

**CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
17TH SEPTEMBER 2019**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Parsons)
The Vice Chair (Councillor Baines)
Councillors Boldrin, Goddard, Paling, Shepherd
and Ranson

Councillor Barkley (Deputy Leader of the Council
and Cabinet Lead Member for Finance and
Property Services)

Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Head of Finance and Property Services
Democratic Services Officer (LS)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Radford

The Chair stated that the meeting would be recorded and the sound recording subsequently made available via the Council's website. He also advised that, under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting, and the use of any such images or sound recordings was not under the Council's control.

Note: The sound recording device failed to record this meeting.

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Reference Minute 5, Resolution 2: The requested reassurance had been sent to members of the Committee by email on 29th August 2019. The Committee confirmed that it was content with that response.

Reference Minute 5, Resolution 3: The concern had been reported to the Housing, Planning and Regeneration and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee on 3rd September 2019. That Committee had asked that its members also be sent the reassurance referred to above.

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th June 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

12. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

Councillor Shepherd declared a personal interest as a Leicestershire County Councillor, as some elements in the agenda involved the County Council's finances.

13. DECLARATIONS - THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

14. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURE 11.16

No questions had been submitted.

15. PERFORMANCE MONITORING (PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 1) AND ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

Considered a report of the Strategic Director of Corporate Services providing performance information in respect of the Corporate Plan objectives and key performance indicators within the Committee's remit (Quarter 1 2019/20), together with the Council's Annual Report 2018/19 that reviewed how effectively the Council had delivered the themes set out in the Corporate Plan (2016-2020) (item 6 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

Assisting with consideration of the report: Cabinet Lead Member for Finance and Property Services, Strategic Director of Corporate Services.

The Chair stated that the Council's Annual Report 2018/19 had been considered by the Scrutiny Commission on 16th September 2019 and that, therefore, it might be appropriate to focus scrutiny at this meeting on the Quarter 1 information specific to this Committee's remit, and any red indicators in that respect. That did not prevent members of the Committee from raising issues relating to the Annual Report 2018/19, if they so wished.

Summary, key points of discussion (red indicator, Quarter 1 and Annual Report):

- (i) DES3 – FP (agenda page 24): Investment Strategy would be considered by Cabinet on 19th September 2019, for recommendation to Council. This was only red indicator at Quarter 1. Strategic Director did not have any concerns regarding other indicators at this stage.
- (ii) K18 (agenda pages 26 and 47): This Council collected Charnwood Council Tax on behalf of all public services in the County, therefore all would benefit from any improvement in performance by this Council. Even a small percentage improvement represented a significant sum, particularly for those receiving larger share of Council Tax. Discussion regarding this Council's performance compared with other collection authorities in the County, Charnwood in third quartile for both in year and total collection. Recognised that fair comparison was difficult, no family of like authorities available. Also, that performance had exceeded Council's own target in 2018/19. Stated that, although this Council would wish to be effective collector for all recipients, cost to it of improving performance needed to be considered against likely income. Noted that 0.1% total Council Tax was approximately £97k of which this Council retained £8k (7%). Range of factors affected performance, including how enforcement was balanced against other objectives (policy matter) and relative deprivation levels. Considered that increasing direct debit payments might assist. Reference to charges against properties and how that process worked.
- (iii) K14 (agenda page 47): Responding to a concern that reuse, recycling and composting target was not being met, the Chair stated that strong reasons and reassurance had been provided to explain that performance at recent Waste Management training session for councillors (4th September 2019).

The Democratic Services Officer agreed to email the presentation slides from the above training session to Councillor Baines.

RESOLVED

1. that the Committee's support for the Council's continued aspiration to improve the Percentage of Council Tax Collected performance (K18) be recorded;
2. that the report providing performance information in respect of the Corporate Plan objectives and key performance indicators within the Committee's remit (Quarter 1 2019/20) and the Council's Annual Report 2018/19 be noted.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the importance of achieving the best performance possible for this Key Corporate Indicator, as discussed in (ii) above.
2. The Committee's remit included receiving regular performance monitoring reports and, having noted the discussion at this meeting and made specific resolution where it so wished, it was content to note the performance information report.

16. REVENUE MONITORING (GENERAL FUND AND HRA) PERIOD 4

Considered a report of the Head of Finance and Property Services to assist the Committee in monitoring the General Fund and HRA Revenue position (Period 4 2019/20) (item 7 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

Assisting with consideration of the report: Cabinet Lead Member for Finance and Property Services, Strategic Director of Corporate Services, Head of Finance and Property Services.

Summary, key points of discussion:

- (i) Noted that a further monitoring report (Period 7 2019/20) programmed for consideration by the Committee on 3rd December 2019.
- (ii) Reference was made to the recent change to budgeting for managed savings and the importance of finding those savings during the year and not relying on underspend, in particular a concern that 4 months of the year had already passed to achieve that.
- (ii) Discussion regarding Brexit Grant, £35k received to date, more expected October 2019, not budgeted for. Not allocated to specific costs at this stage, most likely that it would be needed for something the Council needed to react to, associated staffing or communications. Arrangements in place for Brexit planning were briefly outlined.
- (iii) Agenda page 56, Table C, concern that current tenant rent arrears (dwellings) might be increasing year on year. Particular reference to 24 tenants being £2,000 or more in arrears.

- (iv) Although beyond the period of the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-2023, the Council was aware of the potential risk to income of legislative changes to make statutory the collection of garden waste.
- (v) Reference was made to a late in year virement of budget to meet agency worker costs in the Planning and Regeneration Service in 2018/19 and the wish not to see that repeated, where the expenditure was apparent earlier in the year. The authorisation required for such virements, dependent on the amount, was briefly outlined.
- (vi) Car park income reduction noted, Committee would look at again when considering Period 7 monitoring report to see if the trend was continuing and, if so, possible reasons.
- (vii) Brief discussion regarding Town Hall overspend, seasonal nature of income, importance of annual pantomime, better idea of how performing towards end February.
- (viii) Noted that this Committee might wish at some point to review the Council's management of its assets, also that the Scrutiny Commission had decided not to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of the Investment Strategy (Cabinet 19th September 2019) and that it had agreed an informal scrutiny panel to consider generating commercial income, to be chaired by Councillor Baines.
- (ix) Noted that, where tenants had 8 weeks of arrears or were vulnerable, a dedicated Landlord Services Universal Credit officer was making applications to the Department for Work and Pensions to switch payment of the housing element of Universal Credit from the tenant to the Council, this was welcomed. Council's Lifeline service commended, importance to service users and as income to Council.

The Head of Finance and Property Services agreed to check whether the arrears referred to in (iii) above had seen an increase year on year and email a response to Councillor Boldrin in that respect.

The Head of Finance and Property Services also agreed to check why the due diligence costs for Limehurst Depot had not been budgeted for and to email a response to the Committee in that respect.

The Democratic Services Officer agreed to ask the Head of Landlord Services for an explanation of the term "void percentage for Central Heating" and to email a response to the Committee in that respect.

RESOLVED

1. that officers be asked to note the Committee's concern that budgeted for managed savings (Managed Savings Budget Non Salaries, £300k) are found during the year and that the Period 7 monitoring report to be considered by the Committee at its next meeting (3rd December 2019) provides an explanation of how that is in hand;
2. that the Committee's concern that late in year virements of budgets are not appropriate where the expenditure concerned is apparent earlier in the year be noted, and the current position in that respect be checked at the request of the Chair;

3. that the report setting out the General Fund and HRA Revenue position at Period 4 2019/20 be noted.

Reasons

1. Although the Committee was assured at this meeting that the Council's Senior Management Team was aware of the need to find the savings and was working to ensure that, the Committee wished to both highlight the importance of doing so during the year (in particular, not relying on possible year end underspend) and to continue to monitor the position in that respect.
2. To record the Committee's concern regarding the matter and to ensure that the Council is working to avoid such late in year virements, where possible.
3. The Committee's remit included receiving regular financial monitoring reports and, having considered the revenue position and made observations and requests for further information as outlined above, it was content to note it.

17. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020-2023

Submitted a report of the Head of Strategic Support following a request by the Scrutiny Commission (5th August 2019) that this Committee considers proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2020-2023, to give the Committee an opportunity to be involved in pre-decision scrutiny at an earlier stage (item 8 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Chair stated that the Scrutiny Commission, at its subsequent meeting on 16th September 2019, had decided that it no longer wished to involve scrutiny committees in pre-decision scrutiny at an earlier stage, given that the Council's Constitution stated that pre-decision scrutiny was a matter for the Commission and provided a practical approach to doing so. Therefore, it had withdrawn the request that this matter be considered by the Committee. The Chair also referred to planned scrutiny of the draft MTFS 2020-2023 by the Budget Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 25th September 2019. As a result, he proposed that this item not be considered by the Committee, although members of the Committee could ask questions on the Strategy, if they so wished.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Finance and Property Services briefly set out the key issues and risks for the MTFS 2020-2023, with the Committee noting in particular the uncertainty of the environment in which the Council was operating and the need for transformation/efficiency plans to deliver.

RESOLVED that both the position set out above and the draft MTFS 2020-2023 be noted and that the Cabinet Lead Member be thanked for assisting the Committee with both this item and items earlier in the meeting.

Reason

To acknowledge the further decision of the Scrutiny Commission, the information set out in the draft MTFs 2020-2023 and the contribution of the Cabinet Lead Member for Finance and Property Services to this meeting.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Finance and Property Services left the meeting due to another appointment.

18. UPDATE - PURCHASE OF FLEET (ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES CONTRACT)

This item had been included on the agenda at the request of the Chair and Vice-chair.

Considered a report of the Strategic Director of Corporate Services to provide an update on progress with the Council's purchase of fleet (Environmental Services Contract) (item 9 on the agenda supplement filed with these minutes).

Assisting with consideration of the report: Strategic Director of Corporate Services.

Summary, key points of discussion:

The financing of the purchase was a matter within the remit of the Committee. Previous scrutiny of the matter (Scrutiny Management Board, 8th October 2018) had questioned the reason for the funding ratio proposed and subsequently agreed (internal loan/Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) on a 50:50 basis) as that had not been explained in the Cabinet report. The Chair stated that he welcomed the reference in the update report to, at a time nearer to when funding was required, reassessing that split to ensure it was still appropriate. The Council's treasury consultants would be worked with to assist that. Noted that a different split was likely to require Cabinet approval, at which point rationale for that would be outlined. A member of the Committee stated that it would also be useful to know the rationale for a 50:50 split, if that proved to be most appropriate.

RESOLVED

1. that when the split of funding between internal resources and external borrowing for purchase of the fleet is decided, that that funding ratio and the reason for it be reported either to a meeting of this Committee, or by email to all members of the Committee if there is not a timely meeting of the Committee available;
2. that the update on progress with the Council's purchase of fleet be noted.

Reasons

1. To enable the Committee to be assured that the most appropriate funding split has been chosen.
2. To acknowledge the Committee's scrutiny of this matter.

19. WORK PROGRAMME

Considered a report of the Head of Strategic Support to assist the Committee in determining its work programme (item 10 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

Assisting with consideration of the report: Strategic Director of Corporate Services, Democratic Services Officer.

Reference Action Requested 2. on the first page of the report (agenda page 101). As noted earlier in the meeting, the Scrutiny Commission, at its subsequent meeting on 16th September 2019, had decided that it no longer wished to involve scrutiny committees in pre-decision scrutiny at an earlier stage, given that the Council's Constitution stated that pre-decision scrutiny was a matter for the Commission and provided a practical approach to doing so. Therefore, it had withdrawn the request that the matters set out be considered by the Committee.

The Chair referred to the decision of the Committee at its first meeting that he and the Vice-chair would review the Committee's work programme, with the resulting proposed work programme to be considered at this meeting. He stated that he had delayed that review, pending the publication of a new draft Corporate Plan and draft Business Plan, so that the priorities therein could be reflected in the Committee's work programme and allow a more strategic approach to scrutiny. Until then, he proposed that the current work programme be continued with.

There was brief discussion regarding reference to scrutiny committee minutes at Council meetings and to Cabinet Lead Members recently having more involvement in scrutiny meetings.

RESOLVED

1. that the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee review the Committee's work programme taking into account the new draft Corporate Plan and draft Business Plan, once available, and the resulting proposed work programme be considered at a future meeting of the Committee;
2. that, pending the outcome of the above review, the Committee proceeds on the basis of its current work programme, updated to include any decisions made at this meeting.

Reasons

1. To work towards a prioritised approach to the scrutiny undertaken by this Committee, in particular to reflect the priorities of this Council as set out in its Corporate Plan and Business Plan and to be a better critical friend.
2. To enable scrutiny of the matters set out and agreed by the Scrutiny Commission to be undertaken, pending any alternative or additional proposals.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the Council meeting on 4th November 2019 unless notice to that effect is given to the Democratic Services Manager by five members of the Council by noon on the fifth working day following publication of these minutes.
2. These minutes are subject to confirmation as a correct record at the next meeting of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee.