

Select Committee Chairmen & Vice-Chairman's Group

29 September 2020



Strategic Reset Group Report to Cabinet

Purpose of report: to report to Cabinet on the findings of the Select Committee Chairmen & Vice-Chairmen's sub-group scrutiny of the council's strategic reset.

Introduction:

1. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic and the impact on Surrey and the country more broadly the council is resetting its strategies and delivery plans, building on the progress made over the past 2 years. This work will be framed by the existing Vision for 2030 document considering the changed environment we now find ourselves in.
2. A working group with representatives from each Select Committee was set up by the Select Chairmen & Vice-Chairmen's Group to conduct oversight of the development of the council's reset strategy, provide scrutiny challenge and feedback from the perspective of their respective remits.
3. The role of this group was to:
 - On behalf of the four select committees the group will carry out pre-decision scrutiny to influence the reset plans and in-year priorities by reviewing them for risk, value for money and outcomes for residents;
 - To identify and prioritise future public scrutiny of issues emerging from the reset plans;
 - Report back its findings to the Select Committee Chairmen & Vice-Chairmen's Group; and
 - Make recommendations to Cabinet as necessary
4. The membership of the group was:
 - Chris Botten (Vice-Chairman - Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture)
 - Nick Darby (Vice-Chairman - Adults & Health)

- Nick Harrison (Chairman - Resources & Performance)
 - Saj Hussain (Vice-Chairman - Communities, Environment & Highways)
 - David Harmer (Chairman - Audit & Governance)
5. The group met three times with officers from commissioning, strategy and finance teams over the course of July and August before reporting to the Select Committee Chairmen & Vice-Chairmen's Group on 3 September 2020.

Key Findings

6. Officers from Finance, Commissioning, Transformation and Strategy took the working group through the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the council's strategic ambitions. The working group also reviewed scenarios and macro planning assumptions and the challenges and opportunities these presented.
7. The capacity of senior officers and the organisation at large to deal with the challenges presented by COVID-19 was raised especially with the new challenges of unitarisation and a proposal to centralise social care under the NHS. It highlighted the ongoing demand and budget pressure on adult social care as a risk to the organisation.
8. In the face of growing inequality, it was agreed that economic development should be a high priority for the council and should be prominent in the council's strategic frame. The group thought that the council should develop strategies to boost employment, apprenticeship schemes were cited as an example. Members further emphasised that any strategy must realise tangible benefits for residents.
9. Members raised the difficulties faced by the voluntary sector as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. It was noted that the sector plays a key role as a system partner for the council and the group suggested that something like longer term contracting arrangements with the council could prolong voluntary organisations' viability, by giving them some security as to their future revenue income, ensuring their contribution was not lost. Officers noted this suggestion and replied that new ways of working with the sector need to be considered. Officers further highlighted the potential for the new Community Projects Fund to support these organisations' capital projects and acknowledged the sectors' importance in regard to the objective of 'enabling resilient and connected communities.'
10. The working group highlighted the importance of including future national policy changes such as the delivery of social care under NHS management and new planning legislation to the council's planning scenarios.

11. The prospect of unitarisation was consistently raised as both a risk and an opportunity for Surrey. This was acknowledged by officers; however this was beyond the remit of the strategic reset which was focused on the council in its current form.
12. The issue of transitioning from the European Union was raised including the risk to the ongoing viability of adult social care in Surrey but also the opportunity presented by possible changes to procurement rules in the future.
13. The recognised that the current situation was not permanent, and circumstances could change further meaning that the council needed a mechanism to continually review its scenarios and adapt its priorities quickly if required.
14. Select Committees should make use of the scenarios and core assumptions to plan and prioritise future scrutiny work, aligning their forward work programmes to the council's reset ambitions.

Conclusions:

15. The working group were assured by the responses to the challenges presented to the officers as detailed above and were supportive of the recommended decisions made in the draft Cabinet report they reviewed on 24 August.
16. The working group was confident it had stress tested the key assumptions made by the council across all its services and highlighted areas of risk and opportunity for Surrey.

Recommendations:

1. That the scenarios and assumptions presented to the group, alongside the budget reset and transformation information presented at the previous meeting, should form part of the information provided to the select committees to inform their work programmes.

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