition from Child to Adult was being delivered.
- Peer Review Update which looked at the progress on the Adult Social Care inspection preparedness

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- Family Hubs, which included a site visit to Change, Grow, Live (CGL) to understand the link between the two programmes, and the wider work of the CGL organisation in tackling Alcohol and Substance Misuse.
- The Committee also undertook a Spotlight Review on Dentistry Provision in the Borough which resulted in a series of recommendations being presented to and agreed by Cabinet.

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

- Performance Monitoring of the Councils Priority 1 'Ensure Children and Young People Have a Positive Start in Life' over the Period of the 2023/24 municipal year.
- The Children's Services Improvement Plan.
- A Spotlight Review of the Strategy and Collective Action to Address Child Neglect in St Helens.
- Spotlight Review to scrutinise the TESSA Process and contribution to its evaluation.
- Update on progress towards the SEND inspection.
- Update on the Education, Health and Care Plan Process and its impact in the Borough.
- Reducing harm caused by underage alcohol consumption.
- Listening to the Voices of Children and Young People in St Helens.

The Chair noted the work completed by the Place Services Scrutiny Committee as the Chair of the Committee was not present at the meeting and thanked all Members of the Commission and the three thematic Scrutiny Committees and officers for their continued work and dedication to the Scrutiny Function over the 2023/24 municipal year.

41 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT PERIOD 3

Members were advised that the Council's Period 3 position for 2023/24 provided Overview and Scrutiny with the details of use of resources throughout the financial year and that the report had been presented to Cabinet on 28 February 2024 and Council on 6 March 2024.

The Head of Financial Management highlighted that there had been a severe and worsening pressure in the Children & Young People portfolio, the main drivers of this being increased demand, social work staffing challenges and delivery of the ongoing programme of efficiencies. The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services added that costs within children's services had also risen, further increasing pressure on budgets.

The other main pressure was within the Integrated Health & Care portfolio, reflecting continuing demand pressures and the complexity of need of a cohort of individuals in adult social care services.

Comments and points were raised in relation to the Financial Monitoring Period 3, including:

- Members requested information on what, if any, the financial impact of the closure of the St Helens Chamber had on the Authority, and whether the closure affected learners who were no longer in a position to complete apprenticeship programmes.
- The increasing costs in Children's Social Care and the work undertaken during 2023/24 to increase Foster Carers was substantial. Although the Authority had

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seen an increase in Foster Cares, the demand was such that some children required costly 'out of borough' placements. Assurances were given that everything was being done to mitigate these challenges however, with increased demand and the increasing levels of complex cases, the Authority continued to face increasing pressure in this area.

- The provision of four new Childrens homes was being progressed and would be monitored through the Childrens and Young Peoples Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year.
- Adults Social Care costs and demand had seen a notable increase. Keeping people within their homes was a fundamental priority for the Council. The Authority continued to look at the benefits of using artificial intelligence (AI) to support the delivery of adult social care services. The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee had indicated that a piece of work on the using of AI would be considered in the 2024/25 municipal year.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) **the forecast outturn revenue overspend position for 2023/24 summarised at Section 1 of the cover report and detailed in Sections 1 and 2 of the Appendix, and in individual portfolio positions detailed at Annex C be noted;**
- (2) **the management actions outlined in Section 1 of the Appendix to mitigate the 2023/24 revenue position be noted;**
- (3) **the latest position with regard to the implementation of 2023/24 budget savings and those brought forward from prior years, as detailed in Section 3 of the Appendix be noted;**
- (4) **the revised capital programme as detailed in Section 4 of the Appendix be noted;**
- (5) **the latest Reserves and Balances position as detailed in Section 5 of the Appendix be noted;**
- (6) **the Other Financial Monitoring Matters as detailed in Section 6 of the Appendix be noted;**
- (7) **the Treasury Management Position Statement at Annex G to the Appendix be noted;**
- (8) **the proposed alternative means of achieving saving OPS01 (removal of cash payment options for car parking) detailed at paragraph 3.6 of the Appendix be noted;**
- (9) **the realignment of savings ICH6 (Learning Disability Services Review) and IH&SC01 (Care Package Reviews) detailed in paragraph 3.8 of the Appendix be noted;**
- (10) **the proposed alternative means of achieving saving PH7 (Cessation of Support to Non-Mandatory Council Services) detailed at paragraph 3.9 of the Appendix be noted;**

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- (11) **the delegation of accepting the confirmed UK Shared Prosperity Fund Grant to the Director of Strategic Growth in consultation with the relevant portfolio members and the Director of Finance, as detailed in Section 6.1.7 of the Appendix be noted.**

42 **QUARTER 3 PERORMANCE REPORT 2023/24**

A Report was submitted which provided an analysis of progress and performance over the period from the 1st of October to the 31st of December 2023- 24 against the Council's Priority 6, 'Be a Responsible Council'. The report reflected the new performance framework and targets aligned to the priorities and outcomes of the Borough Strategy as agreed by Cabinet on the 26th of April 2023. This framework provided the basis for quarterly performance reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny over the course of 2023-24.

Comments and points were raised in relation to Priority 6 Indicators were as follows:

- It was highlighted that the recruitment freeze meant that the Authority currently had over 400 vacant positions amounting to around 10% of the total workforce. This in-turn was indicative of the effects this had on the Authorities ability to maintain or improve its target position regarding performance in some areas including complaints being received and responded to in a timely manner.
- Further comments were made regarding Freedom of Information Requests (FO I's). The Council would often receive multiple FOIs from different sources relating to similar topics. Whenever the Council anticipated multiple FOIs relating to a particular issue officers would proactively publish notices regarding the information to reduce the need for individuals, media or interest groups to submit FOIs.
- Reassurance was requested that the high levels of vacant positions were being managed in terms of staff welfare and managing caseloads. Members thanked all the Council staff for their continued work under the circumstances.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) **the performance position at Quarter 3 2023/24 be noted, and**
- (2) **the actions planned by the Corporate Services Directorate and other services to address specific areas for performance improvement in relation to Priority 6 be noted.**

Councillors Bell and Tasker left the meeting before discussion on the following item.

43 **UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

The Director for Policy, Transformation and Change provided an update report on the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) framework which was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2015 and would be in force until 2030.

The SDGs aimed to address the key global challenges of economic, environmental, and social sustainability through a framework comprising 17 global goals that collectively

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provided 'a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet'. The SDGs applied at both domestic level and overseas and UN member states were responsible for their implementation both at home and contributing to progress internationally.

It was reported that St Helens was committed to delivering the SDGs locally, and each of the 17 SDG Goals had been mapped against the 6 priorities of St Helens 'Our Borough Strategy 2021-30' as shown in (Appendix 1).

The report provided a brief assessment against the Sustainable Development Goal framework globally and attempted a further assessment of the St Helens' position in relation to key aspects the SDG framework locally by drawing on a number of linked metrics and data sources.

Members were informed that the Performance information within the report was consistent and mirrored in the National trend of SDG performance. Officers noted that it should also be acknowledged that a number of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and associated global targets did not readily lend themselves to monitoring at a local authority level or were not applicable to an area such as St Helens. These included indicators in Sustainable Development Goals relating to Clean Water and Sanitation, Life Below Water and Life on Land.

Comments and main points were raised as follows:

- Water quality information was discussed. It was noted that Public Health, and the environmental health department held local water quality data and information which could be provided on request.
- Information was requested on how CO2 emissions data was collected and measured within the Borough. It was confirmed that information regarding air quality in the Borough was provided to the Council and data was held on the Council's Local Insight portal.

* **Resolved that the Committee note the report and St Helens' latest position against the UN Sustainable Development Goals.**

44 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES

A report was presented to provide information about the work programme setting process for Overview and Scrutiny Commission and its thematic Committees for the 2023/24 municipal year.

Members were advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission was responsible for all overview and scrutiny functions on behalf of the Council, including the monitoring and co-ordination of work of the four Scrutiny Committees. To support the Commission in its role, the work programmes of all 3 Scrutiny Committees were included in the report as appendices, alongside the Commission's Work Programme.

The Senior Scrutiny officer indicated that following this final meeting of the 2023/24 municipal year, Work Programme setting meetings were to be arranged for the development of the Commission, and the thematic Committees' Work Programmes for the 2024/25 municipal year.

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The Chair thanked all Members and Officers for their ongoing commitment and work over the course of the 2023/24 municipal year.

- * **Resolved that the report be noted**

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