

Report to Council

Date of meeting: 13 December 2022

Chairman: Councillor H Kane

Democratic Services Officer: V Messenger (01992 564243)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny progress report for November 2022 be noted.**

Report:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 3 November 2022

1. The Committee scrutinised the transfer of Grounds Maintenance to Qualis ahead of Cabinet on 7 November 2022. A Small introduced the report, which proposed to transfer the service on 1 April 2023. Qualis had established a vision for itself as a property company promoting and undertaking property development, management and maintenance. The report provided a high-level summary of the current costs of delivering the existing in-house service, including an indicative Contract Payment in the event of the transfer of the Grounds Maintenance service. The business case for the transfer represented an efficient way to deliver this service. It enabled the Council to reduce its back-office costs and offset these against the Qualis Management charge. However, members needed to be assured that there was a tangible benefit to the Council before any transfer could take place.

Members had many varied questions that covered the TUPE process for the staff involved in this service transfer and what support would be available to them, and that staff turnover in the Ground Maintenance team could lead to the development of a two-tier system as new staff joined. There was concern at the effect of the transfer on current clients and how the service would be better. Also, as some members had been contacted by residents about housing repairs not being done or delayed after this service transfer, there did not seem to be effective scrutiny in place in terms of housing repairs and Council tenants, yet the transfer of another service was being proposed. It was noted that progress and financial performance would be regularly monitored and reported back through the relevant scrutiny committee. However, the Committee's recommendation to Cabinet following a lively debate was that at this stage the Committee felt unable to support the transfer of Grounds Maintenance to Qualis, as a proposed motion was carried.

2. Feedback from members who attended the October scrutiny course from an external trainer was positive and proved a success, so next year two external scrutiny courses would be organised.
3. There was a request to look at the recommendations made by a past scrutiny task and finish panel on services for older people and how they had been updated especially in the current economic crisis. This would be progressed by senior officers in consultation with the Chairman. The Committee's work programme was also noted.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 17 November 2022

- (4) The Chairman clarified that following Councillor J H Whitehouse's question at the previous meeting for a review of the recommendations made by a past Task and Finish Panel on Services for Older People and Disabled People in 2007, relevant officers were looking into how this could best be progressed. However, it was deemed more appropriate that an update report be made to a future meeting of the Stronger Communities Select Committee.

- (5) Reflecting on the 3 November meeting, the Chairman had noticed members' concerns about the transfer of services to Qualis. Councillor H Kane informed the Committee that after subsequently speaking with S Jevans (Qualis Group Managing Director) and A Small (Strategic Director and Section 151 Officer), S Jevans would attend a future meeting of this Committee and report on the quality of services with a view to providing statistics with real figures rather than percentages.
- (6) The Committee undertook detailed scrutiny of the Corporate Performance Reporting for quarter 2 on the project status summary, key milestones and RAG status for those projects identified as a 'Priority Project' within the portfolio. Members' questions encompassed many of the projects but especially on the waste contract. Missed collections were causing many residents to contact Customer Services and this was impacting on Customer Services meeting its key performance indicator targets on customer satisfaction.
- (7) A member of the public asked the following question on safeguarding at the meeting, "Have any reports been made in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 8.2 of the Shareholders Agreement with Qualis Group Ltd since it was signed in February 2020?" On behalf of the Chairman, the Chief Executive, G Blakemore, replied, "yes". However, in answer to a follow-up question on the result of the investigation, G Blakemore advised that she was not in a position to discuss the investigation but on whether the report was included, the answer was yes.
- (8) The chairman reported on the business transacted at their previous select committee meetings except for Stronger Council, as the October meeting had not taken place owing to a lack of business. Another meeting had been scheduled for 24 November.
- (9) The Committee also monitored the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for November 2022 and reviewed its own work programme.