

## **MINUTES**

### **FINANCE AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**13 NOVEMBER 2019**

**Present:**

**Councillors:** Cllr Adeleke  
Cllr Barrett  
Cllr Chapman  
Cllr Cloughton  
Cllr Sobaan Mahmood  
Cllr Suqlain Mahmood (Chairman)  
Cllr Hollinghurst  
Cllr Stevens  
Cllr Taylor  
Cllr Townsend (Vice-Chairman)

**Officers:**

M Brookes	Assistant Director – Corporate and Contracted Services
N Howcutt	Assistant Director – Finance and Resources
L Roberts	Assistant Director – Performance, People and Innovation
B Trueman	Group Manager – Technology and Digital Transformation
B Hosier	Group Manager – Procurement and Contracted Services
F Hussain	Group Manager – Legal and Corporate Services
T Angel	Corporate and Democratic Support Officer (Minutes)

**Also Present:**

Councillor Williams – Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Contracted Services

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

## **1 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2019 were agreed by the members present and then signed by the Chairman.

## **2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Sinha, Symington and Tindall.

Councillor Stevens substituted for Councillor Tindall.

Councillor Hollinghurst substituted for Councillor Symington.

Councillor Elliot, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, also gave his apologies.

### **3                    DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4                    PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

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

None.

### **6                    ACTION POINTS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

There were no outstanding actions from the meetings held in September and October.

### **7                    QUARTER 2 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**

The Chairman made an observation that the quarterly budget reports were very similar. N Howcutt suggested he could create an executive summary of quarter on quarter changes to be placed at the beginning of the document if that was something the committee would prefer. The committee agreed that would be a good idea. Councillor Cloughton said he didn't find the report template very helpful and asked if it was something that could be reviewed. L Roberts said this matter had been discussed at the 'away day' with Cabinet and CMT, and they were looking at possible improvements.

N Howcutt introduced the report and summarised the key issues; a General Fund pressure of £126k, not significantly different to quarter one. The HRA has a surplus of £433k, a slight increase quarter on quarter. The Capital Programme has a slippage of £3.1m, which is less than 5% of the overall programme.

Councillor Townsend referred to the minimum revenue provision of the core funding. He noted that the provision was £165k lower as a result from 18/19 and asked why it wasn't included in the original budget. N Howcutt advised that the budgets are set in November/December, but also they don't know the actual outturn of the capital programme until May/June so it was a timing issue.

Councillor Sobaan Mahmood asked for some more information on the £35k Brexit fund and what it covered. N Howcutt explained that it covered the costs we had incurred to date for exploring the expenditure implications of Brexit. He advised they had set up the Brexit implication model and that had highlighted the areas that would need investment. They had also used some of those funds for training additional Environmental Health Officers. He added that we were in a secure period at the moment but once Brexit has happened we would need to spend significantly more than the current government funding.

Councillor Cloughton referred to paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2. He queried if the £50k fuel costs were duplicates or if the spend had doubled. N Howcutt explained that the fuel

had overspent slightly last year but also because they were changing the fleet around they haven't had the correct vehicles available for certain routes so they've had to split routes and carry out double journeys.

Councillor Barrett drew attention to the additional £80k insurance income and asked if it could have been anticipated in the original budget. N Howcutt advised we had signed a new insurance contract in year this year and the costs were lower than we projected they would be. Also the volume of work going through had increased and we recharge the costs to a lot of external organisations that feed off of our insurance so we had benefitted from that.

Councillor Barrett referred to the £80k investment income and asked what cash balances we had to produce that. N Howcutt advised that our cash balances at present were approximately £95.2m, significantly higher than projected.

Councillor Chapman referred to paragraph 4.1 and expressed his concern for the amount spent on agency staff. N Howcutt said he could speak to HR colleagues about the volume of permanent staff versus agency staff if required. He explained that we have had some short term projects and when we've taken the income we have to deliver the work. He added that they have had some employees off work for various reasons so it made sense to bring in temporary staff.

Councillor Chapman referred to paragraph 5.2 relating to garage voids. He asked if there were any results yet from the garage survey. L Roberts advised that they had appointed a consultant two weeks ago on a full time basis to lead the project. She said there had been an issue with the surveys and they had to use some paper forms due to the interfaces not working. She said they planned to bring a report to this committee in February 2020 and hoped that would bring a more complete picture of the service.

Councillor Hollinghurst felt that garages were too small for cars these days and asked if there was a possibility of demolishing and rebuilding the garages but building less and making each one wider. He also suggested increasing the rents and making them premium garages. L Roberts advised that the outcome of the survey would look at the potential for demand and whether people want garages for cars, storage or alternative uses such as workspaces.

Councillor Taylor asked how we were engaging and consulting with residents about the use of garages in their area. L Roberts said they had a list of residents who had expressed an interest in garages so there were officers going through the system and contacting the individuals. Councillor Taylor asked if there was any engagement with the wider community. L Roberts replied that hadn't been planned for at present but it was something they would look at going forward. Councillor Taylor asked for full details of the engagement process and asked for copies of any surveys or information that is circulated with the wider community so they can be kept informed at all times.

**Action: L Roberts**

Councillor Adeleke referred to the budget of £25k for the replacement kiosks and asked if that was council property. N Howcutt explained that it referred to the replacement kiosks in the customer service unit and the works had been bought forward to ensure they had the resilience in service. Councillor Adeleke asked if they had considered the ongoing maintenance. N Howcutt advised they had the continued

ongoing maintenance they already have at the moment so all costs were already factored in to the budget. He said it would be a better system and more resilient.

Councillor Chapman referred to page 20 regarding buying back a leasehold property that had been sold under the Right to Buy scheme. He asked if this was unusual. N Howcutt explained that there were extenuating circumstances in this case and it was in the council's best interest to buy the property back.

Councillor Cloughton referred to paragraph 6.5 relating to an underspend of £270k. He asked what the vacancies were and what impact that had on the services. N Howcutt said this report was at the Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee last week and it was discussed in detail. He suggested reading the minutes of that meeting as there wasn't a representative from Housing here to answer his queries.

Councillor Stevens asked if tenant's charges were fully recovered and if they were properly proportioned to each of the tenants. N Howcutt advised yes they were. He explained that until the service was delivered it may mean that the recharge goes up or down depending on the standard of service and whether the work has been completed or not.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

## **8                    QUARTER 2 FINANCE AND RESOURCES PERFORMANCE REPORT**

N Howcutt introduced the report. He referred to the KPI's and summarised that there were 14/15 green and the performance was still strong, and 1 amber which related to general fund expenditure discussed earlier. He said between now and year end they will look to bring that pressure down through various processes and they were hopeful to balance the budget. Overall the performance was strong.

There were no questions.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

## **9                    QUARTER 2 CORPORATE AND CONTRACTED SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT**

M Brookes introduced the report and highlighted a couple of issues with FOI and complaints. He said the service manages the process but it was down to individuals to respond so he has been working with the teams to try and improve on that. He advised that there was also a process review on complaints.

The Chairman asked if we were ready for the forthcoming Election. M Brookes said there had already been numerous meetings, there was a project plan in place and staffing was being organised.

Councillor Claughton asked if we knew how many eligible voters there were that hadn't registered yet. M Brookes said he would need to come back to him with those figures.

**Action: M Brookes**

Councillor Claughton referred to the work carried out by procurement relating to temporary agency staff. He welcomed that work but asked if we were becoming reliant on agency staff. B Hosier said there was a need for temporary agency staff across the council, some of which is seasonal. He said one of our largest contracts came to an end so there was a need to review that but also we needed to check that all departments were having their requirements met.

The Chairman expressed concern about the grievance procedure for taxi drivers within the Licensing department. He said he often receives complaints from drivers that the complaint process was not fair and that they don't feel that they get the opportunity to explain themselves. He asked how we could make the process fairer for drivers. M Brookes advised that the Licensing Committee approved the three strike rule and that we do give drivers an opportunity to come in and explain themselves before we take a view on the issue. He said he would be interested to hear about specific cases and asked Councillor Mahmood to email him with the details of drivers that feel they have been treated unfairly so he could look into it. The Chairman said he didn't have a problem with the three strike rule, it was the manner in which certain officers are dealing with the drivers and felt it was unacceptable. He said he would speak to the Licensing Committee and express his concerns and also speak to M Brookes separately. He added that all interviews with drivers should be recorded so that this issue can be avoided. M Brookes said he would discuss these concerns with Nathan March, Licensing Team Leader. F Hussain said she was surprised to hear that feedback. She said the matters she had dealt with where we had revoked licences, we had given the driver an opportunity to put their case forward and on occasions we have then reinstated the licence. M Brookes said they could look at recording meetings with consent in the future.

The Chairman asked how we choose sites for CCTV. B Hosier said in this instance we had been asked by the sheltered housing schemes to install CCTV and there was an ongoing programme to ensure that all the schemes are covered. In terms of additional CCTV in public spaces, he believed there was an application that needed submitting and would be discussed with JAG (Joint Action Groups).

Outcome:

The report was noted.

**10                      QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE, PEOPLE AND INNOVATION  
PERFORMANCE REPORT**

L Roberts apologised for the lack of KPI figures in the report, and also that Matt Rawdon, Group Manager (People), wasn't able to be here for this meeting.

Councillor Adeleke asked how sickness levels were currently and if we had improved since last year. L Roberts advised that the sickness improvement programme was put in place last year and meetings are held monthly with Sally Marshall as the Chair. She advised that this quarter the sickness performance was worse by 44 days but in comparison to last year we were performing better. She added that they now split the performance to show the difference between long term and short term sickness.

Councillor Townsend asked if the percentages were total number of sick days or by individual. L Roberts confirmed it was the total number of sick days in the organisation.

The Chairman asked what we did with our old ICT equipment. B Trueman explained that they go to a registered recycler and we're provided with an instruction certificate to assure us that the data has been destroyed and the equipment has been recycled responsibly.

The Chairman asked if there had been any progress on creating a DBC app. B Trueman advised they were focusing on the website first and then will look at the possibility of an app. The Chairman suggested we could have a banner on the website with important information such as bin collections, snow, etc. B Trueman said he would need to speak to the Communications Team about that.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

**11                    REVIEW OF ON STREET AND OFF STREET PARKING TARIFFS & CHARGES 2020/21**

Councillor Williams introduced the report and explained that the approach of this review was slightly different to previous years as it wouldn't usually come to an overview and scrutiny committee before going to Cabinet. The report covers several options but also includes his recommendations as the Portfolio Holder.

Councillor Barrett asked why we didn't apply an RPI to parking charges annually rather than having to review them. Councillor Williams advised they used to review them annually, then every two-three years because they took a decision to freeze car parking charges. He said it was difficult to charge a RPI on car parking charges due to the coin acceptance on the machines. He said it was up to members what they would like to do but he didn't feel increasing parking charges every year was a good approach.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked if there was a large variation in popularity on certain days of the week and if there was scope to vary the charge. Councillor Williams felt that would be extremely confusing for customers and he also wasn't sure if the technology of the machines allowed it. He added that the most popular day for parking was Saturday. Councillor Hollinghurst asked about the possibility of making Sunday a free parking day like it used to be. B Hosier said that was a member decision.

Councillor Cloughton asked if we had considered offering a free one hour of parking in each of the car parks like we do in Tring. Councillor Williams said it wasn't an option they were considering due to the big loss of revenue and the free hour in Tring was a historic decision.

Councillor Townsend asked if the figures could be provided for how much the public actually pay for car parking. B Hosier drew attention to paragraph 3.3 which details the expenditure and income for each year but said he could break that down further if required. Councillor Williams advised that the £2.3m was the total of everything

included in the parking service. Councillor Townsend felt that a breakdown would be beneficial.

**Action: B Hosier**

Councillor Stevens said thank you for letting the committee have sight of this document before it goes any further. He said it would be discussed at the Parking Forum next Tuesday and a few questions had already been raised regarding the proposed plans in Berkhamsted, in particular the multi-storey car park. He asked if it was fixed that season ticket holders would be on the upper floors. B Hosier advised that the upper floors must be closed by a particular time and the logic behind it was that season ticket holders and local businesses would have left the car park earlier than other members of the public.

Councillor Stevens felt that £4 for 10 hours parking was very competitive and attractive for commuters. He asked how we would police that. B Hosier replied that they want people to use the car park so they wouldn't be trying to put anyone off of parking there. Councillor Stevens asked what times the charges were valid between. Councillor Williams replied 8am to 6pm.

Councillor Mahmood queried if we could give priority to local businesses. B Hosier said the intention was to offer the season tickets to local businesses first, however local businesses will have to pay for those permits and then decide whether to reclaim that money back off of their members of staff.

Councillor Adeleke said he was mindful that we haven't increased our charges for several years but asked if we had considered one free parking day over the Christmas period. Councillor Williams explained it would have to be considered as part of the charging structure. He added that the car parks are full around Christmas anyway so people would struggle to make use of that benefit. Councillor Adeleke felt it would help local businesses but also show good will and PR. Councillor Williams said as the car parks were already full it wouldn't achieve anything. B Hosier added that people that work in the town centre would arrive for work before shoppers so they would probably benefit more from the free parking.

Councillor Taylor referred to B Hosier's earlier comment that the upper levels of the Berkhamsted multi-storey car park would be closed earlier and asked for more details. B Hosier advised that as part of the planning conditions there was a restriction on how long the car park would be open for. He said there would be a shutter used to restrict access and the stair doors would be locked. He added that there was a help button that linked to the CCTV unit should anyone need to gain access after closing.

Councillor Taylor queried if we would consider giving local businesses a discount. B Hosier advised that the costs were yet to be determined. He explained that there were 8 floors; 4 short stay, 2 long stay and 2 for annual season ticket holders. The annual season ticket holders would have to demonstrate that they were part of a local business within the area in order to qualify. He said discounts could be considered to help local businesses but it would have a financial impact on the council. Councillor Taylor suggested we could charge commuters more rather than offer discounts to local businesses. B Hosier said that was something that could be looked at.

Councillor Claughton asked what had been considered in regards to the climate emergency and the parking charges for electric vehicles. B Hosier explained it had been reviewed slightly but was in its infancy and needed to be investigated further. He felt it could also add to the confusion of parking charges. Councillor Claughton asked when it had been looked at and if it was since the Motion had been agreed at Full Council. B Hosier said it could be looked at again but it would have an impact on the consultation and costs etc. Councillor Williams said it would need to be looked at as a separate project.

Councillor Townsend said he wanted it noted that he felt a 60% increase for residents was excessive.

The Chairman said the report was well written and easy to follow. He thanked the officers and Portfolio Holder for the report.

Outcome:

The Committee noted the report and supported option 1 as recommended within the report.

**12                      WORK PROGRAMME**

There were no changes to the work programme.

The Meeting ended at 9.36 pm