

POLICY AND CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Monday 9th January 2024

PRESENT – Councillor Tony Humphries (in the Chair) Councillors Connor, Liddle, Taylor, Hussain S, Slater N and Fielding.

ALSO PRESENT – Executive Member for Finance & Governance- Councillor Vicky McGurk.

Officers – Dean Langton and Phil Llewellyn.

RESOLUTIONS

10. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from the Councillors Sidat and Fazal, and from Tony Watson.

11. Minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2023

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2023 were submitted for approval.

Councillor Neil Slater indicated that he had asked the Executive Member for Finance & Governance, Councillor Vicky McGurk for a breakdown of all assets sold and their value, since 2016, as reflected in the minutes of the last meeting, but that he had only received some of the information that he had requested. Dean Langton agreed to look into the matter further.

Councillor Sylvia Liddle clarified whether the response to the questions raised by the Unions to Jill Readfern had been circulated to the Committee, with Phil Llewellyn confirming that they had. Councillor Liddle also requested a response to the other recommendations agreed at the last meeting, which Phil agreed to follow up with Jill Readfern.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

12. Declarations of interest

Councillor Vicky McGurk declared an interest as a Foster Carer (in respect of Agenda Item No.5 – Update on Finance).

13. Call-in Committee Update

Councillor Kevin Connor, the Chair of the Call-in Committee, updated Members on the two recent meetings of the Call-in Committee, held on 21st

December 2023 (Burials and Cremations Fees) and 4th January 2024 (Car Park Fees and Charges).

Councillor Connor referenced comments made at both meetings about whether the meetings had been a good use of Members and Officers time, and he also felt that there was a misconception around the different roles of scrutiny, where Members could have an open debate and produce recommendations for improvement, as opposed a Call-in, where there was a set procedure to follow and the meeting was not a debate. Councillor Connor also stated that he felt that Members needed to be judicious before calling items in and consider the financial implications of delaying a decision being implemented.

Members of the Committee discussed the merits of the Call-in process in terms of alternative options by the Opposition being presented for consideration by Executive Members, but also of the clear need for Members to fully understand the role of the Call-in Committee and the process to be followed, and the Chair highlighted a training need in this regard for both existing and new Members.

RESOLVED-

1. That the update be noted; and
2. That the Monitoring Officer be requested to consider suitable Scrutiny training, which would also include specific focus on the Call-in process and proceedings.

14. Update on Finance

Councillor Vicky McGurk, Executive Member for Finance and Governance gave an overview of the latest budgetary position, referencing the Quarter 2 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring reports that were attached with the Agenda, with a current forecast of a £1.4M overspend at year end, although this would potentially reduce in the coming months.

Councillor McGurk highlighted the significant costs in Children's Services, which was a demand led budget, and the issues highlighted in the recent MacAllister report into the Children's Social Care system, which highlighted the problems within the sector with local authorities being unable to compete with independent agencies, who could pay staff more and charge local authorities higher prices.

Councillor McGurk highlighted a market failure, with recruitment issues being a big issue, with independent agencies able to pay staff such as Social Workers more, who would also be under less pressure than at a local authority. Similar issues existed with Adult Social Care, which led to higher costs and demand and made budget forecasting difficult.

Generally, Councillor McGurk highlighted a reduction in debts, and a focus on no new borrowing.

Dean Langton, Strategic Director Resources, delivered a presentation which picked out the key headlines from the reports submitted, which covered:

- Overview
- Portfolio position
- Savings Implemented
- Predicated Reserves as at 31st March 2024
- Capital Programme

Members of the Committee then asked questions, and made comments and observations relating to the following, which were responded to by Councillor McGurk and Dean Langton:

- Sustainability of Leisure Savings in the report (£160K) – these related to reduced energy costs, so should be achievable.
- Forecasted variance of £279K on Housing Services, mainly arising as a result of lack of resource to establish a new Selective Licensing area – work was now underway, but income would be less than predicted because of the size of the area, therefore this would be carried forward into the next financial year.
- As Childrens Services were demand driven, and therefore historically overspent each year, would the budget ever be manageable – all the issues referred to earlier by Councillor McGurk showed the difficulties of trying to forecast the budget spend, but variables were controlled as much as possible, with a focus on Early Help. Councillor McGurk indicated that the Government needed to put a cap in place to stop profiteering by private providers, and also referenced how poverty and the cost of living crisis all drove demand.
- Reference was also made to other costs and pressures in Children’s Services, such as the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block shortfall, the costs of Education Health Care Plans, and the recent withdrawal of an operators licence for free school transport and other factors.
- Predicated overspend of £200K in Growth and Development Portfolio – this would be recoverable as around £40M funding would be coming, and some could be top sliced.
- Revenue Collection – Council Tax and Business rates – Council Tax, £4.1m to collect which equated to 96.4%, and a shortfall of £2.6M, with 98% collection of Business Rates. The aspiration was for 100% collection of both, and debts were chased as much as possible.

The Executive Member and Dean Langton were thanked for the information presented and their responses to questions and comments.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

15. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 11th March 2024, where the main agenda item from the Work Programme would be Digital Management.

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed