

## MINUTES

### STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

19 SEPTEMBER 2018

<b>Councillors:</b>	Anderson (Chairman)	Hicks
	Bateman	Howard
	Birnie (Vice-Chairman)	Matthews
	Fisher	Ransley
	S Hearn	Riddick
<b>Officers:</b>	Claire Covington	Strategic Planning and Regeneration Officer
	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration
	Fiona Jump	Group Manager - Financial Services
	Katie Mogan	Corporate and Democratic Support Lead Officer
	Craig Thorpe	Group Manager - Environmental Services

#### Also in attendance:

Councillor Neil Harden  
Councillor Janice Marshall  
Councillor Graham Sutton

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

#### **112**            **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 June 2018 were confirmed by the members present and signed by the Chairman.

#### **113**            **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe.

#### **114**            **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **115**            **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

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

None.

**117**                    **BUDGET MONITORING Q1**

F Jump introduced the report to members and ran through the projected outturn. The headlines for this quarter were as follows:

- the General Fund pressure for DBC as a whole is currently £719k
- paragraph 3.4 shows the breakdown of the current financial position.
- within the £719k pressure, £595k relates to this committee but the current early projection is that it is expected to improve.
- majority of the overspend is in supplies and services. Co-mingled waste disposal has a £500k pressure.
- the capital programme at appendix B shows a slippage of £1.7 million. Under line 128, there has been an underspend of £125k as a solution has been found to extend the life of the roof of Berkhamsted Sports Centre.

Councillor Birnie said he was concerned about commercial waste and asked officers why they thought this was going to get better.

C Thorpe said the main reason was the cost of materials. A year ago, the price of materials was fairly stable. Now it has dropped and we are not taking on as many customers so therefore collecting at a loss.

Councillor Anderson asked about the commercial waste annual income target.

F Jump said it was currently £1.1 million

Councillor Anderson suggested the budget setting process might be making life harder by being over optimistic.

Councillor Birnie asked if other costs were contributing to the loss of income or if it was the increased costs of disposal.

C Thorpe said it was loss of income. The Chinese market is no longer taking plastic but the price of paper is starting to slowly increase.

Councillor Marshall said there was a reduction in income but not a loss overall. She said that investigations are continuing into the reasons why.

Councillor Matthews said that other local authorities must be facing the same issue. He questioned whether there was any way of increasing the value of the waste by changing the collection strategy.

C Thorpe said it was a country wide issue and in meetings with colleagues, some said that they had reported the impact of loss of income into their budgets

Councillor S Hearn commented that the provision of services is more important than the financial implications.

Councillor Birnie referred to the increase in planning incomes fees but queried as to why the same wasn't true for land charges.

J Doe said the increase in income was from major applications who attract disproportionate fees. There has been less activity in the property market so there has been less land charge searches. However, developers can obviously see a long term demand.

### **Outcome**

That the Strategic Planning & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the report.

## **118                    ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

C Thorpe introduced the report to members and ran through the highlights:

- the food waste trials in flats is almost complete. 1600 properties across the borough were involved. Residents have been written to and ask to complete an online survey about their experience and these results will be analysed.
- the clothes swap event was very successful with 60% of items swapped.
- the new dog bin operative has done a lot of work in mapping where the bins are in relation to general litter bins. Parish Council bins will now be emptied as part of their rounds.
- The Splash Park was opened and has proved very successful and staff have been recognised on social media.
- there is an increase in missed bins in the performance data. This is due to a number of vacancies and agency staff.

Councillor Matthews asked if other councils have looked into the loss of revenue and if any alternative solutions will be shared. Will there be a strategy review in light of current waste costs?

C Thorpe said they are always looking at ways to improve. Some authorities in the Herts Waste Partnership can play the market to get a better deal but DBC are tied into a contract. However, DBC have benefitted from higher prices in the past under this contract.

Councillor Matthews said there was always some confusion in Berkhamsted about bin collection days and what bin should be collected. He asked if the calendars would be reissued.

C Thorpe said the bin collection calendar was available on the website. The bin calendar for 2019 will be distributed to properties at the end of November. The cost to print these calendars and distribute cost £9k.

Councillor Birnie said he was pleased to see that the trial for flat recycling had gone well. He asked why the focus was on newer flats?

C Thorpe said a cross section of flats was used. There are 8,000 flats with no ability to recycle.

Councillor Marshall said the food trial lasted for three months over three areas. The comingled recycling will be provided through wheelie bins held in metal frames. In October, wheelie bins will be rolled out for flats that currently have no facilities.

Councillor Hicks asked if this would save money.

C Thorpe said it would cost money but the environment is the driving factor here.

Councillor Hicks said he had been contacted by residents who have reported missed bins or waste left by bin lorries but the council do not respond to say they have cleared it up.

C Thorpe said there are about 120 missed bins a week and it would be a huge resource to have to respond to every resident.

Councillor Harden said residents can log issues on the resident's portal and they can check the status of the issue online.

Councillor Anderson said that the Splash Park had been a huge success.

### **Outcome**

That the Strategic Planning & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the report.

## **119                    ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Councillor Anderson said that E Walker was currently off and sent best wishes for a speedy recovery on behalf of the committee.

Councillor Anderson asked about the recent PH decision in relation to temporary staff.

Councillor Harden said this was to suspend standing orders as the department had reached the threshold to recruit. The team is now fully staffed.

Councillor Howard referred to paragraph 3.10 about pest control. She asked if the hot weather had increased the number of calls.

Councillor Harden said nothing had been raised to him as an issue.

Councillor Birnie said he was happy to see the department had met the targets on fly tipping as it continues to be a huge problem.

### **Outcome**

That the Strategic Planning & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the report.

## **120                    PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION Q4/Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

J Doe introduced the report to members and ran through the highlights:

- The decision targets have been met at 82% for appeals. The national average is 65%.
- The competitive situation in building control has increased due to the growth in private approved inspectors. One has now opened in Hemel Hempstead – these private companies can make a profit but the council must balance its books over three years. To bolster DBC's competitiveness, we are looking at providing a high quality service which will include being able to book inspections via an app.
- Land charges are currently £60k below budget which is due to a slowdown in the property market.
- Planning validation is disappointing as 43% but this has already improved this year – August was 68%.
- Paragraph 22 refers to the roll out of the new planning software. This should be fully operational in 6-9 months.

Councillor Birnie asked if time had been allocated for officer training on the new planning software.

J Doe reassured members that officers would have time to be trained and test the system.

Councillor Hicks referred to the problem in Building Control. Wouldn't it be easier if wages could be raised for these positions to attract the right candidates?

J Doe said the council operates a pay structure so it isn't as easy as to just increase wages.

Councillor Matthews asked if training would be given to councillors.

J Doe said there will be a briefing for members.

Councillor Matthews asked if the letters sent to residents would be improved as there are many complaints from residents about not receiving letters for developments close to them.

J Doe said the notifications will be looked at.

Councillor Birnie said there was often many valid objections from residents that are not being reported to the Development Management Committee.

J Doe said it isn't always possible to list every objection so officers normally provide a summary.

### **Outcome**

That the Strategic Planning & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the report.

J Doe introduced the report to members. The Hemel Hempstead Masterplan refers to improving the access and movement around the Water Gardens car park. Bridge Street would be improved by narrowing the road and making it one way out of the car park. One issue is that it would remove the disabled parking but this does currently cause congestion. The project has been delayed as it was felt the Water Gardens regeneration should be completed first. The budget for the project is £759k with a £160k contingency as it is classed as a high risk project in the town centre. The report is due to go to Cabinet next month and the project will begin, if approved, in 2019.

Councillor Anderson asked why was it necessary to make the slip road into the car park so long and take out so many of the trees softening the urban landscape.

J Doe said the plans were drawn up by Highway engineers, who were concerned about the traffic flow on Leighton Buzzard Road.

Councillor Anderson pointed out that any queuing traffic would simply backup through the traffic light controlled pedestrian crossing anyway.

Councillor Birnie said he had two concerns with this project. Firstly, it seems rather expensive and secondly, the displacement of blue badge holders who have already been affected by the taxi rank.

Councillor Harden said blue badge holders were legally allowed to park anywhere and they get free parking in the car parks. There is a safety issue on Bridge Street for pedestrians which will be improved with this project.

Councillor Ransley hoped that the road markings would be repainted as the roundabout on Bridge Street is invisible. She also raised the issue that people may become confused about the one way system.

Councillor G Sutton said not of all the signs were included on the drawing provided. The direction of travel will be clockwise.

J Doe said the main cost of the project was the creation of the slip road. At the moment, Bridge Street divides the Water Gardens in two so this project will create a seamless feel to the gardens.

Councillor Birnie asked how this project would make it easier for pedestrians to enter from Leighton Buzzard Road.

C Covington said at the moment, there are two footpaths and the public realm is poor and the routes are unclear. There also isn't a dropped kerb so there is no good access from the pelican crossing into town centre.

Councillor Anderson said the slip road was quite close to the crossing.

J Doe said he would take this point back but it had been through safety audit training.

Councillor Anderson suggested that the slip road turn be closer to the car park.

C Covington said this would then potentially back up traffic onto the Leighton Buzzard Road.

Councillor Anderson advised that the traffic would backup through the pedestrian

crossing anyway.

Councillor G Sutton said the slip road into the tiered car park was also quite long. The Leighton Buzzard Road is quite narrow for the amount of traffic it takes.

### **Outcome**

That the Strategic Planning & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report but was concerned about the necessity of the length and positioning of the slip road.

## **122                    WORK PROGRAMME**

Councillor Birnie said he wanted to bring forward the parking standards report as January was too far away. This policy was causing issues at the Development Management Committee.

J Doe said the main focus was currently on the Local Plan but would discuss with Portfolio Holder to see if any interim advice could be given to DMC.

Councillor Anderson said an interim report might help.

Councillor Marshall said she doubted the report on flat recycling would be ready in November and would be better placed in January.

The Meeting ended at 9.20 pm