

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at ZOOM - [HTTPS://ZOOM.US/](https://zoom.us/) on TUESDAY,
16 JUNE 2020 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors A Coote, C Criscione, A Dean, G Driscoll, R Jones,
P Lavelle, G LeCount and G Sell and A Storah

Officers in attendance: D French (Chief Executive), R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager) and A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Also present: Councillors J Lodge (Leader), C Day (Portfolio Holder for Communities, Youth, Public Safety and the Police and Fire Service Liaison), J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local Plan), Councillor N Hargreaves (Portfolio Holder for Finance) and P Lees (Deputy Leader of the Council).

SC8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair noted that Councillor Reeve was no longer a member of the Committee since his promotion to the Cabinet. He thanked Councillor Reeve for his service to the Committee and welcomed Councillor Storah as the nominated substitute for this meeting.

SC9 CALL-IN: CORPORATE PLAN DELIVERY PLAN FOR 2020/21

The Chair introduced the item and said Councillors Dean, Sell and Criscione had called in the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan (CPDP), approved by Cabinet on 27 May, for the following reasons:

"The reason for calling in this decision is because the Corporate Delivery Plan is insufficient insofar that it is, inter alia, not measurable, lacking in both quantified and timed outcomes. It therefore requires further development to meet these good governance standards. The plan should also demonstrate aspirational outcomes achievable in normal times and should not solely be downplayed by current uncertainties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Scrutiny committee needs the opportunity to scrutinise the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan, having been given qualified assurances from the executive that this would be the detailed follow on from the Corporate Plan."

The Chair said a late supplementary pack had been published earlier in the day containing Member submissions. He said an explanation should be given as to why the evidence was submitted on the day of the meeting.

In response to a Member question, the Democratic Services Manager said the Corporate Plan Delivery Plans of neighbouring local authorities could be tabled for consideration but it would be for the Members who had called in the decision to justify the documents' inclusion.

Councillor Dean said the current CPDP lacked clarity and accountability and whilst he appreciated the unprecedented nature of the public health emergency, the Council needed direction that was lacking in the Plan.

He proposed the following,

“That the Scrutiny Committee refers the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan back to Cabinet with a request that it is amended to identify:

- (i) delivery outcomes,
- (ii) when the outcomes will be delivered,
- (iii) who will be responsible for delivery of outcomes.

The revised plan may show:

- (a) clearly what the Cabinet wishes to deliver, but
- (b) may include uncertainties that could affect timely delivery resulting from the present Covid-19 pandemic.”

Councillor Criscione said assurances in regard to the CPDP had been given by the Administration at this juncture last year; the Administration had not lived up to those promises. Furthermore, the ruling group had a strong mandate and this was their chance to prove they could deliver on promises made in the pre-election period. In his view, they had failed to do so.

There were a number of serious flaws in the Plan, such as no costings, a lack of consistency in target setting and a general lack of detail. He said the lack of detail in the CPDP was intrinsically linked to the lack of progress made by the Administration in delivering its mandate. He said the Council required vision and ambition and praised the Corporate Plan which demonstrated that scrutiny could add value to the process. He said SMART objectives were required to spell out in detail the council’s direction of travel, although he appreciated such objectives would be subject to change due to the public health emergency.

Councillor Sell said he shared the sentiments of Councillor Criscione; the Plan lacked detail and provided no clarity for residents. He said there were four principles that should be enshrined in the Plan; accountability, transparency, vision and challenge. He said looking at other Local Authorities’ Delivery Plans was entirely appropriate as it was right to look at other councils to achieve best practice. He said the CPDP needed clear objectives, clear completion dates, clear accountability and an ambitious vision and asked for the Plan to be referred back to Cabinet for amendment.

The Chair invited Councillors Lodge, Lees and Hargreaves to respond.

Councillor Lodge said he rejected a number of reasons given for calling in the CPDP. He said an officer or Cabinet Member was listed by each item and therefore accountability had been enshrined in the Plan. He added that the CPDP had been subject to wide consultation and the ambition contained in the document was clear to see. Finally, he criticised the three members for underestimating the scale of the Covid-19 recovery. Economically, the nation’s

finances were in a poor state and the Council was looking at a £4 million shortfall due to the impact of the crisis. He emphasised that the Council was on essential spend only. Many councils had cancelled their delivery plans due to a lack of funds and whilst additional Government support may be forthcoming, there was little certainty in terms of the level of assistance that would be offered, or when it would be received. He asked Members to “wake up” to the reality of the situation.

In response to a question from Councillor Criscione asking whether the Leader would have been happy to present such a Plan to his Board of Directors during his professional career, Councillor Lodge said leading a Council was very different to leading a company due to the collective nature of the organisation, as opposed to one where he could “pull all the levers”. In response to another question, he said he absolutely agreed with SMART targets but due to the impact of Covid-19 on the Council’s finances their value would be questionable. He said they could be incorporated into the Plan when the financial picture was clearer.

Councillor Lees agreed with Councillor Lodge and said the public’s primary concern related to the continuation of basic services, which were under threat due to Covid-19, not, for example, the building of new council houses. She said the Administration would continue to be ambitious but they could not make promises with so much uncertainty surrounding public finances. She asked Members to work proactively with the Administration in the best interests of residents.

Councillor Hargreaves said he had read the supplementary papers and the assumption that a Delivery Plan would be updated as circumstances changed was incorrect. He also dismissed comments relating to recycling performance as lacking evidence and another regarding Neighbourhood Plans as misguided. He asked Members to reject the request for call-in and to press on with the Plan.

Councillor Criscione said he fully appreciated the scale of the pandemic but the CPDP could still be much improved. The health emergency did not negate the need for a detailed Plan outlining specifically how the Administration’s vision would be achieved.

Members discussed the CPDP and the reasons given by Councillors Dean, Criscione and Sell to call the Delivery Plan in. Councillors Coote, Driscoll, LeCount and Jones expressed disappointment and shared the view that the call-in was politically motivated and had not added value to the process, particularly as the CPDP was due to be reviewed again at the Scrutiny Committee meeting in September.

Councillor Storah said he did not agree with the reasons given for calling in the CPDP, particularly the issues raised in regard to the Local Plan process. He said the CPDPs of neighbouring authorities included in the supplementary papers had aspirational targets but did not say “how or by when” they would be delivered.

In response to a question, the Leader said the CPDP had been written by senior officers and Cabinet Members in consultation with the wider public.

The meeting was adjourned for a comfort break at 8.08pm and reconvened at 8.13pm.

Councillor Dean said this was not about party politics but rather good management practice. He said he fully appreciated the context of the public health emergency and questioned the wisdom of publishing the CPDP in the current circumstances. He said he was concerned by the conduct of the meeting and the term “protagonist” had created an “us versus them” setup, which was not the way to carry out effective scrutiny.

In response, the Chair clarified the meaning of protagonist as “an advocate or champion for a particular cause or idea” as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary. He said it was not a judgement but rather a statement of a position taken in discussion or debate.

Councillor Criscione said there was no political motivation behind the call-in and that he was sincerely trying to assist in a constructive manner. He said it was up to Cabinet, not Scrutiny, to clarify ideas behind the CPDP.

Councillor Sell said it was about accountability and challenge; he had a democratic right to call this item in for further debate and additional scrutiny. He said he welcomed Councillor Lodge’s comment in regard to the implementation of SMART targets later in the process.

Councillor LeCount said it was important in a democracy that all could be questioned and thanked the three Members for instigating the debate.

The Chair summarised before moving to a vote. He said the CPDP was an unimpressive document that lacked specifics and the Committee had voiced its disapproval following the meeting in May. However, as mentioned during the debate, he said there was little value in bringing the document back at this point in time, due to unprecedented public health emergency and the looming economic crisis that was expected to follow, as the Administration had already promised a review. He expected more specific targets and prioritisation to be incorporated in the CPDP for further scrutiny in September. He added that it was the Scrutiny Committee’s role to provide robust challenge but an alternative approach to call-in could have been taken on this occasion and still led to the same outcome.

The motion to refer the CPDP to Cabinet for amendment was defeated.

The meeting was closed at 8.30pm.