

MINUTES

FINANCE AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

17 JULY 2018

Councillors:

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

Also Present:

Cllr Harden – Portfolio Holder for Community and Regulatory Services

Cllr D Collins – Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Contracted Services

Officers:

N Howcutt	Assistant Director – Financial Services
Stuart Potton	Team Leader – Revenues and Benefits Support
M Rawdon	Group Manager – People and Performance
L Roberts	Assistant Director – Performance, People and Innovation
K. Solely	Team Leader – Communications and Consultation
S Turner	PA to the Corporate Directors (minutes)
L Warden	Group Manager – Tenants and Leaseholders

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

90 **MINUTES**

91 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Elliot and The Chairman confirmed that Cllr McLean would be arriving late.

92 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

93 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

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

None.

95 **ACTION POINTS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Cllr Douris said that the layout of the action points was very good and there was a lot of detailed information included.

Cllr Tindall suggested that the action points were numbered.

Action: Member Support

Cllr Tindall was concerned that the costs were not included for DBC v Ryan Bailey. M Brookes to confirm.

Action: M Brookes

Cllr Tindall mentioned the customer services information did not identify the date on the column and the commentary was incorrect. M Rawdon apologised for the error in the commentary.

Cllr Douris confirmed that the figures and commentary was not the current details and were from the last meeting.

96 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman confirmed he would always like the work programme to be at the end of the Agenda.

Action: Member Support

N Howcutt advised that some changes had been made to the Work Programme and Members may want to quickly review.

Councillor Douris commented on the presentation where the comments spill over the page. N Howcutt noted this and confirmed it would be rectified.

Action: N Howcutt

97 **FINANCIAL OUTCOMES OF CONTRACT MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTARY SECTOR**

Cllr Tindall declared an interest as he works with CAD on the Domestic Abuse Forum.

M Rawdon introduced the report and asked if there were any questions.

Cllr Tindall congratulated Officers as this seemed to be a success. Case Study 2 on P40 seemed to be a case of child abuse rather than domestic abuse.

Cllr Douris queried whether the amount of debt written off should be in a Part 2 report. The Chairman agreed this should be Part 2.

Cllr Douris would be interested to know what the 83 clients that Mediation Herts saw represented as a percentage of tenants. M Rawdon will ensure that information is sent to the Committee.

Action: M Rawdon

The Chairman declared that he was very pleased to see the good work P21, point 7.2 relating to the contractual relationships with the voluntary sector. The Chairman said well done to everyone involved.

98 UPDATE ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT

L Warden updated on the status with Universal Credit in Dacorum setting out the likely impact and the steps we are taking to mitigate the potential risks. A lot of the information is unknown and we are constantly receiving new instructions which makes establishing the risks more difficult. We have been talking with DWP to try and build relationships, with other authorities to try to learn from what they have done and also with CAB. There is also an internal Working Group which N Howcutt Chairs. We are continuing to do what we can but it's difficult with so much uncertainty.

Cllr Taylor raised concerns about the level of debt that has been reported in the paper. LW advised that this is not definite because it's all unknown, but it could be correct on a worst case scenario basis and we would expect this to decrease once more details are known. The other authorities we have contacted who are more advanced with the roll out of Universal Credit debt levels are less than expected but we have nothing to model this on because we do not have any data.

Cllr Taylor asked if he could take comfort that it is a worst case scenario and officers are working to address this. N Howcutt advised we have a very small number which is a very different group of demographic than we would expect by the full roll out. We don't know when the full roll out will be completed, we also know that any debt issues that other organisations have had could be very different because Universal Credit is constantly changing.

N Howcutt confirmed that there is a line people can call if they've got problems which is now Freephone, it wasn't before, so people will raise their issues earlier than they would before. We don't have any real indicator what rent debt levels people have and how that will impact with Dacorum population demographic. We don't really have any clear understanding of how it will be rolled out and how quickly, so if we rolled out everyone at the same time there would be a larger debt arrears than if you did it slowly.

N Howcutt mentioned that the delay of payments was more when they first started on Universal Credit and other concerns around landlords not accepting tenants on Universal Credit were a bigger issue previously than they potentially are now, since there is more legislation to stop them doing that. It's a moving feast, we don't know what the liability is, we believe there will be a liability and increased rent arrears, we've allowed for that in the HRA Business Plan. Until we have more definitive understanding of the volume, the clients and demographics we will not have a better understanding of modelling it.

N Howcutt explained that the Working Group is meeting every three weeks and every time we have an update from Central Government we will feed that into our models. We will bring another paper back in the next few months once we have more certainty.

Cllr Tindall thanked Officers for an extremely good and clear report, which details exactly what we are dealing with.

Cllr Tindall asked if there could be protocol on how we help the residents. There is an enormous financial risk to us and I think one of the best ways to mitigate this is to spend to save, which is to establish a protocol which recognises that two of the difficulties facing residents. The difficulty of form filling where it clearly half way through filling in the form it crashes and there's also the five week delay, which is difficult for people who don't have recourse to any surplus funds, where their living week to week. This means they will be five weeks behind with their rent immediately. We are not able to use DHP can we set up arrangements with the Credit Union, wouldn't advise we get these people in further debt but this could help residents. We have a duty as a Council to help the residents out as much as possible to steer them through this.

Cllr Tindall also recommended Universal Credit as an ideal subject for Member Development and I would suggest that all 51 Councillors attend.

L Warden highlighted that other authorities had provided a co-location triage for residents and that there Universal Support funding which has been provided to the CAB to help with budgeting for people affected. Additionally we have funding to help people make a claim as it's all online, we are working with the CAB and Library, also we are working with our tenants to encourage them to get online.

S Potton said that DHP is exactly as it's written in the report, you just can't claim it, but you can get advance of your Universal Credit if you are going to struggle.

Cllr Tindall asked about the application. S Potton advised that he is not aware of this as it would be administered by DWP. Cllr Tindall explained this is why we need a joint team and that it should help extract the maximum amount of money from the DWP for introducing this system.

N Howcutt said that section 8 of the report highlights what we are trying to do including the partnerships. It's not just the Council affected by this, the Job Centre is also affected. The DWP want this to be as successful as possible so they will work in partnership with local authorities as much as they can. We will work with them as best we can. The lack information is what prevents us from truly targeting the individuals that will impacted.

Cllr Tindall suggested that we contacted residents. N Howcutt advised this had caused significant difficulties for other authorities and advised that a more targeted approach would be more useful.

Cllr Banks asked if we could offer tenants the ability to overpay a little additional rent on a regular basis so that they build up a credit to help with the five-week delay. L Warden advised this is already being encouraged but unfortunately there was not a lot of people who are able to do this as they are on a limited income.

Cllr D Collins mentioned that Chart 5.2 indicates the roll out process and that it would be difficult for some people to get to Aylesbury or Luton. L Warden advised that the

DWP had different boundaries to us, but there had been some changes and she will email them out.

Action: L Warden

Cllr Douris mentioned that Great Gaddesden was missing in Chart 5.2. Also he believed the Library would be very happy to help people

The Chairman expressed concerns about private sector landlords debt and landlords refusing to accept tenants who are claiming Universal Credit. S.21 notices have been served on tenants to end tenancy in an expectation of arrears rather than actual arrears, we should look at this and speak to other authorities about the percentage of Landlords affected as this could cause problems finding accommodation for our residents. He also wants clarification on the legal situation with S.21.

Action: L Warden

99 COMMUNICATIONS PRESENTATION

Kelvin Soley gave a brief presentation outlining the role of the Department. Corporate projects, Campaigns and Events, website, consultations, staff engagements among others.

Cllr Douris thanked Kelvin for the presentation and said that is was he who requested it. Cllr Douris requested that a copy of the presentation be available for everyone.

Action: K Solely

Cllr Douris mentioned that the presentation shows 18039 residents but the slide shows this in views, is it views or residents – are they the same or different? K Solely said that it refers to the number of views and it depends what the campaign is.

Cllr Douris asked for confirmation that one of Kelvin's team was leaving and wondered if the person was going temporarily and if they would be replaced? KS confirmed that they would be doing a 13 month secondment for HCC who approached us directly, we have already appointed a replacement for those 13 months.

Cllr Douris said it was very interesting to see that only 2% of the population read the paper. He went on to say that he does not think that the department sells itself enough. For example the Leisure Services Contract where he felt that the Borough didn't actually portray itself to the public. He felt it may have been let down a bit by the internal comms team, but since he started this questioning it feels to him as though there was a far greater level of comms communication to the public than there was beforehand. He asked Kelvin if he recognises any weaknesses that have taken place within the team and whether he has looked at strengthening those and continuing to strengthen them, and of course the fact that the team have won awards, something which probably nobody in this room knew anything about, which is a shame. We want to sell to the residents of Dacorum what a great place Dacorum is and what a good Borough Council we are, we have an awful lot going for us.

Cllr Harden said that he thought the Leisure Contract was a difficult thing purely because of the procurement element, so there was some difficulty for our Communications Team when there was a lot of social media activity from the Sport Space side. Everyone Active have done very well with all their publicity and promotions after the contract and maybe there is a lesson learnt for us internally with how to deal with that - and certainly we did put out a lot of promotions straight after the contract. It may be a case of when Social Media clashes with the legality of internal procurement and how we deal with that, is probably an area where we can learn something.

Cllr Douris said that he accepted everything Cllr Harden said.

Cllr D Collins asked how much monitoring of social media sites comms does. For example, if he wanted to find out the views of people in Berkhamsted he said he would go to Everything Berkhamsted and it will tell you instantly whether things are good or bad. He asked whether as a communications group sites like these are monitored, because he feels that if you really want to know what people are thinking you have to go to sites like that and when it comes to things like the sports contract obviously he is concerned that we get feedback quickly on any potential problems. He asked if there is an operation that monitors these types of sites and precis' what is coming in.

K Solely replied. We do, we use one of the leading media intelligence platforms to monitor all social media etc., so we are aware of certain triggers that refer to DBC or any triggers that we set up, and on a more personal level, yes we do have a look at Everything Berkhamsted, Hemel Community and Conversation etc, so we are aware of all the different groups – where it does become a lot more challenging is when as a council there are areas we cannot overstep so as an organisation we cannot directly comment within those groups, whereas individuals are able to do that. We can respond to people when they contact us directly on our channels.

Cllr Harden asked if there is a mechanism internally of getting a view of something developing in the community and then having a conversation around what the corporate response is, if you get something building up which is negative to the council how does it work with regards to doing a press release or a comment in response to the negativity.

K Solely explained that it is a difficult area but we are looking at how to respond within forums and it is one where we need to look at the different options and whether it is sharing content for example the Splash Park opening that was sent out to all our followers and reposted within those groups. But we do need to have a look at the negative reactions that we need to pick up on and we are not complacent.

L Warden highlighted one example of how we've worked with this, is we spotted on the Hemel Communities page there were a lot of comments about clear landings policy, around peoples shoes being taken and then there are a raft of comments underneath it and we can't personally go on there, but we speak to the communications team who will then put something on the DBC page which explains our policy and why we are doing this due to fire risk etc.

Cllr Douris said that thinking about the Splash Park opening, he said that HCC will ring round the media outlets and let them know if there is an upcoming event, do the

Comms Team ring round the radio stations and say do you know that there is a Splash Park, do you want to do an interview with Cllr Marshall? He feels that would be proactive and he is not sure he is hearing proactivity.

K Solely replied that we do, it is all linked as part of a multi-channel campaign so all the press would be notified at the same time. A recent example of a proactive event was the Dacorum Business Heroes there we have had in the last 3 or 4 editions half page articles in there actively working with community editors putting together pieces reflecting business heroes in the community.

Cllr Douris said he would challenge that – because you have said you put out media alerts which he could interpret that as you do an email out saying there is a Splash Park opening as there are differences between this and business heroes which has a certain area of interest in reality. Something like the Splash Park which is a big investment for us and appeals to probably the broadest sector of our population, but he hasn't heard comms say "We will phone the media" and Radio Dacorum fine though it is – it's not the BBC it's not Herts it is not all the others, we need to get onto those, but he has not heard you say that your team pick up the phone on things like this which have mass market appeal and actually phone the media.

K Solely We will be calling round not only social media but all the press media etc., so it's not something that will just pass by quietly it is a big event and will be communicated as such.

L Roberts said that part of their previous experience was with the BBC and although we may well want to put stuff out to them they may well not be interested. We will endeavour to be proactive but it doesn't guarantee that they will be interested.

Cllr Tindall remarked that one thing that had been missing out of this is the Ward Councillors, they do not always seem to be fully informed of what is going on in their areas, and there should be a point where communications lets them know as they are possibly the experts on exactly what is going on in those areas so is there a protocol as to when ward councillors should be notified of different things that are observed on different websites or have been generated from within the council?

K Solely said that there are a number of outlets for any target issue, press release irrespective of which area all councillors are notified.

Cllr Tindall said that he felt there were instances that ward Councillors should be the first port of call when it was to do with their ward and that there have been recent instances where the councillors haven't been fully informed. It is not very good if they then have to chase to find out what is going on. He asked if there was any briefings which says that if something pops up that affects a ward or wards you will notify the ward councillor as to what is going on. He gave the example that recently a resident wrote in about a problem and he was contacted as the ward Councillor for a response before the resident was replied to, he was able to say that we will deal with that and you don't have to worry about it anymore. It was confirmed that not all issues came through Comms.

Cllr Tindall said that he doesn't look at Facebook or Twitter and if something came up on those sites it would be good to be informed by Comms.

Cllr Douris said that he felt it is a difficult subject for Communications to deal with on that level, and that he thinks different areas have responsibility for things and perhaps it is for the services to let the Councillor know.

L Roberts said that she thinks that there is something that they can do, which is to look at communications that we do and make sure that when we put the plans together that it is something that we consider, because on an ad hoc basis it would be very difficult and what we don't want to do is as a Comms team is get in between the residents and whichever service they are working with as that would actually complicate matters, but when we are looking at Comms as part of an initiative, things like Universal Credit etc , then definitely we should take that into account in terms of whatever can be done to keep Councillors in the loop.

Cllr Harden mentioned the leading a horse to water scenario where the number of press releases that come out that don't appear in The Gazette, is something that members need to be aware of. The question I did want to ask and would like a show of hands here – can members put their hands up if they receive press releases direct from the Communications Team? Cllr Harden said he is on the mailing list and that others should get themselves on it because there are a lot that come out that we won't necessarily see in the local papers or the press but are very good press releases coming from the Comms team. They are a really good informative thing even if they are not specific to your area.

Cllr Douris said that it gives that advance knowledge of what is happening. Cllr Douris then went on to ask if on the first slide we were the highest ranked in Hertfordshire at 98.8. What Cllr Douris would like to know is could we have the figures from the other local authorities so that we can get an idea of where we stand – it might be 98.8, 98.7 but if you could let us have that detail. He also mentioned that his background is in sales and marketing and the presentation was exceptional with the detail in it, what we are achieving he feels that we should concentrate on the headlines. He feels that we don't do it enough, we put in detail. The splash park, there is all the detail of what we do, but 'Splash Park Wonderful!' or something like that so that it hits the headlines, because that is what people notice they don't read down into the detail, so I think that the headlines are where we have got to promote ourselves more. Dacorum is doing fantastic work and the figures show that we are getting there. The presentation is really exceptional actually and I think we should be promoting ourselves all the time, so if we could have the figures for where we are in Hertfordshire and promote ourselves for all the work that you guys are doing. Thank you.

Action: K Soley

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

The Meeting ended at 9.00 pm