

MINUTES

FINANCE AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

12 JUNE 2018

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Howard
Herbert Chapman (Chair)
Douris
E Collins
Taylor
Tindall
Adeleke
Armytage
McLean
Banks (Vice-Chairman)
Barrett

Also Present:

Cllrs Harden & Elliott

Officers:	C Baker	Group Manager – Revenues, Benefits and Fraud
	M Brookes	Solicitor to the Council
	Jim Doyle	Group Manager – Democratic Services
	B Hosier	Group Manager – Procurement, Commissioning and Compliance
	N Howcutt	Assistant Director – Financial Services
	M Rawdon	Group Manager – People and Performance
	B Trueman	Group Manager – Technology and Digital Transformation
	S Turner	Directorate Support Lead Officer (minutes)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

43 **MINUTES**

44 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr Silwal (Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe substituting) and Cllr Fethney.

45 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Douris declared that he has an interest in a company that is mentioned in the papers.

46 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

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

None.

48 **ACTION POINTS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Cllr Tindall queried the number of vacant posts and suggested this could be putting additional strain on staff. The need for monitoring vacancies was important to ensure that it doesn't affect staff, Cllr Tindall wondered if the slight increase in sickness was due to the vacancies.

Cllr Douris asked that the action completed date is filled in.

Action: J Doyle

The information on the Mount Prison election was not included. J Doyle apologised and said he would ensure that it was available for the next meeting.

Action: J Doyle

The Chairman confirmed that the rest of the actions were all in order.

49 **Q4 BUDGET MONITORING**

The Chairman advised the Q4 Budget Monitoring Report was for the 2017/18 period.

Cllr McLean asked for clarification on switching Revenue to Capital. N Howcutt advised that this could be done as it was the Housing Revenue Account.

Cllr Douris mentioned that he would like to see all the other meetings this report has been to in the title. N Howcutt noted the request and would consider this going forward. M Brookes added that the other meetings were also included in the Consultees section.

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe requested that underspends always had a narrative. N Howcutt to include in future reports.

Action: N Howcutt

There were some concerns raised regarding the presentation of the report, including the paragraph numbering and the changes in the font. N Howcutt apologised as he thought this issue had been fixed. N Howcutt to ensure report presented correctly.

Action: N Howcutt

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe also queried the lease terms and using a developer for the CRM system while relying on an in house designer.

N Howcutt will confirm the lease issues.

Action N Howcutt

N Howcutt added that in terms of in-house use of developer, he had been here three months and he had found the in-house team very effective.

B Trueman clarified that ICT Project Management was already handled in-house but that we had been unsuccessful in recruiting a CRM Developer to a fixed term position. For this reason an agency resource was being sourced from Pertemps. As this approach is more expensive per day, greater emphasis is being placed on ensuring detailed instructions are in place for the developer.

Cllr Tindall commented on the condition of the greens and verges and enquired if this was due to the difficulty of recruiting Clean, Safe and Green Officers. Cllr Tindall asked if the issue can be overcome there is a rise in the number of calls he is getting about this problem.

Cllr Harden understood that there was a six week rota which is being carried out, the problem is that the weather, the sun and the rain, was creating perfect growing conditions. Cllr Harden added that if you have an issue, flag up to Simon Coultas, as he is always willing to help if he can.

Cllr Tindall said that despite the recruitment difficulties he would like the condition of the greens and verges explained. N Howcutt advised that this report was the Quarter 4 outturn when there would not have been a lot of grass cutting. Cllr Tindall requested a report be presented at the next meeting.

Action: Member Support

Cllr Tindall raised concerns about using Council properties for homelessness. He suggested that this needs to be reviewed frequently.

N Howcutt advised that using council stock is a last resort, it is a temporary solution and a way of using assets that might not otherwise be able to be used. The next steps are dependent on the investigation if the person is offered more permanent accommodation this is possibly going to be in the private rented sector.

Cllr Douris wanted to add a couple of words about the grass cutting. He said he is acutely aware of the issues with the weather, creating a perfect storm, and he said that he would resist the opportunity to complain. Also the other problem was that the grass clumps when it is cut and it can't be picked up as it would be too costly.

Councillor Taylor mentioned for the benefit of all Cllrs that Natasha Beresford may be able to expand on the use of Council stock for temporary accommodation at the Member Development evening.

Cllr Tindall asked what the problem was with the de-pooling of service charges. N Howcutt responded that the split out of rents and service charges was undertaken on inaccurate details of communal areas. A consultant has now reviewed the communal areas and there has been further work undertaken to assess the information. This has resulted in there being more certainty on the charges for 2018/19.

Cllr Tindall enquired about the repairs and maintenance underspend on planned work and if this affected the condition of the stock, also he would like to know why there is an overspend on responsive. N Howcutt confirmed that the condition of the stock was good and a decision had been made to reduce the planned work, to ensure that resources could cope with the planned and responsive, the planned work has been re-profiled and will be added into future years.

The Chairman wanted to know what improvements had been undertaken to contribute to the £190k income generation due to the incentive payment on waste services and how we sat with the nine other local authorities that were included in the scheme. N Howcutt advised he would provide a breakdown.

Action: N Howcutt

Cllr Elliott highlighted that he had seen many companies in the private sector with their year end outturn and he would like to compliment the expertise at Dacorum, he was confident that this would continue.

The Chairman asked for the recommendations to be agreed.

1. To carry forward the unspent reserve funded budget from 2017/18 to 2018/19.
2. The use of the Housing Review Account surplus to fund an increased Revenue Contribution to Capital.

All agreed the recommendations.

50 **Q4 FINANCE & RESOURCES**

N Howcutt said there was no significant issues. There is a change to the capital slippage from 3 to 4. In the performance report 10 of the 14 KP's are green.

Cllr Douris said this was exceptional. He enquired if the £89k variance was good or should we be looking at a larger variance. NH said that a lot of mitigating work had gone into budget monitoring and it may seem like a small variance but when you look at the minutia it was very good. There is also a good working balance which can be used if necessary.

The Chairman highlighted that the average time taken on benefits was on target and asked if the target would be reduced for Quarter 1. C Baker advised that it was best not to compare Q4 as this is very different to the other quarters, it is considered sensible to compare Q4 to Q4.

The Chairman asked that the recommendation that The Committee notes the contents of the report and the performance of Finance and Resources for Q4 2017/18.

All agreed the recommendation.

51 **Q4 LEGAL GOVERNANCE & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

Cllr Tindall enquired if the action taken in DBC v Ryan Bailey, where the applicant withdrew the appeal on the day, had resulted in any costs for Dacorum. M Brookes will check this with the team.

Action: M Brookes

Cllr Douris congratulated the legal team on these victories and asked if there had been sufficient publicity. M Brookes confirmed that when we are successful in prosecutions there was normally a press release issued, although these may not necessarily be published.

Cllr McLean asked for an update on the Maguma situation where the breach was determined and he was found guilty but no action had been taken. M Brookes advised this was the Courts decision and Mr Maguma has been given clear warning of future action should further breaches occur.

Cllr Armytage would like clarification on the Town and Parish Council work that had been undertaken. J Doyle advised this was work which Sharon Collins had helped with. J Doyle confirmed he would provide more information.

Action J Doyle

Cllr Douris enquired about the apprentice being appointed and if we pay apprentice levy. M Rawdon confirmed we do pay apprentice levy. J Doyle advised that the apprentice is due to start on 25 June.

The Chairman asked that Members note the report as per the recommendation. This was agreed.

52 **Q4 PERFORMANCE, PEOPLE & INNOVATION**

B Trueman confirmed that there were four green and four amber performance indicators at the moment.

Cllr Tindall raised concerns about the commentary relating to CSU11 – call handling abandoned call rate and asked for an explanation. M Rawdon confirmed there was an error.

Cllr Douris added that the commentary on CSU12 did not reflect the figures either. N Howcutt said this was a fundamental mistake and that CSU11 and CSU12 would be reported at the next meeting in more detail.

The Chairman asked that the information clarifying the commentary be circulated before the next meeting and it can be discussed at the July meeting.

Action: M Rawdon

More concerns were raised by Members. The Chairman clarified that the information would be circulated and it would be discussed at the next meeting. The Chairman confirmed that the matter is now closed.

Cllr Tindall commented on the increase in sickness levels. M Rawdon advised there is a presentation on sickness that includes the action being taken to reduce sickness.

The Chairman set out the recommendation that Committee notes the contents of the report and the performance of the division. The Committee agreed the recommendation.

53 SICKNESS REVIEW

M Rawdon gave a presentation update to the Committee on the sickness project.

Cllr Tindall raised the following points/questions:

- The short term gastro and headaches could be an early indication of stress and if monitored it could reduce the long term problem.
- Have Dacorum investigated the potential value for money of insuring against staff being off sick?
- Is sickness analysed in terms of patterns etc?
- Has any analysis been undertaken on the vacancies and their impact which could lead to stress?
- Would like to continue recording long-term and short-term sickness separately.

Cllr Douris added the following:

- Has any analysis been done on morale and if this affects attendance?
- Have other authorities been contacted to compare what we are doing?

M Rawdon said that morale is gauged in the staff survey and has been pretty consistent. Cllr Douris said that there had been a certain amount of disgruntlement as we have had a dispute with the unions.

Cllr Harden asked about thematic issues and how these are being dealt with.

M Rawdon said that we have done benchmarking with other authorities and our policies were found to be very robust within our area, we are able to withhold sick pay.

The Chairman asked if warnings and withholding pay applied to all. M Rawdon confirm that it was fairly applied.

Cllr Tindall pointed out that the staff survey response was low, that tells us more about the disgruntlement of staff. M Rawdon said that 52% of staff had responded and this was just above the average response rate.

N Howcutt confirmed that the survey is going to be undertaken annually.

Cllr Taylor indicated that morale should be discussed at appraisals rather than through an unnamed report. Cllr Tindall added that a good manager should know how staff are feeling.

Cllr McLean asked if there was statistics available on absences and the staff who were allowed to work flexibly versus those who not. M Rawdon said this could be looked at and provided to the Committee.

Action: M Rawdon

Cllr Collins said she would be interested to know if when we are interviewing if any account was taken if it was a man or a woman. Some reports had shown that men below the age of 40 had less sickness than women aged below 40 and that women over 40 had less sickness than men. M Rawdon confirmed that we had to comply with the equalities act and treated everyone the same regardless of age or gender.

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe suggested that there is a lot you can do in terms of wellbeing for alleviating musculoskeletal problems and also do we rely on GP's to sign people as fit for work, could we use an independent assessor to get people back to work. M Rawdon replied that we have an Occupational Health Practitioner who we use to challenge the medical advice and supports staff back to work. It sounds expensive but M Rawdon would be willing to explore the options.

Action: M Rawdon

Cllr Tindall asked about hot-desking and how often tests were carried out on the keyboards and chairs to ensure there aren't any pressures. M Rawdon confirmed that every new member of staff will do a self assessment, there are people trained to help. M Rawdon said it could be picked up as part of the Return to Work interview.

Action: M Rawdon

Cllr Tindall asked if there were any incidents of RSI or upper limb disorder. M Rawdon said that it would be considered if it was a problem in the trends.

Cllr Harden mentioned that hot-desking didn't seem to be a problem as some staff had their own chairs, also people are creatures of habit and a lot seem to be sitting in the same place.

N Howcutt advised that he is a new member of staff and as a new employee he had undertaken a DSE assessment which was very detailed and gave a lot of information on how to make adjustments to workstations and chairs. It was a very robust system.

Cllr Douris stated that he believes Occupational Health are situated far away and there is a private medical service up at Maylands costing about £95 per review, surely it would be more cost effective for them to do the return to work certificate.

The Chairman enquired if people who were off sick was offered redeployment within a certain timescale. M Rawdon responded that it depended on the medical information we received. The Chairman requested this continued.

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WORK PROGRAMME

Additions to the work programme include:

- Presentation by Communications – to be added to 17 July agenda.
- Clean, Safe and Green update – to be added to 17 July agenda
- CSU11 and CSU 12 update – to be added to 17 July agenda.

The Meeting ended at 9.15 pm