

**CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
3RD DECEMBER 2019**

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

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: None

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.

20. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Reference Minute 16, Resolution 1: The Chair was content that the requested explanation had been provided in the Period 7 revenue monitoring report to be considered at this meeting (item 7).

Reference Minute 18, Resolution 1: The Chair reiterated that the Committee wished for the agreed funding ratio and reason for it to be reported to it as set out, once decided (purchase of fleet, Environmental Services Contract).

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17th September 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

21. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

No disclosures were made.

22. DECLARATIONS - THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

23. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURE 11.16

No questions had been submitted.

24. PERFORMANCE MONITORING (PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 2)

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 2 2019/20) (item 6 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

Summary, key points of discussion:

- (i) No red indicators at Quarter 2.
- (ii) "NS" was "Not Started".
- (iii) ERM1 - SS (agenda page 20): No increase in number of Flood Wardens since Quarter 1. View that current time of year was best time to increase numbers, experiencing flooding. Understood that work was being undertaken to do so, could check with relevant Head of Service as to detail of that.
- (iv) ERM5 – CIS (1) (agenda page 20): Welcomed that 99% of customers surveyed rated telephone service from Contact Centre as "good" in Quarter 2.
- (v) ERM5 – CIS (2) (agenda page 21): Progress column stated that the first stage of implementation would begin, but no timescale/implementation date was given. There were other examples of this information not being provided in the report. That affected the Committee's ability to monitor progress effectively.
- (vi) ERM5 – SS (2) (agenda page 21): Results of Residents Survey would be published in due course, publication date not known at this meeting.
- (vii) ERM5 – SS (1) (agenda page 21): Those customers not rating web service received as "good", were the reasons for that known? Reliant on customers choosing to leave comments. Redesign of website, unfamiliar location of information for regular users, had caused some dissatisfaction. Sometimes response related to outcome rather than web service itself, could identify which it was if customer left comments. Brief discussion as to whether website could be adapted to better indicate nature of dissatisfaction, without customer needing to leave comments. Number of times online completion was abandoned could indicate that an online form was too lengthy or complex. Much work had been undertaken to eliminate difficulties for online customers. Levels of satisfaction for web-related services always lower than telephone/face-to-face (Govmetric). Brief discussion regarding intended trial of webchat facility, suggestion that Council consider Chatbot also.
- (viii) DES1 – SS (2) (agenda page 22): Review of this Committee's work programme by the Chair and Vice-chair (to ensure scrutiny reflected the priorities of the Council and that the Committee could be a better critical friend) had been delayed pending availability of the new draft Corporate Plan and draft Business Plan. Those documents not yet available. Corporate Plan due to be considered by Cabinet in January. The Chair considered that access to the Cabinet Forward Programme was also necessary to undertake the review of the work programme effectively, Committee agreed with that view and that access to the document should be requested. Noted that Key Decision Notice provided details of many of the matters to be considered by Cabinet over next 12 months, however Chair's view that that did not provide complete picture.
- (ix) "SLT" was "Senior Leadership Team", further explanation of which was provided.

- (x) DES2 – CIS (2) (agenda page 23): Were new online forms checked via satisfaction survey on website? In response, reference to frequent requests regarding that during the process, opportunity for feedback if so wished.
- (xi) DES3 – CIS (2) (agenda page 24): Reason why call recording implementation had been delayed to Quarter 4? In response, because original solution put forward had proved not to be so. Alternative solution had now been identified that could be implemented by end Quarter 4.
- (xii) Concern that information on the Council's website was not always easy to find for members of the public, reference to Local Plan consultation information and particularly paper response forms not indicating to where they should be returned.
- (xiii) BP12 and BP13 (agenda page 26): Satisfaction levels illustrated the better experience that customers considered they had when interacting with Council by telephone/face-to-face (as compared to online). How would the Council's move towards increased online interaction with customers balance against that? In response, reference to working towards one process for each transaction which could be enacted by the customer online as an attractive option but, where necessary, could be facilitated with the customer over the telephone or face-to-face (or via webchat). Currently, it was not intended to remove those options for the customer. Committee's role included ensuring that the Council got the balance right.

The Democratic Services Officer would ask the Head of Strategic Support to provide information on work being undertaken to increase numbers of Flood Wardens and email a response to the Committee in that respect.

The Democratic Services Officer would arrange for the results of the Residents Survey (ERM5 – SS (2)) to be emailed to the Committee once available.

The Strategic Director of Corporate Services would raise the suggestion regarding use of Chatbot with the relevant team and a response emailed to the Committee by the Democratic Services Officer once available.

RESOLVED

1. that, further to the comment made in (v) above, future performance monitoring reports submitted to the Committee provide timescales /implementation dates for actions where possible;
2. that the Committee's wish to have access to the Cabinet Forward Programme, to assist the review of its scrutiny work programme as outlined in (viii) above, be recorded;
3. that resolution 2 above be actioned by way of a note to be provided by the Chair of the Committee making that request, to be sent via the Democratic Services Officer to the Leader and Chief Executive;
4. that the report providing performance information in respect of the Corporate Plan objectives and key performance indicators within the Committee's remit (Quarter 2 2019/20) be noted.

Reasons

1. To assist the Committee in monitoring progress effectively.
2. The Committee considered that access to the information in the Forward Programme was necessary to ensure its scrutiny work reflected the Council's priorities and direction of travel.
3. To ensure that the Committee's request was actioned and included the Chair's rationale for that request.
4. The Committee's remit included receiving regular performance monitoring reports so that it could ensure that targets and objectives were being met and identify areas where performance might be improved. Having noted the discussion at this meeting and made specific resolution where it so wished, the Committee was content to note the performance information report.

25. REVENUE MONITORING (GENERAL FUND AND HRA) PERIOD 7

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 7 2019/20) (item 7 on the agenda supplement 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) Nonspecific Savings Target of £300k, only £72.5k identified to date. Was one-off this year, would be ongoing saving moving forward. Overall, expected to end on budget for 2019/20.
- (ii) All aware of urgency of position moving forward, £2.7m to be found over next 3 years, either from increasing income or reducing expenditure. Reference to many uncertainties faced.
- (iii) Agenda supplement page 4, reference to £203,900 Budget Managed Vacancy Savings Salaries against £68,300 retained to cover agency costs. Discussion regarding value for money (total amount spent on agency cover much less than total MVS), process of vacancies and recruitment over the year, savings that generated, never at full establishment, turnover greater in some roles, could take period to successfully recruit.
- (iv) Agenda supplement page 5, Strategic and Private Sector Housing, confirmed that £50k underspend (£34k underspend Empty Homes legal fees and £22k additional licence fee income) was one-off, moved from base budget to earmarked reserve for use when needed by Head of Service.
- (v) Agenda supplement page 6, Waste, Engineering and Open Spaces, discussion regarding Garden Waste Bin income shortfall and contractor performance, indicated as risk in report. Number of factors affecting performance, not all within contractor's control. Recycling and factors affecting performance complex area,

targets difficult to achieve. View that increased cost of garden bin to customer may have affected income.

- (vi) Agenda supplement page 7, Customer Experience, reference to £42k overspend relating to loss of Housing Benefit Admin Subsidy Grant funding, forecast to be £72k by year end. In response, reference to connection with roll out of Universal Credit, expectation that less process would mean less workload, not necessarily case, same checks needed for local council tax support as had been required for Housing Benefit. Amount of grant not known until late stage.
- (vii) Agenda supplement page 7, Customer Experience, reference to £300k overspend Carpenters Arms and supported living Housing Benefit subsidy claim costs, forecast to be £515k by year end. Demand-led. National issue. Universal Credit had meant that Council could only claim back some of costs, further explanation of which provided (vulnerability markers removed). Representations to be made to address issue, requiring providers to register as Social Landlords would assist. Important issue/risk for the Council, had developed quickly. Was being looked into.
- (viii) Agenda supplement page 8, Community Grants, monies would be paid out, welcomed.
- (ix) Agenda supplement page 9, HRA, significant underspend at end October 2019, reference to issues with contractor, Head of Service had measures in place to ensure work undertaken and monies spent. Question as to why no year end forecast for HRA (as for General Fund)? In response, reference to agenda supplement page 10, appendix 3, year end forecast was underspend of £164k.
- (x) Agenda supplement page 10, reference to current large underspends on several Landlord Services functions, forecasting that much of that would be spent by year end, would that be possible? In response, reasons for forecast set out, including that additional contractors would be employed for compliance work and that some works scheduled for Quarter 4. Head of Service could provide more detail if required.
- (xi) Agenda supplement page 12, query regarding Table 2, references to October 2019 needed to be removed, table should provide comparison between 2018/19 and 2019/20 only.
- (xii) Agenda supplement page 13, Table C, Current Tenant Arrears (Dwellings). By way of example, number of cases over £2,000 was 21 in 2018/19 and 28 in 2019/20, were the numbers cumulative or all new cases each year? Not known at this meeting, HRA Accountant would be able to advise.

The Head of Finance and Property Services noted that it would be useful to the Committee if the timescale for the review looking at alternative uses for garage sites was stated in the report (agenda supplement page 9).

The Democratic Services Officer would ask the Head of Landlord Services for information on the number of tenants who, on receipt of benefit under Universal Credit, did not pay the rent to the Council (report referred to this being the case in some instances) and email a response to the Committee in that respect (agenda supplement page 9).

The Head of Finance and Property Services would check the position in respect of the query in (xii) above and email a response to the Committee in that respect, also include that information in future revenue monitoring reports.

RESOLVED that the report setting out the General Fund and HRA Revenue position at Period 7 2019/20 be noted.

Reason

The Committee's remit included receiving regular financial monitoring reports and, having noted the discussion at the meeting and made specific resolution where it so wished, it was content to note the revenue monitoring report.

26. WORK PROGRAMME

Considered a report of the Head of Strategic Support to assist the Committee in determining its work programme (item 8 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

Reference work programme remaining subject to review by Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee in due course, in accordance with the decisions of the Committee on 17th September 2019 and so that scrutiny could reflect the priorities of this Council and be a better critical friend, see discussion earlier in this meeting Minute 24, paragraph (viii) and resolutions 2 and 3.

The Democratic Services Officer would send to Councillor Radford the dates of further scheduled meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED that, pending the outcome of review by the Chair and Vice-chair, the Committee proceeds on the basis of its current work programme, updated to include any decisions made at this meeting.

Reason

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 20th January 2020 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.