

MINUTES

FINANCE AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

5 DECEMBER 2017

Present:

Cllr Chapman (Chair)
Cllr E Collins
Cllr Douris (Vice Chair)
Cllr Taylor
Cllr Tindall

Also Present:

Councillor Williams – Leader of the Council; and
Councillor Harden – Portfolio Holder for Residents and Corporate Services

Officers:

M Brookes	Solicitor to the Council
J Doyle	Group Manager - Democratic Services
F Jump	Group Manager – Financial Services
C Souto	Financial Planning & Analysis Team Leader
B Hosier	Group Manager - Commissioning, Procurement and Compliance
N Brown	Group Manager – Commercial Assets & Property Development
C Baker	Group Manager – Revenues, Benefits & Fraud
M Rawdon	Group Manager – People and Performance
B Trueman	Group Manager – Information, Communication & Technology
R Twidle	Member Support Officer (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

70 **MINUTES**

There were no minutes. The Chair confirmed they would be available at the next meeting.

71 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Chair gave the following apologies for absence:

- Councillor Howard was Chairing a different committee at the Joint Budget.
- Councillor Clark
- Councillor McLean attended the Joint Budget presentation, but was unable to attend the Committee due to another engagement.

R Twidle gave the following apologies:

- Councillor Adeleke
- Councillor Silwal
- Councillor Armytage was attending a different committee at the Joint Budget.

72 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During the course of the meeting Cllr Tindall declared an interest; he said a company of which he is a principal shareholder rented a garage from DBC.

73 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

74 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN

None.

75 JOINT BUDGET PREPARATIONS 2018/2019

Finance and Resources

C Baker, F Jump, B Hosier and N Brown gave a presentation regarding the budget for their service areas to the Committee.

The Chair thanked the contributors to the presentation and asked Members if they had any questions on the issues covered.

Cllr Taylor asked a question relating to cards. He said that on one side the Officers were saying cards were increasing costs and on the other, cards are saving money and reducing costs. He asked if there was an equalisation on that.

C Baker said probably not overall, he said it depended on the balance of the numbers who are using them and what they are used for. C Baker explained that Electronic Purchasing Cards (EPC) reduced costs; however this was balanced against the costs of credit card charges, particularly when people used them to pay. He said DBC could not avoid charging costs that needed to be paid. Cllr Taylor thanked C Baker.

Following a question from Cllr Taylor regarding the Rossgate Shopping centre receiving an allocation of £110K, N Brown confirmed this and advised that work would commence in the middle of next year because of the need for scaffolding.

Cllr Tindall referred to pg 15 of the Agenda pack. He quoted the figure of £366K reduction in Homeless Grant. He said that he had discussed homelessness problems over the last month and because of the changes in legislation, DBC was going to have greater difficulty with homelessness; he wondered why there was reduction. C Souto said that this was actually an income for the year that would be received on the basis of a new grant which will be ring-fenced to the Homelessness Service and will be specifically spent on homelessness.

Cllr Douris referred The Tour of Britain; he noted from the agenda pack that there was a £150K saving which indicated there would not be one next year. He asked if DBC had withdrawn from it or were unsuccessful in bidding for it.

Cllr Harden explained when DBC first did the Tour of Britain, in 2014/2015, there was an option to have 'first bite' of a future Tour. With the regeneration of the Town Centre, DBC decided to host the Tour again to showcase the new Town Centre. They were, however, quite expensive to facilitate, therefore this decision would need to be reviewed.

Cllr Douris asked if the officers were satisfied that with the credit card purchasing, and if DBC were receiving full VAT receipts, to ensure that repayment VAT was matched? C Souto and F Jump confirmed that there were very rigorous controls in place around purchases, and that VAT receipts could be provided.

The Chair asked B Hosier to clarify what was the retained parking service. B Hosier said that parking enforcement was carried out by Indigo Staff, but two members of staff had been directly retained by DBC (S Barnes and D Rodger).

Cllr Tindall referred to pg 18 of the agenda pack regarding Car Parking, specifically supplies and services; he asked for clarification regarding the figure of almost £122k, noting this was 19% of the budget. He also asked if DBC was any further with smart meters, which may add the car number to stop swapping car tickets and enable DBC to be smarter at the point of charging.

B Hosier said the £122k was in relation to savings that would be delivered through the parking service contract; however they did not exactly tally. He said there was a £30k reduction through the increased usage of Ringo cashless parking; this was because there is a small charge incurred by DBC for the use. Because the expenditure through Ringo increased, DBC ended up spending £30k more.

In relation to the second question, B Hosier said that as part of the new parking enforcement contract, new technology would be implemented. B Hosier said that people parking would have to input their registration numbers into the machine to ensure that it covered their car for that period of time. He said this technology would highlight parking issues and would produce e-maps so that they could be on- or off-street parking. He said DBC would then use that to focus the resource within those elements.

Cllr Tindall asked if therefore was any information on the future of The Heights; in particular if it was being sold. Cllr Tindall said that he realised that this may be commercially confidential then a response via Part 2 restrictions would be acceptable.

Action Point: N Brown to provide clarity around the sale of The Heights.

Cllr Douris addressed N Brown. He noted that the agenda pack indicated the AstroTurf replacement for the Sport Centre at cost of £70k; he said he has had previous experience of AstroTurf replacement at schools and thought this would be a much greater cost. N Brown confirmed that this was the cost that had been quoted. Cllr Douris asked N Brown if he could reassure the Committee on this figure. Cllr

Douris said that his previous experience of the matter suggested that the cost would be over £100k.

Action Point. N Brown to review and confirm the costs of the Astro turf replacement.

People, Performance and Innovation

B Trueman and M Rawdon gave a presentation regarding the budget for their service areas to the Committee,

Cllr Tindall asked B Trueman if he could provide any update on the Leisure Management Services contract. Cllr Harden advised that the information was available on Modern.Gov as both part 1 and 2, ready for Cabinet the following week. Cllr Tindall thanked Cllr Harden.

The Chair asked if there were any further questions.

Further to M Rawdon's presentation outlining the proposal to reduce hard copies of Dacorum Digest, which also highlighted that there were 11,000 subscribers to the digital copy, Cllr Douris asked how many homes/residences this equated to. He said it may be that it only goes to 4 or 5,000 homes; this was not a huge number if the hard copies were being deleted.

M Rawdon responded saying in terms of figures, he did not have that information to hand but would look into the matter and return to the Committee. M Rawdon emphasised that that the proposal was to reduce, not to discontinue the hard copy. He said that there were currently four editions per year, but the proposal was to reduce this to two editions, but they would be filled with as many articles as possible. M Rawdon said that when logging onto the DBC website, users will see information about how to subscribe to the E-newsletter; the focus would be to increase the amount of subscribers.

Action Point: M Rawdon to confirm the amount of subscribers in terms of residences.

Cllr Douris asked B Trueman to provide some more information regarding the Disaster Recovery site. He said it sounded as though it was hosted here; he asked what would happen if something were to go wrong with the building? How would this impact upon the recovery.

B Trueman advised that the live site was located in Amersham; effectively if the building falls down, the live site was still "ticking away". This meant that DBC staff would be able to go and work there. B Trueman said it was very important that the production site was separate to the live site, and not located in the same place. B Trueman said there was the possibility of the scenario where The Forum collapses and something catastrophic also were to happen in Amersham as well – he said although possible, it was extremely unlikely therefore this was accepted as a calculated risk.

Cllr Douris responded by asking if the alternative site should be somewhere in the far north of the country e.g. Calderdale, on the basis that Amersham was not that far

away. He said that, from his simple understanding, that if DBC were hosting data on the Cloud, it would be hosted in various places, all remote from each-other.

B Trueman said that DBC did not currently store its data in the Cloud, although said that it was likely that this would happen in the future. B Trueman said he thought in another five years, it was likely there would be a very slimmed down data centre and information would also on the Cloud; using the services like Microsoft Azure which could host servers such as DBC's. He said that in the meantime, the practical issue was that wherever the servers were located, staff need to be able to get there reasonably. B Trueman said if errors do occur, it was useful to be able to drive there and actually physically turn things off and on.

Cllr Douris asked if the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR) as well as its obligations, had any financial impact in the forthcoming year.

B Trueman said it was unlikely to, within his service provisions but he was unable to comment on the impact of other services within DBC. He explained that within the data centre re-provisioning, which was a project already budgeted for next financial year, there was a proposal to buy the new technology which included better tools for server sync data. B Trueman said that is the most obvious responsibility to the GDPR was that when individuals submitted subject access requests, that DBC provided everything that they held as quickly as possible. He said there were tools within the new data centre that would do exactly that.

Cllr Douris said there are a number of people that would need to be registered as Data Commissioners, at a cost of £35. Cllr Douris asked if an allowance had been budgeted for this. M Rawdon was not aware, but agreed that this would need to be taken into consideration.

The Chair advised that at the Member Development Steering Group (taking place the following evening), John Worts would be presenting on this matter, including GDPR self-registration for Members.

The Chair asked M Rawdon for some clarification on the figures and costs of agency staff. He accepted that the reduction of staff could be addressed through some developing new technologies, however he expressed concern that savings achieved by the reduction in staff was counterbalanced by the costs of agency staff. He asked for some further information on this point.

Action Point: M Rawdon to provide the Committee with the costs of agency staff.

The Chair raised the issue of the increased income on the garage pricing, noted as £350k (pg 14 of the agenda pack) He asked whether this was a percentage increase or savings. C Souto said that Elliott Brooks would be explaining this in greater detail in the Housing and Community OSC. She said there was a proposal to increase income from the garages by reviewing the pricing structure. This would include looking at garages around the Borough, with the view to identifying sites that could be considered premium garages, and therefore charge a greater rental income.

The Chair referred to the Business Rate Retention; he asked what this figure was as a percentage. He said it used to be 25%, and he was aware it that it had increased

over a period of time. He asked the relevant officer to come back to the Committee with this information. He wanted to know what DBC was paying and receiving, because there was a large business community within the Borough. He said he knew that DBC were looking at other ways of dealing with the business rate across the County.

Action Point: relevant officer to provide the Committee with the Business Rate retention figure as a percentage.

The Chair asked if there were any further questions and there were not. He said we could not go on to the next presentation.

Legal Governance and Democratic Services

M Brookes gave the Committee a presentation regarding the budget for his service areas. The Chair thanked M Brookes and invited questions.

Cllr Tindall referred to pg 23 of the agenda pack, he asked for clarification how Legal Services managed to increase income by 1222%. C Souto said that she did not believe there is an issue with the figures and explained there was an £5k additional income that had been generated. She said that what was a very small budget had been increased by £5k so the calculation was correct, it just looked rather odd the way it had been presented. M Brookes confirmed that this income had been generated by the street naming and numbering service.

Cllr Douris asked if the “numbering” referred to within the presentation was the numbering of the houses. M Brookes confirmed this, also confirming that DBC charged per property.

Cllr Harden asked what the approximate charge for street naming would be for a development, of that total £5,000. M Brookes said there was a schedule of rates, which was compared against what other Local Authorities were charging, as well as what the service cost to run. He said there was a recharge to try and recover this cost. He agreed that figure was probably quite conservative and hoped that it would be over-achieved.

The Chair referred back to the matter of increased bank charges for credit and debit cards He asked if DBC would receive this increase or if this was a cost charged by the credit card provider. Cllr Williams said that DBC was charging a levy to people who paid by credit card but from January 2018, the Government had banned credit card charges and fees. He said that as a result the cost of processing credit card transactions would be borne by DBC, therefore was a cost.

The Chair asked the Committee if there were any further questions; none were forthcoming.

76 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair highlighted the Work Programme is on pages 54 - 56. No comments were raised by the Committee regarding this item.

The Meeting ended at 9.10 pm The Chair closed the meeting and thanked those present for their attendance.