

Extract from minutes of Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee – 29 September 2020

Review of Cabinet report – Approach to Value for Money

The committee considered the report, 'Approach to Value for Money', which was to be discussed by Cabinet at their meeting on 6 October 2020. Cabinet would be considering the development of a value for money framework and timeline, which would set out how it would implement value for money benchmarking of all services to feed into a prioritisation exercise for conducting fundamental value for money reviews of all the council's services. The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to review the report and provide comments to Cabinet. It was noted that the report had also been considered by the Audit and Governance Committee.

In presenting the report, the Head of Business Insight and Corporate Communications noted that the former council's had a range of approaches and this work would provide the opportunity to agree the approach for Dorset Council moving forward. Benchmarking and customer consultation would take place and the work would review what support the Local Government Association (LGA) and the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) might be able to provide.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Change welcomed comments from the committee on the approach proposed and suggestions for how the work was progressed. He noted the difference between this area of work and performance management. He thanked officers for their work in this important area.

Councillors considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion the following points were raised:

- There was a need to ensure value for money at all levels of government
- The work proposed represented a starting point and there were questions that needed to be answered and links to be made to corporate priorities
- In response to a question, the role of allocated business partners within the corporate services department was outlined. The role of business partners, who were members of staff, was to work with front line services to provide specialist support in areas such as human resources, finance and procurement. Information on business partners was available to councillors on the council's Intranet site. It was noted that business partners would be key to taking this piece of work forward
- The council did not currently have all the information it needed in respect of performance monitoring and the impact of the situation with Covid-19 was recognised. Although the approach to value for money was distinct, there was still a relationship with work being progressed on performance monitoring. Work on performance management had recently been restarted
- A request was made for detail of timescales associated with this work. The Head of Business Insight and Corporate

Communications noted that a timeline would be put in place once the approach had been approved by Cabinet and some initial benchmarking had been undertaken

- Reference was made to paragraph 9.2 of the report and the notion of 'Equity: the extent to which services are available to and reach all people that they are intended to – spending fairly', and whether equality impact assessments were undertaken? In response it was noted that sometimes the council may choose not to spend fairly for a good reason, such as a requirement to assist a particular part of the community who may require a greater level of support than others. This could depend on the service under consideration and there was a need to link into equality impact assessments
- A comment was made in respect of links to procurement and consideration around ensuring best value for money versus supporting the local economy by buying local
- The Executive Director for Corporate Development provided an overview of the current financial position of the council, which was set out in a report to Cabinet on 6 October 2020. He noted that the proposed approach to value for money, provided a systematic approach to reviewing services and needed to tie in with consideration of affordability. Value for money implications had been taken into account in the restructure of the corporate services area of the council and also in Children's Services through the Blueprint for Change. The importance of benchmarking was recognised, which helped to pose questions and provide new areas to look at. Cabinet had recently approved a new Procurement Strategy for Dorset Council and this had included an emphasis on social value as well as low cost
- In response to a question with regard to business partners supporting Children's and Adults services, the Executive Director noted that these corporate staff members were embedded into services to provide a critical friend role and work alongside specialists working in the service area. This was a recognised way of working and business partners had been through a recruitment process
- The report noted that customers, both internal and external would be consulted to find out what they wanted from the service. Consultation methods would vary depending on the service area but would seek to canvass the views of residents and colleagues as appropriate.

The Chairman noted that the comments of the committee would be provided to Cabinet when they considered the report at their meeting on 6 October. This would include the wish of the committee for a timeframe to be put in place for this piece of work. The committee supported the recommendation to be made to Cabinet as set out below.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

Cabinet develop a value for money framework and timeline setting out how it will implement value for money benchmarking of all services to feed into a prioritisation exercise for conducting fundamental value for money reviews of the all the council's services.