

Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 28th April, 2026.

Present:- Councillors Khawar (Chair), Hulme (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Mohindra and O’Kelly

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Bedi

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Mann, Matloob and Tomar

PART 1

59. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

60. Minutes of the last meeting - 31 March 2026

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2026 be approved as a correct record.

The Vice Chair asked for responses for points that had been raised at the February meeting on the Controlled Parking Zones. The action was as follows:

Turning to Appendix B, some streets in Chalvey were marked as “suspended.” Could Officers explain why these schemes were suspended? Officers reported that there was an intention to revisit all suspended schemes. Resident were understandably concerned, as the partial implementation created significant displacement parking, especially around the two nearby schools. This affected residents’ ability to park but also service providers, such as engineers, who were sometimes unable to attend properties due to lack of parking. Officers were asked for clarification on the reasons for suspension and an indicative timeline for reviewing and progressing the zones. Officers would give this consideration and add to report.

Councillor Mohindra had also raised many questions about ward councillor engagement around the implementation of CPZs and was still awaiting responses on these too.

Scrutiny Officer would follow up the responses.

61. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Repeated on the Agenda

Resolved: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 31st March 2026 were approved as a true and accurate record.

62. Budget Task and Finish Group Report

It was noted that residents' voices should be included within the budget-setting process. Members highlighted the importance of elected members attending and engaging with scrutiny meaningfully, recognising that scrutiny relies on the commitment of a small number of volunteers who must be able to dedicate sufficient time to the work.

The Chair invited comments on the report. No further comments were raised, and the recommendations were introduced.

The Committee agreed that any Executive budget-related decisions made outside the formal budget scrutiny timetable, and which had a direct impact on budget proposals, should be considered by the Scrutiny Committee through a format agreed in consultation with Committee Members and the Chair of Finance. An invitation to participate should be extended to all Members.

It was recommended that the budget-setting timeline and process, including scrutiny involvement, be agreed and consulted on as early as practicable in the municipal year to ensure adequate and dedicated time for scrutiny.

The Committee further recommended that impact assessments be undertaken and revisited at an early stage of the budget-setting process to support informed decision-making and to fully consider the impact on residents, particularly those most likely to be adversely affected. It was emphasised that impact assessments should form an integral part of budget development rather than being undertaken after key decisions had effectively been made.

Public engagement and consultation were recommended to be significantly strengthened and carried out earlier in the budget-setting process to enable residents, businesses, and key stakeholders to provide meaningful feedback. This may require the Council to adopt new and innovative engagement methods to improve participation rates.

It was also recommended that Executive Members demonstrate stronger oversight and ownership of their portfolios by attending budget scrutiny meetings regularly. In addition, a budget scrutiny work programme item was recommended for the 2026/27 municipal year, with the scope of work to be developed collaboratively with scrutiny members and finance officers.

The Committee noted and agreed the recommendations. Members were thanked for their contributions.

RESOLVED: that the Committee agreed the recommendations as in the report:

- Any budget-related executive decisions or those that are considered outside of the budget scrutiny timetable that have a direct impact on the budget proposals (i.e. significant savings or reductions in services),

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should be considered by the scrutiny committee. The format of this scrutiny to be decided in consultation with Committee members, the Chair, and finance colleagues.

- That the budget setting timeline and process, including scrutiny involvement be agreed and consulted on as early as is practical in the municipal year to ensure there is dedicated and sufficient opportunity for key stakeholders to engage with the budget setting.
- Equality Impact Assessments to be undertaken and completed at the earliest stage in the process of the budget. This is with the aim of informing decisions made around the budget and to consider the impact of budget decisions on all residents, particularly those who might be adversely affected. This impact should always be considered as part of the budget-making process, not an afterthought once decisions have effectively already been made.
- That public engagement and consultation is significantly strengthened and undertaken early on in the budget setting process, to allow for residents, business, and key stakeholders to feedback on the budget. This may require the council to consider new and innovative methods of engaging with residents to sharply improve participation rates.
- That Lead Members have stronger oversight and ownership of their budget portfolios, demonstrate much stronger political ownership of their portfolios and that they attend budget scrutiny meetings regularly.
- That the Budget Task and Finish Group be commissioned for the 2026/27 municipal year and that the work is thoroughly scoped with the involvement of scrutiny members and finance colleagues.

63. 2027/28 to 2029/30 Budget and MTFS Timetable

The Committee considered a report setting out the proposed timetable for the 2027/28 budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) covering the subsequent two years.

The Director of Financial Management & Strategy introduced the report and explained that, following Cabinet approval on 20 April, the Constitution required the budget timetable to be shared with the Chair of Scrutiny. It was considered good practice to bring the timetable to the Committee at an early stage to enable effective engagement by both Cabinet and Scrutiny Members. This approach sought to address shortcomings identified in the 2026/27 budget-setting process and to strengthen scrutiny involvement for 2027/28 onwards.

Members were advised that the key stages included an MTFS refresh in July, publication of a draft budget for Cabinet consideration in November, and

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submission of the final proposed budget to Cabinet and Council in February. Scrutiny involvement was intended to begin early, with topic briefings following the July MTFS refresh, and detailed scrutiny of draft proposals taking place between November and January. Any material changes proposed after publication of the draft budget would be communicated to Scrutiny to allow comment prior to Cabinet consideration.

The Committee discussed the type, timing, and level of financial information required to support effective scrutiny, particularly in relation to savings proposals and risks. Officers confirmed their intention to work with the Chair and any task and finish group to agree information requirements in advance.

Members raised issues relating to financial resilience, reserves, and key financial risks. It was clarified that these matters were addressed in the most recent MTFS approved by Council and would be refreshed as part of the July update, at which point Scrutiny would have the opportunity to consider them in detail.

The Committee highlighted the complexity of the Dedicated Schools Grant and high needs funding, and requested member-wide briefings on the education funding position, including implications of national policy changes. Officers agreed that such briefings would be appropriate and undertook to explore options jointly with Education Services, including potential engagement with the Schools Forum. ACTION

Stakeholder and resident engagement was discussed, including engagement with parish councils, statutory partners, and wider stakeholders. Officers confirmed that relevant statutory bodies continued to be consulted as required, and that options for broader engagement, including residents and partners, were being developed alongside the MTFS refresh.

Members sought clarification on how feedback from consultations would be reported. It was explained that consultation outcomes would be reported to the relevant decision-maker, which could include officers under delegated authority, Cabinet, or Council, depending on the matter. The Committee noted that the timetable had been brought forward earlier than in previous years to allow proactive scrutiny and early identification of emerging risks. Risks to delivery of the timetable, such as government policy changes and operational capacity, were acknowledged, and Members were assured that the timetable was intended to be sufficiently flexible to respond to emerging issues. Regular budget monitoring and MTFS refresh points were highlighted as mechanisms for early warning and engagement.

Resolved: that the Committee noted the budget and MTFS timetable as set out in the report and Appendix A, and agreed that Officers would work with the Committee to develop a programme of scrutiny activity aligned with the timetable.

64. Improvement and Recovery Task and Finish Group Report

The Chair invited Councillor Hulme, Chair of the Improvement and Recovery Task and Finish Group, to introduce the report.

Councillor Hulme stated that, while the task and finish group had commenced, the process had been disappointing and fell short of expectations. It was outlined that insufficient planning time and limited information had been provided to enable Members to undertake detailed scrutiny of service impacts. Discussions with Officers tended to focus on potential financial savings and overlapped with the Budget Task and Finish Group, rather than concentrating on the impact on service users.

It was noted that information was often circulated late, with some material presented only during meetings, limiting Members' ability to prepare. Member availability and attendance also presented challenges, particularly due to overlapping membership with other task groups. In addition, the Improvement and Recovery Plan had not been shared with the group at the outset. Councillor Hulme concluded that the process did not start or end effectively.

Looking forward, it was emphasised that the need for clearer and more detailed scoping of any future task and finish work, particularly in relation to the transformation programme. It was noted that scrutiny should focus on areas where it could add the most value and that expectations of task and finish groups needed to be explicit and proportionate to the scale of the work.

The Chair invited questions.

It was queried of what lessons had been learned, particularly regarding the difficulty Members experienced in engaging with Senior Officers from Children's Services. Officers responded that sessions had been held on the Improvement and Recovery Plan, customer services and complaints, and communication and engagement. While Officers had followed the agreed presentation format, Member attendance at some sessions had been limited. The Officer explained that, at the time, service improvement plans for Housing and Children's Services were at different stages of development and were not fully aligned with the corporate Improvement and Recovery Plan.

The key lessons identified included:

- the need for stronger alignment between corporate and service improvement plans;
- the importance of having consistent, published service improvement plans to support effective scrutiny; and
- the difficulty of running overlapping task and finish groups simultaneously.

A further question was raised regarding compliance with the Housing Ombudsman complaints code and progress since the report. The Officer confirmed that significant improvements had been made, increasing compliance to approximately 90%. The complaints policy had been revised, and processes strengthened. The focus was now on ensuring that complaints

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informed continuous service improvement rather than solely achieving compliance. This work would be reflected in the refreshed Improvement and Recovery Plan.

Members raised concerns about customer call waiting times. Officers acknowledged the issue and explained that longer and more complex calls were driving increased waiting times. Actions included reallocating resources, expanding face-to-face resolution through the Brickwell Hub, and improving digital channels to reduce repeat contact. Members were directed to the Performance Report for further detail.

A Member asked what could be done differently in future task and finish groups. Officers advised that robust scoping at the outset was critical, alongside clear expectations about the time commitment required from both members and officers to ensure meaningful outcomes.

Resolved: that the Committee noted the report and findings of the task and finish group and approved the recommendations and actions set out in section 3.9 of the report and below and directed to officers as appropriate:

- a) That the scoping process would be reviewed to ensure that topics for task and finish groups are tangible, realistic, and that the group had a clear structure by which to carry out the review.
- b) That training and guidance was provided for members and appropriate officers on effective task and finish group work, to lay out the roles and responsibilities of the respective stakeholders.
- c) That member attendance was monitored and included in the final report of all task and finish group reports.
- d) That the Statutory Scrutiny Officer ensured that as part of the scoping, and investigative stages of the group's work, key internal and external stakeholders were identified and engaged with, with a particular focus on outward facing groups.

65. Transformation Update

The Committee considered a report setting out the proposed approach to procuring transformation delivery partners and the associated governance and assurance arrangements.

It was noted that Cabinet, in February, had agreed that external transformation capacity and capability were required to deliver the transformation programme at pace, and that reliance should not be placed on a single provider. Cabinet had also emphasised the importance of robust, independent assurance over delivery and benefits realisation.

The report explained how those principles were being implemented and provided Members with an opportunity to comment in advance of a further report to Cabinet seeking formal approval of the proposed procurements.

Members were advised that a multi-stage procurement approach was being progressed. Separate contracts (“lots”) would be procured independently but governed under a common governance framework, rather than forming a single contractual framework.

The first procurement (Lot 1) related to the appointment of a lead transformation partner. This role would include provision of transformation leadership, programme management, independent assurance, and support for organisational design, culture change, and specialist commercial and financial advice. A parallel procurement (Lot 2), launched shortly afterwards, would secure specialist capability for technology-enabled change, including digital service redesign and supporting technologies. Further specialist procurements (Lots 3A–3C) would be undertaken as required to deliver additional expertise.

The Committee noted that assurance arrangements formed a central element of the approach. The Lot 1 provider would validate proposals, support prioritisation and sequencing, and provide ongoing assurance across the transformation portfolio. All new projects would be required to pass a Gateway Zero feasibility assessment, and existing projects would be brought retrospectively into the same assurance framework. It was emphasised that existing work would continue during mobilisation, with the aim of acceleration rather than delay.

Members were also informed that independence would be safeguarded through clear conflict-of-interest provisions. Where a delivery partner was undertaking delivery work, they would not provide assurance on their own activities, and alternative assurance arrangements would be put in place.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that procurements would be undertaken through compliant public sector frameworks to ensure speed, transparency, and value for money. Evaluation would be conducted fairly and consistently, in line with Contract Procedure Rules and legislative requirements. Value for money would be assured through competition, independent validation of proposals, and the Council’s discretion not to commission work where value could not be demonstrated.

It was noted that the lead transformation partner contract was expected to be for up to three years, with an explicit requirement for capability transfer to the Council and a phased reduction in reliance on external support over time.

Members acknowledged the risks associated with the tight procurement timescales but noted that mitigations were in place, including maintaining capacity to continue in-flight work. It was further noted that organisational culture and behaviour change would be addressed from the outset through the scope of the Lot 1 contract.

Resolved: that the Committee noted:

- the summary of the proposed Transformation Delivery Partner – Core/Portfolio Office, PMO & Specialist Advisory (Lot 1)
- the intended multi-stage procurement approach; and
- the proposed governance assurance, and independence arrangements.

66. Attendance Report

The Attendance report was noted by the Members.

A query was raised regarding the verification of apologies, specifically noting that Councillor Muvvala was listed despite no longer being a member of the Committee. It was clarified that Councillor Muvvala had withdrawn prior to the meeting on 30 March, and it was agreed that the apology would be removed.

67. Date of Next Meeting - TBC

Members were informed that the dates of future meetings were still to be confirmed and would be circulated once agreed at Council.

Chair