

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY
SELECT COMMITTEE
27/06/2019 at 6.00 pm



Present: Councillor Ahmad (Chair)
Councillors Phythian, Stretton, Williamson, Byrne and Hulme

Also in Attendance:

Mark Stenson	Head of Corporate Governance
Mark Hardman	Constitutional Services
Lauren Jones (item 10)	People Services
Anne Ryans (item 11)	Director of Finance
Merlin Joseph (item 11)	Interim Director of Children's Services
Patsy Burrows (item 11)	Children's Social Care
Andy Cooper (item 11)	Finance Service
Claire Shield (item 11)	Finance Service

1 **APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR**

RESOLVED that Councillor Stretton be appointed Vice Chair of the Select Committee for the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

3 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

4 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

5 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions received.

6 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Value for Money Select Committee held on 21st March 2019 be approved as a correct record.

7 **MINUTES OF THE GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED
AUTHORITY ECONOMY, BUSINESS GROWTH AND
SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority Economy, Business Growth and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 8th February and 15th March 2019 be noted.

MINUTES OF THE GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY CORPORATE ISSUES AND REFORM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority Corporate Issues and Reform Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12th February and 19th March 2019 be noted.

MINUTES OF THE GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY HOUSING, PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority Housing, Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th February and 14th March 2019 be noted.

UPDATE ON THE IMPROVING ATTENDANCE AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The Select Committee received a report providing an update on the position in relation to improving attendance activity for the financial year 2018/19; information relating to sickness absence percentages per weekday per Directorate, levels of compliance and Return to Work Interview statistics per Directorate, and the top reasons for absence; and summarising progress on the Health and Wellbeing Programme – ‘Fit For Oldham’ (FFO).

The outturn for 2018/19 showed an average of 9.611 working days lost per employee, amounting to 3.79% of time lost, the Council target for this period being 6 working days lost. This compared with Greater Manchester local authority average of 10.35 days and the 2017/18 Nationwide Local Authority average of 9.8 days.

The principal reasons for time lost were advised, the Committee noting that mental health (including stress) and musculo-skeletal reasons represented near to 60% of time lost. The support offered to address these issues, together with the support offer related to cancer related absence, was further advised. Members queried support available to address musculo-skeletal issues, being advised that the occupational health provision would refer to appropriate services. For office based staff, the health and safety team were available for desk/workplace assessments. There was no specific provision related to issues that might be caused by domestic violence, but this would be referred to FFO to consider in conjunction with the Mental Health Champions project. Noting the prevalence of mental health and musculo-skeletal reasons and querying the adequacy of the NHS offer, Members were advised that staff were encouraged to seek support through work and to participate in preventative activities.

With regard to mental health issues specifically, it was advised that this was spread across the authority, though was higher in

particular areas. There was no policy in relation to 'time out' periods, but discussions had been held about a policy around attendance at FFO events and activities. Considering whether mental health issues arose through understaffing or overwork, it was reported that recording for stress did not differentiate between personal or work reasons was not recorded, but the support offered was available for all reasons. The Committee was asked to note that, from an insurance perspective, the Council did not have lot of claims citing work related stress.

There remained a continuing focus on improving managerial compliance in conducting return to work interviews in a supportive and timely manner and this had been promoted through a variety of means. While managers were required to undertake Return to Work interviews, the current HR/payroll system did not record the holding of such interviews: the issue had been raised with the Programme Team working on the new system. Such information as was available at this time would be requested and made available to Members.

Sickness absence statistics were presented by the average number of sickness by days lost per Service, by age, by gender, by short-term and long-term sickness absence, and by weekday. Noting that sickness absence was particularly high on Mondays, Members queried the use of disciplinary action in relation to sickness absence. The amount of such action was considered to be low, but Members were advised that action would be taken if sickness was proven not to be genuine or if clear patterns emerged.

The FFO programme delivered a variety of activity across several locations and continued to respond to feedback from the workforce about how employee health and wellbeing may best be enhanced. Particular features of the programme, including bespoke training 'Supporting Mental Wellbeing in the Workplace' that had been introduced and received positively by all participants, the offer of regular Healthchecks for employees and the launch of a Health and Wellbeing hub on the Council intranet, were advised. The levels of engagement with FFO by each Council Division was advised within the submitted report. A suggestion that the Council produce or use posters promoting breast checks to support the early identification of breast cancer would be referred to FFO.

Going forward, the Committee was advised of a range of activities, including the commissioning of a whole system review of the Council's approach to the management of employee health, wellbeing and absence management to further reduce the level of sickness absence among employees.

In consideration of the report Members noted that, while the Council performed well against other local authorities, they needed previous years statistics to be able to fully review sickness absence and note any trends emerging.

RESOLVED – that (1) the report on sickness absence and the actions being undertaken to improve attendance at work be noted;

(2) the sickness position for the financial year 2018/19 be noted;

(3) the update on the health and wellbeing programme 'Fit for Oldham' be noted.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES - FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AT 2018/19 YEAR AND BALANCING THE BUDGET GOING FORWARD

The Select Committee received a report providing an overview of the financial performance of Children's Social Care for the 2018/19 financial year and the measures being taken to balance the budget in 2019/20 and future years.

A dramatic increase in the cost base of Children's Social Care over the last three financial years was noted, a situation not unique to Oldham. The increased costs meant that, even after the allocation of reserves and additional resources, the Service had overspends of £3,420k in 2017/18 and £3,967k in 2018/19. Much of the use of reserves in 2018/19 had been to support short term investments to implement the Children's Services Operating Model and Structural Resources Plan, a three-year strategic recovery plan to fundamentally address the problems faced in Children's Social Care. The submitted report focused therefore on a review of the outturn position for 2018/19, the increased resources allocated for 2019/20 and 2020/21, and the measures being taken to manage the budget in 2019/20 and future years.

The overspend in 2018/19 had occurred in each of Children in Care, Children's Safeguarding, and Fieldwork and Family Support, the three Service areas within Children's Social Care. 74% of the overspend was attributable to Children in Care and an analysis of the overspend was presented, with detailed consideration being given to the costs and circumstances relating to Social Care Placements, including out of Borough placements and fostering arrangements, to youth on remand services, and to short breaks for children with disabilities. A consideration of budget variances in Children's Safeguarding and in Fieldwork and Family Support was also presented.

In response to queries, it was advised that the youth on remand budget was volatile and difficult to predict due to the courts being able to remand young people to the care of the local authority and the varying number of high risk offences occurring each year. With regard to the support of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, the Council received a set amount per child in grant and made returns to the DfE that determined the allocation. It was advised that services provided cost more than the grant received, though the Home Office had agreed recently to an increase in the grant available. The Interim Director acknowledged that out of Borough placements were a recurrent issue and that while in Borough or local placements were

sought, out of area placements were sometimes needed for safety reasons. However, a successful model at North Yorkshire was being investigated to see if practice could be taken on board in Oldham.



The Children's Social Care budget had been increased by £4,611k in 2019/20 to respond to spending pressures and to support implementation of the Children's Services Operating Model and Structural Resource Plan. This still left a potential budget pressure pending the impact of the Operating Model and so additional resources had been allocated to areas of overspend on a risk assessed basis. In anticipation of continued financial pressures and noting that the new operating arrangements needed time to bed in, a sum was earmarked in reserves to provide additional support, if required. Formal financial monitoring would commence at month 3 and monitoring reports would be submitted to this Committee.

The largest factor in reducing the budget deficit was implementation of the Operating Model. Delivery of the Structural Investment Plan would see a permanent senior leadership team reducing the need for interim agency staff at a senior level: completion of the new senior structure was estimated for completion in October 2019. The second phase would see the phased roll out of additional social work, placements and commissioning capacity to provide a fit for purpose Social Work structure that would reduce the percentage of agency social work. To address short term financial pressures, senior leadership within Children's Social Care had been tasked with reducing areas of cost pressure, and joint work with Finance colleagues was underway to review working arrangements to ensure achievement of value for money.

In response to a query as to the success of the Operating Model, it was advised that staff morale was high and that there was interest being shown in people wanting to come to work for Oldham. Once recruitment had progressed it was to be hoped that the organisation, working in conjunction with the CCG, police and other partners, would be fit for purpose and successful. There was a greater focus on training and development of staff, and a commissioning service established to broker placements in the biggest cost areas. Referring back to earlier considerations of sickness absence, the Interim Director advised that absence rates were falling, that new structures would see reduced caseloads, new accommodation had been identified and work was being undertaken with Fit For Oldham to address stress issues.

Noting the investment made, Members queried the current position regarding OFSTED ratings. The Interim Director advised that an OFSTED judgement in January 2019 had delivered a 'requires improvement to be good' assessment while stating that they were satisfied with what was proposed and being implemented. A further visit to review practice was expected, possibly in January 2020, to review practice but full inspections were tended to be at three-year intervals.



RESOLVED that the report be noted.

12 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TOOLKIT**

The Committee gave consideration to the Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit that provides the framework for the overview and scrutiny function at Oldham Council. The Chair advised of the intention over the coming year to promote meetings of the Committee, looking to increase public input.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit be noted.

13 **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

The Board gave consideration to the Key Decision Document which listed key decisions to be taken from 4th June 2019.

RESOLVED that the Council's Key Decision Document be noted.

14 **PERFORMANCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY (PVFM)
SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee gave consideration to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Value for Money Select Committee Work Programme for 2019/20. The Head of Corporate Governance advised of the intention to submit regular corporate budget monitoring reports and noted the potential use of the key decision document to feed issues into the work programme.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Value for Money Select Committee Work Programme for 2019/20 be noted.

15 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

RESOLVED that the scheduling of the next meeting of the Select Committee to be held on Thursday, 22nd August 2019 at 6.00pm be noted.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.04 pm