

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2024 - 10.00 AM



PRESENT: Councillor E Sennitt Clough (Vice-Chairman), Councillor B Barber, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor A Hay, Councillor S Imafidon and Councillor D Roy

APOLOGIES: Councillor Mrs M Davis (Chairman), Councillor G Booth, Councillor J Carney, Councillor R Gerstner, Councillor Dr H Nawaz and Councillor A Woollard

Officers in attendance: Paul Medd (Chief Executive), Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer), Amy Brown (Assistant Director), Anna Goodall (Assistant Director), Dan Horn (Assistant Director), Stephen Beacher (Head of ICT Digital & Resilience), David Wright (Policy & Communications Manager) and Helen Moore (Member Services and Governance Officer)

OSC14/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 9 September 2024 were confirmed and signed.

OSC15/23 ANNUAL MEETING WITH THE LEADER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Members had received the presentation from the Leader and Chief Executive prior to the meeting.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Hay referred to page 15 under finance where it says 2024/25 is predicting a deficit if interventions were not met. She asked what does the deficit look like, what interventions are being talked about and what is the likelihood of them not being met? Councillor Boden responded at this stage things are uncertain and could remain so for the rest of the year, there are a wide range of possible predictions of what that number will be and this year there is a particular item of uncertainty as the new Government holds its first budget in nine days time and at this stage no one knows what is going to be said or what the affect will be for local councils so at this time it is a waiting game but once the detailed papers are received this will indicate how the new strategy for this year and future years will be. He stated that when looking at 2024/25 pressures there continues to be demands on Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation, on the Planning budget particularly in terms of staff recruitment and the Port function and the Council's function as a Strategic Harbour Authority plus the levies from the Internal Drainage Boards, with action having been taken on all these issues and continues to be taken. Councillor Boden stated that they all have long-term answers rather than short-term answers and whilst in some cases some of the pressures mentioned may be ameliorated to some extent in the current year 2024/25 there is a focus on 2025/26 and 2026/27 before many of these problems, which are fundamentally the structural deficit talked about before, come into fruition to show any significant effect, hence the likelihood of these being met in 2024/25 is very high and one of the reasons the budget equalization reserve was set up, which has been built up over several years to allow a period of transition and to address some of the structural issues. He added that the reserve was built up to £1.6 million of which £200,000 was used this year in respect of the deficit from last year and by the finance team not changing what they are doing to provide the Council with a strong basis upon which to make decisions in the future. Councillor Boden stated that there are sufficient continuing reserves and there are other

opportunities even in 2024/25 to ensure that the Council continues to be able to have utilizable reserves separate from the basic general reserve to get over the period when these longer-term interventions come into play and start producing the results expected.

- Councillor Hay stated there has been an Accommodation Review report recently and at the time this report was written there was no decision from the County Council as a meeting was scheduled for 15 October 2024, has there now been a decision made as to what they are going to do with Hereward Hall and has there been any talks with County Council on what the possible use of Hereward Hall going forward could be? Councillor Boden responded there are continued discussions with County Council about Hereward Hall and the Council continues to have productive and friendly discussions with the County Council on that matter. Paul Medd stated that, after the meeting on the 15 October, Hereward Hall has been identified as an asset by County Council that they are seeking to dispose of so this underpins the ongoing conversation the Council is having with County Council and at this stage there has been no commitment made and business plans are being worked through on both sides as the staff currently working from Hereward Hall will need to be moved and placed elsewhere.
- Councillor Hay referred to the Performance Management performance indicators where there is a bullet point that says report regularly on Service Performance to the Corporate Management Team, Councillors and the Public and under the Governance Financial control and Risk Management bullet point compliance with Data Protection and general Data Protection Regulation and requirements. She stated it has come to her attention that there have been one or two data breaches of late in ARP and she would like to know if there are any issues with the service? Councillor Hay added that it has also come to her attention that when there are data breaches these are not reported to the Cabinet members responsible for that area, is this something that is happening right across the Cabinet where data breaches are not being reported? Councillor Boden responded that the first thing that needs to be kept in mind is the sheer number of communications which ARP have, and the reported number of breaches was under 100 in a year and of those under investigation a third were deemed not to be breaches and those which are deemed potentially to be breaches are reported to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) where the Council then waits for feedback, from this there were 4 last year 2023/24 and 4 this year 2024/25 that warranted a data breach investigation and in most cases the breach has been an address being wrong or an e-mail or phone number but nothing that has incurred the Council receiving a penalty or a change to the procedures in place. He continued the target is always going to be zero but overall this is a good result. Paul Medd added that the Council does identify the data breaches that were reported into the ICO and if there is ever any doubt about potential breaches the ICO is always consulted which allows the ICO to look into the breach and determine whether or not a thorough investigation with potential sanctions to follow is relevant and in the respect of the data breaches that have been reported no further action has been required, however, whenever there is a data breach this is always a good opportunity to learn and reflect on why it happened to make sure if any corrective action is needed it is put in place to prevent it happening again. Councillor Hay stated that although the numbers are small, she still feels the Portfolio Holder should be made aware when there are breaches. Councillor Boden responded that to the best of his knowledge the Portfolio Holders are made aware at Portfolio Holder Briefings and as an action from this meeting he will ensure that all officers are aware that at all future Portfolio Holder briefings that the Portfolio Holder has all the matters in relation to any ICO and potential breaches of GDPR.

Members thanked the Leader and Chief Executive for attending and noted the information presented.

OSC16/23 COMMERCIAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND INVESTMENT BOARD UPDATE

Members considered the Commercial Investment Strategy and Investment Board Update report

presented by Councillor Boden.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Roy stated the purchase of the property in Elm is a huge investment, with the property itself being nearly £800K and there is a lot of remedial work needed to bring it up to standard for temporary accommodation. He asked is there a total cost and when will the Council break even in terms of return on expenditure required? Councillor Boden responded the Council has not purchased a property in Elm, negotiations continue and there has not been an exchange of contracts, and it would be prejudicial of him to say any more at this time.
- Councillor Barber referred to 70 homes for older people with care needs and asked are they actually 70 homes or is it one home for 70 people? She wondered how this would work with people who have care needs if they are individual homes. Councillor Boden responded this is an Extra Care Scheme of which 3 already exist in the Fenland area, these schemes are for vulnerable residents who have been assessed by Cambridgeshire County Council, who have the legal responsibility as the adults services provider, as needing some form of care package but not needing to go into care so all of the accommodation mentioned comprises of 70 self-contained flats with their own front door, their own personal space, a living room, kitchen, an accessible bathroom and bedroom but they do have communal facilities available including communal emergency services where necessary and there may be a number of two bedroom flats within that proposal but this has not been determined yet.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough asked, in Councillor Nawaz absence, the CIS says it will be reviewed every 2 years, is that too long with an annual review maybe being more useful so if there is anything going wrong it can be picked up earlier rather than having to wait for 2 years and the committee could go through it on an annual basis. Councillor Boden responded that the review is a thorough review and it states where the Council is, however, the interest rates are constantly being looked at for other opportunities and what changes that are necessary and possible, it is a very fluid environment and is looked at on a daily basis but it is not necessary to make the CIS review yearly rather than every two years as the strategy largely remains the same, the opportunities are very short term at times and ones that have to be reacted to very quickly. Councillor Sennitt Clough stated that it was her understanding that it is looked at daily, as far as the operational aspects of it is concerned, and asked how is the information gathered daily and acted upon in terms of moving towards the strategic review in two years? Councillor Boden answered that he should emphasize that the daily examination is undertaken by officers based on the economy, if there is a significant change or trend or even a projection of a trend there is a formal discussion with the Section 151 Officer, Peter Catchpole, to stay alert of any situation and this is then brought up in the Portfolio Holder briefings. Paul Medd stated there is the daily interaction on an informal basis but it is worth mentioning from a formal governance and decision making point of view a lot of this information that is being looked at on a daily basis is reported back to the Investment Board as part of the overall governance and decisions that relate to the Commercial Investment Strategy, which are presented to the three members that sit on the Investment Board for a decision to be taken. Peter Catchpole added the Council do have external treasury advisers which is where a lot of the information comes from daily which is added to a spreadsheet, he then looks over everything to make sure the Council are not missing out on any investment opportunities.

Members noted the annual report from the Investment Board.

OSC17/23 PROGRESS AGAINST THE TRANSFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS PRIORITIES

Members considered the progress against the Transformation & Communications priorities.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Roy stated that the report mentions that the Council advertises on Facebook and Twitter but there is no mention of LinkedIn. He asked does the Council also use LinkedIn for recruitment and, if so, should the Council put that in their report? Councillor Tierney responded that this is an omission as there is a LinkedIn account that the Council does use, and business matters are published to LinkedIn. He added that when looking at different social media companies rise and fall at the moment LinkedIn is on a downward slope and he would welcome members opinions on the use of it going forward. Councillor Roy agreed but stated he feels that the Council should be using every available resource.
- Councillor Barber stated in relation to the continuation of the shared CCTV services with Peterborough City Council, how is the time divided and how effective is the service to responding specifically to Fenland District Council's requirements given the financial problems Peterborough City Council are having and are Fenland getting any CCTV coverage at all? Councillor Wallwork responded that the control room is stationed 24/7 with periods of single crewed, double crewed and triple crewed staff, with the triple crewed operators following a prioritised model that ensures threat, risk and harm is managed effectively through incident managements across all areas covered including Fenland, operators then follow a clear patrol plan to ensure regular patrols of key camera areas, including all customers of Service Level Agreements (SLA) commitments such as the town councils in Fenland, this ensures that even when it is single crewed regular patrols of Fenland cameras take place, when double or triple crewed operators are dedicated specifically to Fenland providing comprehensive surveillance during this time. She stated that the control plan is adhered to ensuring the patrol frequency expectations of the SLA commitments are met, since becoming a shared service of Peterborough City Council patrol numbers have increased and instant numbers and positive outcomes have remained consistent, this highlights the shared commitment to providing an effective, reliable service that benefits both Councils, additionally there are now dedicated Police resources to carry out retrospective media reviews for crimes and incidents in Fenland, something that was not available prior to the merger with Peterborough, which further enhances the ability to respond to Fenland District Council's requirements and provides the overall effectiveness of the service, this structure allows Peterborough City Council to maintain a high level of service to meet Fenland District Council's requirements and ensures a strong responsive and consistent surveillance presence. Councillor Barber asked how the cameras rotate because it seems to be a problem that people have had that because they rotate in a certain way when things happen they are not actually seen. Councillor Wallwork responded the cameras constantly sweep, the officers that work in the patrol centres have to have set standards, they have to be marked on it and they are monitored on it as this is controlled appropriately and very comprehensive at all times. Paul Medd stated as lay people there are often more technical questions around the precise operation of CCTV cameras and what he has found helpful in the past is he has visited the control room and had a look, spoken to the operators and seen how the cameras work practically and if any members of Overview and Scrutiny Panel would welcome a visit to the shared control room in Peterborough that can be organised Councillor Hay and Sennitt Clough agreed this was worth a visit. Councillor Barber re-asked the second part of her question saying given the financial problems at Peterborough City Council whether the CCTV coverage would continue? Councillor Wallwork stated she could not comment on Peterborough finances. Councillor Boden stated Peterborough City Council are not in the strongest financial position of any local authority in the entire country, however, there is a SLA which regulates how these things work and if the worst was to come as far as Peterborough City Council is concerned that SLA would still be in place and there would still be an obligation upon Peterborough City Council even if they were not in control of their finances.
- Councillor Roy stated that under the service review there was a note that income was generated, and asked for clarification on whether the income was generated through streamlining the processes or was it because the Council deleted some services as part of the review? Councillor Tierney responded the Council aims to make savings through a streamlining process, working with the back office to try to keep delivering the service

people expect but to make the saving that are expected of the Council which is what has been delivered. Councillor Roy asked if there were any services cut? Councillor Tierney responded that there were not services cut. Councillor Boden added this is what the transformation agenda is about, it is about streamlining, it is about efficiencies and it is about getting the same or better results with less input, whether that input be in terms of staff numbers or in terms of cost, and what it is important to do is to distinguish between two general lines of change that the Council have been pushing forward for a number of years. He stated that the comprehensive spending review is where the Council looks at all the services that are provided and decides should they continue or should they continue at the level that the Council provides, sometimes a comprehensive spending review causes the Council to increase the amount of service provided but the transformation agenda is different as it is about once a decision has been made how will the service most effectively be provided, and while there is always a connection between what service to provide and how to provide it the objective is to set out the transformation agenda which is based on the efficiencies and effectiveness and the comprehensive spending review which asks what output needs to be achieved, so it would be disappointing if the transformation agenda actually resulted in some reduction in service provision because that is not what its purpose is, and if that happened that would show that the Council strayed between the demarcation line of the comprehensive spending review and the transformation agenda. Councillor Boden made the point that there has been two lots of comprehensive spending reviews, and the Council is currently in the second lot of the transformation agenda, which are two separate things. Councillor Roy responded the purpose of that question was to show residents that processes are being streamlined and services are not being cut. Peter Catchpole added that as part of the reviews income generation is being investigated as well when looking at transformation, as an example the boat measuring policy was reviewed as the length of boats derives income into the Marina and it was discovered that some of those results were not accurate so the boats were remeasured and as a result it managed to generate a few thousand pounds worth of income.

- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated as regards the capital equipment replacement programme and technology refresh timelines, does the Council replace every two years or similar, what preventative measures are in place to stop things going wrong and is there an assigned capital programme for this work? Councillor Tierney responded that the technology modern equipment does not need to be replaced every two years, there is a budget available if things break but the plan is to replace technology every four to five years. He added that the Council has built in checks across the services for what will happen in the case of an emergency or disaster, with back up equipment available and all policies that are in place are robust.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated the big switch over is not happening until 2027 and she understood that the Council was working towards the original 2025 deadline and asked for an update. Councillor Tierney confirmed the Council is still working towards the 2025 deadline and everything is in place to achieve that goal.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated that, on the KPIs, how is the customer satisfaction rate gathered, she would like some further clarity for example the level of satisfaction in relation to the time it takes to answer calls, why is it less than 50%? Councillor Tierney responded the public are asked to fill in a customer satisfaction form around how they felt about their call experience, this data is then gathered and collated. Peter Catchpole added the 50% target is for answering calls within 20 seconds which the call centre is ahead of as of August 2024, so this relates to answering all calls within 20 seconds not customer satisfaction with the rate all calls answered being at 97.94%. Councillor Boden added a recommendation he suggested that Councillors use the main call centre line every so often rather than the direct line numbers they may have, just to see how the call centre operates, and this will give them the experience of what people are facing and how quickly they are responded to, was the call objective met and if it was not successful they can use that as feedback for the officers involved or praise if all went well.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated the percentage of contact calls handled are based on a

target of 80% so is the 90% satisfaction rate based on the 80% target rather than 100%? Peter Catchpole responded these are two different things because the customer satisfaction rate is 90% overall but it is not about a specific KPI whereas the contact centre is 80%, in the customer satisfaction survey there is not a specific question about the calls and the waiting times but there are plans to review the KIPs for the call centre because it is more interesting to look at the calls that are not being answered and what happens to those calls. He made the point that 100% is a good goal to have but when it is volume driven at some stages it is impossible to answer all calls, especially when it is Council Tax season, but a review is going to take place around the KPIs to see if they can be made a bit clearer and a bit more challenging. Councillor Sennitt Clough asked if it was standard procedure to have that sort of policy and procedure in place every so often? Peter Catchpole responded there was a Task and Finish group from Overview and Scrutiny about two years ago which looked at some of those KPIs but the way technology is changing and the way the Council is moving forward the focus is on improving customer service and constantly studying the KPIs to achieve that. Councillor Tierney added in answer to the original question it is based on 100% because it is not looking at the KPIs at all, in regards to setting new KPIs, as was mentioned, Overview and Scrutiny did do this a couple of years ago and stated it could be done again as it is always good for new members to feed into things that should be looked at to ensure the service is good.

- Councillor Barber asked, as part of any review of services provided by ARP and relationship optimising, are the Council looking at response times via letter rather than telephone and does it have any sense of what they currently are? Councillor Boden responded, in Councillor Mrs French absence, that there are ARP performance indicators which are monitored monthly and some are reported to Full Council in the Portfolio Holder Briefings through the briefing report, full operational updates are tabled at every joint committee meeting for members of local authorities with portfolio holder responsibility who are part of ARP and those operational reports are also updated at every Operational Improvement Board meeting which is for the officers. He continued that as far as the first ratio is concerned ARP1 as a performance indicator looks at the number of days taken for new claims and changes to Council Tax support and the number of days it takes to process such requests, which currently stands at 11.9 for seven days against a target of nine days, there is a performance indicator ARP2 which are the number of days taken for new claims and changes for housing benefit and that currently stands at 15.1 for nine days against a target of eight days, so both are below the target. Councillor Boden stated that there are reasons for that, in relation to ARP1, the days taken to process new claims for Council Tax support and for ARP2 housing benefit the biggest challenge has been the migration to Universal Credit, these files are coming through on a regular basis to ARP and they impact significantly on staff time, once almost everyone has been transferred over to Universal Credit then that pressure will be taken away. He stated that staff have been targeting housing benefit new claims and Council Tax support claims this month as a matter of priority, and assessing these claims has resulted in an increase in the number of days taken to process claims overall but there are a number of measures that have been put in place to improve the performance in processing times which includes a focus on new claims and a reduction in the officer time which has been taken right across the ARP partnership. Councillor Boden stated that ARP have looked at the phone rota and how to reduce the amount of time operatives are on the phone to process claims and to carry out the reviewing tasks which are needed to focus on the essential items only and there has been continued monitoring of the ARP resources. He added that ARP has also continued to test the automation of migration notices which is essential for the system to work properly and effectively rather than officers re-inputting data which is sent to them with and over the past few weeks there has been a marked improvement in the outstanding word reports which is encouraging and suggests either that the remedial actions being taken are working or that the pressures coming from the roll out to Universal Credit are reducing and it is looking like there should be an improvement over the coming weeks, which will be reflected in the next quarters performance figures.

Members noted the progress against the Transformation and Communications priorities.

OSC18/23 UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS

Councillor Sennitt Cough stated there are no current outstanding actions at present.

OSC19/23 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Sennitt Clough stated that the members are still working towards the proposed timetable at present with the opportunity to add additional items later in the municipal year if required.

11.18 am

Chairman