

# **Report of the Chair of Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management & Policy Committee**

**29 October 2020**

1. This report is submitted by the Chair of Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee (CSMC), in accordance with the constitutional requirements set out in Standing order 8.3 (m) to update Council on scrutiny work and to set out any recommendations such as may be made to Council in relation to that work.
2. Due to the restrictions placed on 'work as normal' as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, public scrutiny has been substantially reduced since March 2020, so this report follows a different format to the usual standard presentation to Council.

## **Public Scrutiny**

3. Following the immediate urgency arising from the pandemic to establish remote decision making meetings, public scrutiny was re-established in July this year with 2 monthly meetings of Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management & Policy Committee. No other scrutiny committees have met formally since March – a source of some discomfort and consternation - but future meetings are now planned. See section on future work planning below (paragraphs 15-18).
4. Since July 2020, this Committee has been prioritising its work and focussing on keeping abreast of all potential scrutiny areas at this essential time, given that no other scrutiny committees have been able to meet. As a result, it has considered and received regular monthly updates on:
  - the Council's financial position as affected by Covid 19;
  - governance arrangements, including any changes required to be made to Council Standing Orders and the Constitution by the Monitoring Officer, arising from Covid 19;
  - public health statistics in York arising from the pandemic and keeping up to date with emerging situations
5. The Committee has also considered and commented upon the following in detail:
  - The Council's initial response to Covid 19, as well as its Recovery & Renewal Strategy (July 2020);

- An update received on devolution proposals in August, the subject of discussion elsewhere on Council's agenda;
  - Childrens Services, education & skills (August 2020) reviewing the Council's preparations and plans for continuing service provision in these areas;
  - Non-Covid 19 health impacts on York, receiving a presentation from, and questioning, Dr Andrew Lee, Executive Director of Primary Care from the CCG (September 2020);
  - Key major projects, receiving updates on current progress with the Guildhall, York Central and Castle Gateway (September 2020). In particular, the Committee was invited to give its opinion on options for Castle Gateway and welcomed the opportunity to provide its views pre-decision to the Executive, recommending that Option 5 to build Castle Mills and defer the proposed multi storey car park at St Georges Field, be pursued by the Executive;
  - Schools update following the return of York's children to their schools in September and a similar update on the return to universities and the impact on York universities and within the community. The Committee was joined by the Vice Chancellor, Charles Jefferies specifically for this discussion. (October 2020).
  - Re-establishing full public scrutiny committee meetings, agreeing a calendar of meetings to suit current arrangements and putting in place properly managed work planning (see paragraphs x-x below) (October)
6. This full work programme was complimented by an additional special meeting of the Committee on 16 September to review the Council's proposed responses on a Government consultation relating to changes to the Business & Planning Act 2020. This was specifically requested by the Executive Member for Economy & Strategic Planning, who also attended the virtual meeting. The Committee welcomed the opportunity presented by the Executive Member to comment and made a range of suggestions for inclusion in the proposed responses to Government.
7. Concerns were raised over a lack of information and reports being made available in advance of meetings and the Chair and Vice Chair subsequently sought reassurance from the Executive Leader that sufficient priority and resources would be made available to Scrutiny going forward so as to enable all Committee Members to discharge their

duties effectively. This assurance was given and relayed to the Corporate Management Team.

### **Scrutiny Chairs**

7. Whilst not all Scrutiny Committees have been meeting in public, Scrutiny Chairs have regularly been discussing collectively, every month, work priorities with the Chair and Vice Chair of Customer & Corporate Scrutiny Management & Policy Committee to help guide and develop public scrutiny in this time. These sessions will continue to be held every 2 months moving forward, following the re-introduction of wider public scrutiny across all Committees. They will help monitor and progress scrutiny business.

### **Post-Decision Call-Ins**

8. There have been two Post-Decision Call-ins since the last report to Council.
9. A call-in to discuss the York Central report and decision to draw down a further £1.96m to support ongoing work was held on August 13<sup>th</sup> and included submissions from the Executive Leader and Assistant Director for Asset Management & Regeneration. After lengthy discussions a majority of the committee decided to reconfirm the Executive's decision. However, the Committee requested that Audit & Governance Committee review the York Central Risk Register as part of its consideration of the Key Corporate Risks Register at its September meeting. This item was subsequently removed from the Audit & Governance Committee Agenda and is currently subject to ongoing discussions. Committee also re-confirmed its March decision to monitor the York Central development on a quarterly basis.
10. A call-in meeting was held on 15 September to consider Executive's decision in relation to the disposal of 22 The Avenue, Clifton. After much careful deliberation, a majority of the Committee decided to reconfirm the Executive's decision. However, the Committee did ask to review further the Council's Asset Management Plan as a result of their debate and that meeting is set for 23 November 2020, working with the Executive Member for Finance & Performance.

### **New Public Scrutiny Arrangements Proposed Arrangements for November 2020 to May 2021**

11. As the Council's hierarchical statutory scrutiny committee, Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management & Policy Committee will continue as a monthly, public meeting (1730 only).
12. Each Committee within the existing structure will meet in public on a staggered, quarterly basis. These quarterly meetings will principally be focused on the 'overview' function, eg receiving performance & monitor type reports and identifying areas for further work.
13. Informal meetings will continue but will be re-designated as Forums rather than Committees and will take place quarterly between public Committee meetings.
14. There will be two additional slots every month for potential public Scrutiny meetings. One will be dedicated for a 'commissioned' policy development / pre-decision scrutiny and the second will be used for Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management & Policy Committee Call-ins or a second 'commissioned' meeting. Post decision call-in will continue to function in the usual way. The additional public Scrutiny meetings will be commissioned through CSMC following discussion with Executive Members, Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Scrutiny Chairs.
15. Scrutiny Chairs' Forum will meet bi-monthly to discuss work-plans, as outlined in paragraph 7 above.
16. Details of dates of all these public meetings have now been agreed with Scrutiny Chairs and published in the calendar of meetings.

### **Future Scrutiny Work Planning**

17. It is crucial during this time that public scrutiny is introduced more widely across the spectrum but that available resources to support its successful re-introduction are managed effectively and are directed according to where there is most need or added value. A clear and simple way of doing this is through a controlled work programme, managed and allocated by Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management & Policy Committee but developed in consultation with all Scrutiny Chairs, having gathered input from their 'Committees'.
18. In choosing what work it wants to do, Scrutiny needs to be mindful of what outcomes it wants to achieve. Working collaboratively with Executive Members and Chief Officers in establishing key work strands is more likely to deliver key support and outcomes.

19. A composite work plan covering all Scrutiny 'Committees' is currently being developed and will be managed by Democratic Services in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee, based on wider discussion with Scrutiny Chairs/Executive Members/Chief Officers, as necessary, and for regular monitoring by Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management & Policy Committee.

### **Reviewing Working Arrangements**

20. The working arrangements for scrutiny outlined in this report which have been put in place through to May 2021 are in response to the pandemic and the current available resources to support and make scrutiny effective, across the organisation. It is intended to review those arrangements in light of operational experience after around 4 months to assess the position at that time in terms of best practice and lessons learnt. That review will then help to inform the shape of scrutiny moving into the new Municipal Year.

### **Report Recommendation**

21. To note the report and update of the Chair of Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management & Policy Committee.

Reason: To comply with the Council's constitutional requirements

Councillor J Crawshaw

Chair, Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management & Policy Committee