

MINUTES

FINANCE AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

4 DECEMBER 2018

Councillors: Douris
E Collins
Taylor
Tindall
Banks (Vice-Chairman)
Barrett

Officers:	Sally Marshall	Chief Executive
	Ben Trueman	Group Manager – Technology & Digital Transformation
	Chris Baker	Group Manager - Revenues, Benefits & Fraud
	Mark Brookes	Assistant Director - Corporate and Contracted Services
	Ben Hosier	Group Manager - Procurement and Contracted Services
	Nigel Howcutt	Assistant Director - Finance and Resources
	Linda Roberts	Assistant Director - Performance, People and Innovation
	Caroline Souto	Financial Planning & Analysis Team Leader
	Sarah Turner	PA to the Corporate Directors

Also Attendance:

Councillor Graeme Elliot
Councillor David Collins
Councillor Andrew Williams

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

127 MINUTES

Following a Joint meeting of the OSC's where a budget presentation was given, the Finance & Resources OSC meeting began at 8.05pm.

The minutes from 06 November 2018 were agreed and then signed by the Chairman.

128 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Chapman and McLean.

129 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Douris declared an interest as he is a principal shareholder in a company that rents a garage from the Council

130 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

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

None.

132 **ACTION POINTS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Chair mentioned that there were some outstanding actions that needed completing.

In regards to the query from Cllr Elliot on the slippage with the FM contract, B Hosier confirmed that we don't have slippage on revenue expenditure, it would be an overspend. This amounted to 18% of the FM budget, broken down into task orders £45k and asset verification of £25k. When the budget was set for this year, it was very early for the move into this building and wasn't fully aware of what the building needed so there was a need to amend the overspend on the current budget.

C Baker responded on the outstanding query on FR_RO1 relating to whether anything was being done to mitigate the risk. The risk report contains the controls and mitigations.

M Brookes confirmed that the second closure order was required in the DBCvOgundipe case as there was further incidents of anti-social behaviour.

Cllr Tindall mentioned the response in regards to the slippage on the garage project which related to legal party walls and asked if this is the first time the issue has arisen. N Howcutt advised that he was not aware that this had arisen previously.

Cllr Tindall asked if the residents in sheltered accommodation would be refunded the 24p per week now that it has been confirmed that the window cleaning service has not been provided. N Howcutt will confirm with the service.

Action N Howcutt

133 **BUDGET PREPARATIONS 2019/20**

N Howcutt gave a presentation on the Finance & Resources service. The presentation is appended to the minutes as Appendix A. Questions arising were as follows:

Cllr Douris enquired how many properties would be affected by the empty homes policy and why. N Howcutt advised it would be about 100. C Baker confirmed there were various reasons why the properties have been left unoccupied.

Cllr Tindall asked if these properties could be empty as the resident had to go into a care home. C Baker said that there are some exemptions and this would be one of the reasons. Also properties must be empty for two years before the premium is applied, and we contact council tax payers before this period ends.

Cllr Tindall asked for clarification on whether it is likely that there will be any new homes bonus come through this year that could be used for capital projects. N Howcutt confirmed this was reducing year on year by about £200k.

Cllr Douris mentioned 39-41 Marlowes and that there had been a lot of work undertaken. S Marshall confirmed that the Health Authority had undertaken this work and not the Council. Cllr Taylor advised he had been on a tour of the building with Health in Dacorum OSC and they confirmed that £2m was spent on works.

M Brookes presented the budget for Corporate and Contracted Services. The presentation is appended at Appendix B. Questions raised on the presentation were as follows:

Cllr Douris asked if we still have a Barrister working for us. M Brookes confirmed that both Chris Gaunt and Usman Mohammed are Barristers

Cllr Douris highlighted that The Forum was being recognised across Hertfordshire for bringing in a number of services from different sectors.

L Roberts gave a presentation on the Performance, People and Innovation Service. The presentation is appended at Appendix C. Questions raised following the presentation were as follows:

Cllr Taylor mentioned that he had previously been involved in developing online training for Members with HR and queried if this will be included in the new HR system. L Roberts advised that the new system may not be a learning system. It will record what training has taken place for individuals and the learning platform is being looked at as well and there is no reason why this shouldn't look at Members as well.

Cllr Tindall queried what the £63k outturn on employees in Human Resources is for. L Roberts replied that this is actually the recruitment budget where we have gone to the market using agents so we've spent more on recruitment of hard to fill posts. Cllr Tindall asked if this will occur in the future. L Roberts confirmed that this is not related, because the process in which we recruit is not directly related to the HR system, however we have got a recruitment project looking at how we recruit people and the way in which we recruit them, for example using LinkedIn.

Cllr Taylor raised concerns regarding the back up to Bucks CC to Cupid Green and wanted to be reassured that this wasn't too close to The Forum. B Trueman confirmed that the greatest risk is the BT line. At Cupid there will be diverse routes and if there are problems we will be able to get there quickly. The risk has been weighed up and if there is a major issue generally the server will keep working.

Cllr Douris asked if we back up the data onto numerous systems including the cloud. B Trueman confirmed that we do back up in a number of ways, there is the DR centre at The Forum and we also back up to tape which is held offsite, we do not currently use the cloud.

S Marshall presented on the Corporate Initiatives, specifically Graduate and Apprenticeship Scheme and the presentation is appended at Appendix D. Questions raised on the presentation include:

Cllr Tindall asked if we will be working with West Herts College for Apprenticeships. S Marshall confirmed that we would and that we would also be looking at Herts University. We will also be looking at local universities and colleges and going further afield.

Cllr Tindall mentioned that it would be good to have a couple of apprentices in Clean, Safe and Green. S Marshall replied that we already had one in the Water Gardens. S Marshall added that we will also be looking at other ways for recruitment including holding career days.

Cllr Douris highlighted that Herts CC have a number of good trainees that fulfil a very important role. Cllr Douris said that he welcomes this initiative and asked if care leavers could be considered. S Marshall replied that she will make sure that we advertise in those quarters.

N Howcutt advised that was the end of the service presentations and enquired if there were any further questions on the detailed report included in the agenda.

Cllr Douris asked if we have made any allowance for Universal Credit bad debts. C Baker said this was not something that we needed to make a provision during 2019/20 as the transfer to Universal Credit will not be a 'big bang' it will happen very gradually and we probably won't see an impact until 2020/21. N Howcutt said this was a chicken and egg scenario where benefits are paid via grant which will be reduced over time but the bad debt provision will be a very small percentage. The roll out for Universal Credit for new applicants is tomorrow and we are waiting for an announcement from the Government for applicant already in receipt of benefits.

Cllr Douris queried how resilient are we for any change in the VAT rate. N Howcutt confirmed that this was not a serious concern and is very unlikely.

Cllr Tindall mentioned that the roll out of Universal Credit was based on postcodes, so should have been predictable. C Baker said that the next stage of the roll out was based on new claims, which aren't predictable, also it hasn't been announced when the managed migration for existing benefit claimants will be. It would also be difficult to predict if there are any changes to existing applicants circumstances, so there are a lot of unknowns. N Howcutt reassured Members that Officers will continue to provide information during the roll out.

Cllr Barrett queried why the insurance premium is exactly the same. N Howcutt advised that the external costs have not changed as it is a 3 or 5 year agreement and there are no changes for the internal provision. The external contract will be up for renewal soon. N Howcutt will confirm the full details.

Action: N Howcutt

Cllr Tindall enquired about the Homeless Support Grant as the Homelessness team do great work. N Howcutt confirmed that the final settlement will be in January and the expectation is that this will remain the same.

134 **WORK PROGRAMME**

There were no additions to the Work Programme.

It was agreed that the Chair would be asked if L Roberts was the only Officer required to attend the January meeting as there was only the New Normal report listed on the agenda.

The Meeting ended at 9.35 pm