

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: Thursday, 3rd June, 2021
at 2.00 pm. (Banqueting Hall)

Present: Councillors McLeavy (Chairman), Cassidy (Vice-Chairman), Gawne, McClure, McEwan, Morgan, Robson, A. Thomson and C. Thomson.

Officers Present: John Penfold (Corporate Support Manager) and Katie Pepper (Democratic and Electoral Assistant).

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been submitted from Councillors Johnston, Preston and Worthington.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25th March, 2021 were taken as read and confirmed.

3 Public Participation

RESOLVED:- To note that no questions, representations, deputations or petitions had been received in respect of the meeting.

4 Terms of Reference

RESOLVED:- To note the revised Terms of Reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5 Review of Outside Bodies

The Corporate Support Manager informed the Committee that the Council allocated resource to offering representation on a significant number of outside bodies. Members had stated that there could be a better understanding of the benefits of the Council being represented on some of these bodies. Members wanted to rationalise the list so that Member representation was meaningful and agreed that a scrutiny workgroup should review this.

At a meeting of the Council in September 2020 it had been agreed that Members on Outside Bodies should be requested to provide an annual report to Council on the work of the body and its contribution to the Borough and the wider area.

It had been agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out a desktop review of Council representation on outside bodies to allow Members to consider whether representation was still appropriate.

The Elected Members who had been nominated to represent the Council on these bodies were contacted to understand whether they had been invited to meetings within the last two years.

Where appropriate the “point of contact” for the body was contacted to find out whether the body was still operating. The responses received were provided in a table to the Committee.

It was recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:-

- Consider the report and determine whether further action was required.
- That the Council continue to nominate Members to the active organisations.
- That the Council do not nominate Members to organisations that had not been active within the last two years.
- That the nominated Member provide reports on the work of the body and its contribution to the Borough and the wider area.

RESOLVED:- That Outside Bodies remain on the work programme and Members appointed on the bodies were required to provide a report at the end of the year.

6 Internal and External Communications Review

The Corporate Support Manager presented the report and informed the Committee Members that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed that the need for clear and timely communications had never been so important. They decided to undertake a review to ensure that they built on the improved communications being delivered by an external provider and integrated that into improving communication of everything they did.

This review had two elements – Information Technology (IT) and Communications. The working group considered the current position and where the Council wanted to be moving forward.

A number of issues had been identified such as effective use of IT equipment and systems to communicate; public facing communications such as social media and press; and ease of access to services for members of the public.

IT – As the country moved into lockdown and there was the need for the Council to facilitate remote/agile working for staff and Elected Members. This was achieved by the provision of laptops and mobile phones for staff as appropriate. Members already had iPads which were provided to support paperless committee meetings. It was decided to repurpose these to support access to email and to virtual meetings. This was of limited value because the devices had to be returned to IT Department if any reconfiguration or updates were required because remote support was not available. The Chairs of all Committees were also provided with laptops.

Communications – The working group looked at public facing communications such as social media and press; and ease of access to services for members of the public via the Council’s website. The working group subsequently met with the Council’s Chief Executive Officer and a summary of that meeting was as followed:

External communications were currently managed through a contract but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this contract had been extended until 31 March 2021 using coronavirus funding. The contract included a broader range of skills and experience than would be available with just one Communications Officer appointed by the Council.

Other advantages include resilience such as holiday cover, more than one person involved with varying skill sets. Members noted that there had been a substantial improvement in external communications through social media and press engagement since the start of the contract.

In the 6+ months of the review there had been significant progression across the Council. The working group had been consulted on early drafts of strategies and project plans and had been able to contribute effectively. This progression included:

- The Council's Growing Forward Report indicated the need for a more modern IT platform to support Council business through agile working. An IT project to deliver this had commenced involving substantial investment to deliver more secure and advanced technology systems. This was currently being rolled out and a group of Members who were confident and less confident in IT were currently trialling different mobile devices, with support from dedicated IT staff.
- Increased use of Council social media and press providing members of the public with up to date and relevant information.
- Development of a Customer Services Strategy that would consider and modernise the digital, people and place needs of our customers, and deliver what residents required using the channel of their choice e.g. online, phone and face to face. The Strategy would be underpinned by an Action Plan which would continually review new systems and working practices building on what customers told them is working well and areas they think we could improve on.
- The Director of People and Place and the Communications contractor were developing a Media Protocol and process which would include how they could involve and engage Members and Lead Members.

Members noted that internal communications were still a challenge and more could be done to build better communications relationships across the Council. There was a recognition that the Council would benefit from having officers with internal communications responsibilities to improve the communication links with Members and staff.

It was agreed that there was a need for an updated Communications Strategy which should be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before publishing. There had been substantial improvements to some parts of the Council's website and advice from the working group that this should be extended to the whole website so that it was more accessible to the public.

The working group of Councillors Gawne, Morgan, Robson and Cassidy would particularly like to thank the staff who had co-operated with the review and those who had tirelessly progressed IT, Communications and Customer Services across the Council despite the pandemic.

Recommendation:

- It was recommended that the scrutiny review came to an end.
- Future updates to the IT Strategy and Customer Services Strategy should be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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- The Council would benefit from an internal communications officer who had oversight of all communications, both internal and external. This was not feasible at that time but it may have been feasible in the future.

RESOLVED:- It was moved by Councillor McLeavy and seconded by Councillor McEwan to agree the recommendations that the Communications review come to an end.

7 Work Programme for 2020/21

The Corporate Support Manager provided Members with information regarding the Committee's remit. He informed the Committee that a work programme had been agreed in July 2020 by Full Council and Members were asked to consider the reviews undertaken by the working groups and whether further action was required.

- Street Cleanliness – Paused
- Impact of Covid 19 – On-going
- Internal and external communications – Complete
- Corporate Parenting – Complete
- Membership of outside bodies – On-going

Members had been invited to suggest items to be included in the Work Programme for 2021/22.

Flooding on Walney Promenade

It was moved by Councillor Cassidy and seconded by Councillor McEwan that Flooding on Walney Promenade be added to the work programme.

It was agreed that Councillors McEwan, Cassidy, Gawne and C. Thomson be appointed members on the working group.

Discretionary Housing Payments

It was moved by Councillor A. Thomson and seconded by Councillor Morgan that a review of the Discretionary Housing Payments be added to the work programme.

It was agreed that Councillors McEwan, Morgan and A. Thomson be appointed members on the working group.

Tenancy on Piel Island

It was moved by Councillor McClure and seconded by Councillor Gawne that a review into the Tenancy on Piel Island be added to the work programme.

It was agreed that Councillors McClure, Gawne and A. Thomson be appointed members on the working group.

RESOLVED: - The Committee agreed the work programme for 2021/22.

The meeting closed at 2.25 pm.