

**FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
1ST MARCH 2022**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Charles)
The Vice Chair (Councillor Miah)
Councillors Grimley, C. Harris, Parton, Ranson,
Shepherd, Taylor and Ward

Councillors Barkley (Cabinet Lead Member for
Finance and Property Services), Mercer (Cabinet
Lead Member for Private Housing) and Poland
(Cabinet Lead Member for Public Housing)

Strategic Director; Commercial Development,
Assets and Leisure
Strategic Director; Environmental and Corporate
Services
Head of Financial Services
Head of Landlord Services
Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing
Organisational Change Officer
Democratic Services Officer (NC)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Fryer and Paling

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.

The sound recording device failed to function.

28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30th November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

29. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

Councillors Grimley, Miah, Parton, Shepherd and Taylor declared personal interests as representatives of Leicestershire County Council with particular reference to item 7 - Capital Monitoring report Period 9, December 2021 (DFG scheme).

Prior to agenda item 9 – Update on Carbon Neutral Plan and Actions - Councillor Shepherd declared a personal interest as a County Council representative on the ESPO Management Committee.

30. DECLARATIONS - THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

31. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURE 11.16

No questions had been submitted.

32. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Considered a report of the Strategic Director, Environmental and Corporate Services providing Quarter 3 performance monitoring information (item 6 on this agenda filed with the minutes).

Assisting with consideration of the report: Cabinet Lead Member for Private Housing, Head of Landlord Services, Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing, Organisational Change Officer.

Summary, key points of discussion:

- report was presented by Organisational Change Officer. Noted variances in RAG rating compared to Quarter 2, 11 completed. COVID summary was a reduced update but still activity to report due to Omicron.
- provision of predicted Q3 data and lack of additional commentary for % household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting (KI 4) / residual household waste per household (NI 191), was due to a delay in receiving data and was an estimate from the Head of Service. The data for Q2 was retrospectively added to the report for Q3 and this would occur again for Q4 report. These were the only corporate indicators where predicted data was supplied.
- targets were being exceeded by a relatively significant margin for some indicators, review was ongoing for 2022-23 by each Head of Service, looking at current performance and benchmarking with other LAs.
- KI 11 – the additional narrative was welcomed, but still significant concerns regarding the % rent loss and number of voids; there didn't appear to be a sense of urgency and action was needed. If non-sheltered accommodation and sheltered accommodation data were separated into two indicators, it was clear that sheltered accommodation turnaround times was impacting on the overall target and that general needs at 2.99% would be within tolerance. Challenges included age designation criteria, residents' preferences and staff resources. The Sheltered Housing Review Board and project plan had been set to decide on the future of the schemes and what works were required to bring them up to a 'fit for purpose' standard.
- was the Housing Strategy still appropriate? Consider selling off sheltered accommodation? In response the Board had a vision for future accommodation to meet the changing demographics and aspirations of residents of the Borough, with 14 current schemes under review on demand basis. A report would be submitted to the Cabinet outlining the review, the prioritisation of schemes and for the Thurmaston sheltered scheme. The delays were currently caused by lack of resources with posts currently out for recruitment. Age designated criteria work had begun, and ant changes to current designations

- would require Cabinet approval. The matter had been added to the workplan of the Housing Management Advisory Board as part of the consultation process.
- views expressed that assets no longer seemed fit for purpose and tasks should be outsourced if no internal resources available. Would cost of renovation prevent activity even if resources available? Noted all HRA investment possibilities were being considered, following completion of a stock condition survey later this year. Recognised properties not fit for purpose and that sensitivity was required around review and renovation costs of homes, the Charnwood Decent Homes Standard impacted costs but was considered valuable to retain. A report would be submitted to Cabinet and funding was potentially available from Homes England and Landlord Services. Financial modelling around sheltered accommodation improvements was included in HRA Business Plan and financial assumptions would be checked and updated later in the year (following the stock condition survey).
 - reference was made to £787K rent loss and that this had steadily increased each year. If action had been taken sooner to recoup the losses, the Council could have been able to renovate properties by now. A member noted there seemed to be no political will to deliver.
 - unclear why delivery of the Bedford Square Gateway Project was RAG rated green when there was a known delay to the project. Noted that corporate delivery RAG ratings were more subjective but check and challenge was in place.

Further commentary requested as follows:

- from the Head of Planning and Regeneration for Net additional homes provided (cumulative target KI 1), in particular providing confidence around achieving the target of 828 homes by Quarter 4.
- from the Head of Planning and Regeneration regarding direction of travel of 5 year housing supply and the backlog of housing developments. Perception the Development Control section of the Plans Service was 'firefighting' and wished to be reassured that the Plans Service were also focusing on the delivery of the Local Plan and engaging with Inspectorate.
- from the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces for reasons why the increase of tree planting throughout the Borough was overdue (because of planting in Hathern?)
- from the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces for reasons why KI 4 a/b anticipated a 5% decrease in recycling rate.
- from the Head of Planning and Regeneration as to why the Bedford Square Gateway Project was RAG rated green.

It was explained that when Heads of Service were not available to answer queries in the meeting, response would be sought the meeting and once received would be circulated to all members of the Committee and any substitute members present at this meeting.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the performance results: associated commentary and the explanations provided.

Reason

To ensure that targets and objectives are being met, and to identify areas where performance might be improved.

33. CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT PERIOD 9

Considered a report of the Head of Financial Services setting out the capital spend position for the General Fund and HRA at the end of Period 9 (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, Commercial Development, Assets and Leisure, Strategic Director, Environmental and Corporate Services, Head of Financial Services.

Summary, key points of discussion:

- report was presented by Head of Financial Services, noted that slippage expected of £32million and that anticipating to claim back the small overspend on the Bedford Square Gateway Project.
- clarity was provided regarding budget and slippage for the Shepshed Public Realm Scheme. A feasibility study would be completed and further clarity provided to members in July.
- overspend on the Bedford Square Gateway Project was planned to be claimed back from a contractor (not the Town Deal) as work due to be carried out in January had been delayed, impacting other areas of project delivery. If unsuccessful, the monies would come out of the Council budget. Considering the overall cost and size of the project, the overspend was deemed minor, the project was well progressed and spends identified, any adjustments would be included in the Capital Outturn.
- with respect to the DGF Capital Scheme; recognised there was a waiting list, this was due to the impact of COVID with an increase in referrals and delays due to availability of Occupational Therapists. The Lightbulb contract had been extended and additional resources to be recruited to increase capacity to deliver the service.
- Carbon Neutral project showed slippage of approx. 95%, work had not started, was review of the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Carbon Neutral Board required? The ToR had been completed, still aiming to be carbon neutral by 2024 and since 2014 the carbon footprint of the Council had been reduced by 40%.

Further commentary was requested of the Strategic Director, Commercial Development Assets and Leisure to provide further detail on the 'Actual Include Commitments Spend Period 9' figure of £3700 the Carbon Neutral Project.

RESOLVED that the Capital Monitoring Summary position for Period 9, 31st December 2021 for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account be noted as per Table 1. The detailed Capital Monitoring report is included in Appendix 1.

Reason

To enable the information to be used when considering the future 3 year Capital Plan and the future Capital Strategy.

34. GENERAL FUND & HRA REVENUE, REVENUE MONITORING POSITION
DECEMBER 2021

Considered a report of the Head of Financial Services setting out the revenue monitoring position for the General Fund and HRA revenue to the end of December 2021 (item 8 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

Summary, key points of discussion:

- report presented by the Head of Financial Services, noted overall overspend of £91K, ahead of target by £2K.
- the need to review subscription cancellations for garden waste bins in view of the proposed increase in charges for garden waste bins and increased cancellations of approx. £30K.
- the Government's 'Council Tax Rebate' could be used to offset rent arrears but consideration of legal implications was required before any action could be taken. Noted that the Government were using the Council Tax database to grant a rebate, it wasn't linked to council tax and was unlikely to be stated as an energy rebate in council tax bills, although the rebate would be clearly identified. There were administrative challenges as 20K residents of the Borough did not pay council tax by direct debit, although it was possible the rebate could be discounted from the Council Tax bill without requiring bank details. The high media profile of the proposed rebate could encourage more residents to pay by direct debit and could increase the Council's collection rates.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Reason

The Committee's remit includes receiving regular financial monitoring reports.

35. UPDATE ON CARBON NEUTRAL PLAN AND ACTIONS

Considered a report of the Strategic Director, Commercial Development, Assets and Leisure providing further information on the progress of the Carbon Neutral Plan (item 9 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

Assisting with the consideration of the report: Strategic Director, Commercial Development, Assets and Leisure

Summary, key points of discussion:

- report presented by the Strategic Director, Commercial Development, Assets and Leisure.
- feasibility work to be carried out on building a new premises on the site of the Southfield Extension Car Park would compare costs between retro fitting /

- staying at Southfield Road and a new premises. All options would be considered.
- Members would be kept updated through the usual processes. An annual update to the Climate Change Strategy would be provided to Cabinet which could be decreased to six monthly if considered appropriate.
 - the national Climate Emergency Score Card for the Borough Council was 21% based on the information publicly available. It was important that communication was improved, the public were engaged and informed of actions taken by the Carbon Neutral Board and the Council's website updated. The score had been obtained by visibility of information on the Council's website and not through a questionnaire direct to the Council. The Sustainability Officer has completed an internal assessment based on the same criteria and the score was now 50-60%. However to continue to improve the Council's score, the Comms plan would be updated, and a higher profile given to carbon neutral actions on the Council's website. It was likely the score could be improved within a Quarter.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

Reason

To ensure that members are aware of progress with the action plan laid out in the Carbon Neutral Plan.

36. WORK PROGRAMME

Considered a report of the Strategic Director, Environmental and Corporate Services to assist the Committee in determining its work programme (item 10 on the agenda filed with these minutes)

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

Reference was made by the Chair to a discussion held with the Chair of Scrutiny Commission regarding the most appropriate scrutiny committee to review the Community Safety Partnership. It had been agreed to keep the scrutiny of this matter within the remit of this committee as it was performance related.

The Chair also indicated that the Scrutiny Commission welcomed suggestions by this Committee of topics for scrutiny to further balance the work carried out by both committees. Members indicated that it wished the Commission to further scrutinise KI 11 - % rent loss from void properties including a review of its project plan and timelines for delivery.

Summary, key points of discussion:

- inclusion of small contingency for overspend in the Shepshed Project – noted that any contingency agreed would be approved by Cabinet and be highlighted in the Capital Monitoring report, of which this Committee scrutinised on a regular basis.

- raising car parking fees to raise income and mitigate savings to protect front line services – noted if this was considered, public transport availability should also be included. Many factors to consider for each car park, concern that raising fees in residential areas could push residents to park elsewhere. Reference was made to previous Car Parking Scrutiny Panel whose remit differed and included need for additional multi storey car parking. Review of car parking fees in Loughborough underway, but wider car parking review would take officers approx. 9 months to research. Need to understand wider impact of raising fees.
- alternative uses to be sought, for example to create carbon capture area / solar farms, helping Charnwood Borough Council to meet their carbon reduction targets – members considered the review of the Climate Change Strategy Action Plan scheduled for its meeting in September would be sufficient.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee's work programme as set out in the report and with any amendments made at this meeting, be agreed:
2. That the Committee notes the continuance of its scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership;
3. That the Scrutiny Commission be asked to schedule further scrutiny of the Key Performance Indicator KI 11 - % rent loss from void properties
4. That a report regarding the raising of car parking fees in Loughborough including an overview of fees across the Borough be provisionally scheduled to the Committee's meeting in June 2022;

Reasons

1. To enable the Council's scrutiny arrangements to operate efficiently and effectively.
2. To note the Committee's remit continued to include acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee.
3. Members were concerned that this matter was not being given significant priority and wished for further detailed scrutiny on this topic.
4. To scrutinise matters relating to the raising of car parking fees if the information was available by its June meeting, and if, after reviewing the matter, enabling the Committee to initiate further scrutiny.

37. EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED that members of the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local

Government Act 1972, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest of disclosing the information.

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the meeting was no longer being recorded.

38. UPDATE ON FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DELIVERY OF PLANNED WORKS, VOIDS AND ASSOCIATED WORKS

Considered an exempt report of the Head of Landlord Services providing an update on future arrangements for the delivery of planned works, voids and associated works, (item 12 on the agenda filed with these minutes)

Assisting with the consideration of this report: Head of Landlord Services.

RESOLVED that the discussion provided in exempt minute 38E (2021/22) and the contents of the report be noted.

Reason

To keep the Committee informed.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the next ordinary Council meeting 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 Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee.