

MINUTES

FINANCE AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 MARCH 2023

Present:

Cllr Claughton	Cllr Adeleke
Cllr Douris (Chairman)	Cllr Guest
Cllr Freedman	Cllr Symington
Cllr Tindall	

Officers:

Catherine Silva Donayre (Strategic Director, Corporate and Commercial)
Nigel Howcutt (Chief Finance Officer)
Ben Hosier (Head of Commercial Development)
Matt Brookes (Assistant Director, Legal and Democratic Services)
Matt Rawdon (Assistant Director, People)
Alex Robinson (Assistant Director, Planning)
Shaj Choudhury (Head of Transformation)
Trudi Angel (Corporate and Democratic Support Officer)

Also in attendance:

Cllr Andrew Williams (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Commercial Strategy and Delivery)
Cllr Graeme Elliot (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the Finance and Resources OSC meeting held on 1 February 2023 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chapman and Townsend.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman requested that members raise any declarations of interest as appropriate for each agenda item during the course of the meeting.

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**

The action points from the previous meeting were circulated to members and included in the agenda. The chairman hoped the committee were satisfied with the responses from the officers.

7 **QUARTER 3 CORPORATE & COMMERCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORTS**

Cllr Guest declared an interest as the TRO (Traffic Regulation Order) for Old Fishery Lane mentioned in the report was financed by her County Council Highways Locality budget.

The Chairman declared an interest in his position as Dacorum representative on PATROL, which administers the traffic penalty tribunal.

C Silva Donayre noted that the various services areas of the corporate and commercial directorates had been combined for the report, and each service lead would give a brief summary before opening for questions.

Commercial Development

B Hosier referred to parking services on page 26, in terms of parking sessions, and noted that while Q3 showed a 7% increase from Q3 in 2019-2020 pre-Covid, it remained 48,000 sessions lower for the same 9-month period than in 2019-2020. Similarly, on page 27, Q3 showed an improvement, but remained almost 4,000 PCNs below the same 9-month period than in 2019-2020. B Hosier noted that these had both contributed to reduced income levels from parking services. For leisure, on page 32, B Hosier noted that the average weekly attendance in Q3 showed as reduced, which was attributed to Hemel Gym being closed for refurbishment for 2 weeks, but highlighted that the figures for the weekly average in Q3 2022-2023 were much higher than in the same quarter in 2021-2022.

Cllr Freedman wondered if there should be a more visible link between parking sessions and PCNs (penalty charge notices). B Hosier agreed there would be some correlation, however noted that more PCNs were being issued for on-street parking than off-street parking, confirming that enforcement fluctuates from month to month, but that it appears people are parking more often but for shorter periods.

Cllr Tindall wondered if the variance in enforcement rendered the statistics invalid. B Hosier noted that consistent enforcement is a target, however there is a shortage of enforcement officers, and further noted that there was also uncontrollable variance in the numbers of people parking illegally on any given day. Cllr Tindall wondered if this indicated drivers getting savvier in not parking illegally, and B Hosier conceded that whilst this was possible, there would be new motorists each year, so it was difficult to say.

Cllr Adeleke wondered if there was a breakdown of percentages within and outside of Hemel Hempstead, including attributed revenue contributions. B Hosier agreed that the data exists, but couldn't answer off the top of his head, and agreed to the Chairman's suggestion to instead circulate this information later.

Cllr Symington observed that Berkhamsted has a problem with on-pavement parking due to lack of enforcement, and that the issue is about resident's concerns and usage of pavements as well as revenue. B Hosier agreed that it was an issue, but pointed out that pavement parking outside of London is not illegal unless parking restrictions exist, and the police would be the ones to deal with obstruction issues, but added that restrictions in certain areas might be possible. Cllr Freedman agreed that legal action wasn't possible for pavement parking, but suggested production of a notice pointing out the inconvenience caused, and B Hosier agreed to take the idea back to the parking service. Cllr Douris observed that there was also significant local pressure via social media to get people to think twice.

Cllr Guest wondered if the parking trend and income was being monitored, and B Hosier confirmed that it was being monitored on a monthly basis as part of KPIs.

ACTION: B Hosier to circulate the breakdown of parking sessions and PCNs, and the associated revenue contributions, for Hemel Hempstead and outside Hemel Hempstead.

ACTION: B Hosier to raise the idea of a warning notice regarding pavement parking and obstruction of pavements with the parking service.

Legal and Democratic Services

M Brookes noted three main cases and fifteen cases prosecuted through the single justice procedure, and also noted that in November and December the elections team had delivered the business improvement district ballot, and the Kings Langley neighbourhood plan, which had all gone well.

Cllr Tindall noted on page 32 that the Dacorum leisure contract was still under negotiation, and wondered if there was a timescale for completion. B Hosier confirmed when an announcement regarding the negotiations could be expected.

Regarding page 37, Cllr Tindall wondered if there were any statistics on applications for voter identification. M Brookes stated that he didn't have the figures to hand, but agreed to ask the team to circulate them to members.

The Chairman mentioned hearing anecdotally that provisional driving licenses, old-style driving licenses and some other forms of ID do not have photos, further noting that the requirement for passport-style photographs might be a barrier, and Cllr Tindall added that Student ID is not on the list of accepted identification, which M Brookes agreed to investigate.

The Chairman noted that a lot of people either still didn't know about ID requirements, or hadn't registered yet. M Brookes summarised communication efforts, including those for people without internet access, confirming that information would be included with the polling card, and Cllr Williams confirmed the information is also included in the leaflet going out with Council Tax bills.

Cllr Adeleke noted the likelihood of problems at polling stations, and wondered what protection was being provided for polling staff. M Brookes noted that extra poll clerks were being arranged in areas with higher numbers, that there would be extensive training for poll clerks and presiding officers, and that members of the leadership team would be available for specific issues. Cllr Adeleke clarified that he was referring to physical incidents, and M Brookes noted that discussions were being held with the police, who would have teams available if required. The Chairman observed that the situation is national, not specific to Dacorum.

Cllr Freedman wondered if there had been confirmation of additional central funding to meet related additional costs, and whether it was anticipated that funding would be sufficient or there would be a deficit on DBC general funds as a result. M Brookes confirmed receipt of a payment, and that it was expected to be sufficient.

ACTION: M Brookes to request voter identification application statistics be circulated to members.

ACTION: M Brookes to investigate and confirm variations in identification and photograph requirements.

Finance and Resources

N Howcutt referred to section four in the report and noted one red KPI (key performance indicator), which had been there throughout the quarter, relating to time taken for debtors to pay, but noted that the non-commercial debt is green and being brought down by the commercial debt currently held. It was noted that the situation is improving, and that 2023-2024 was expected to be mostly green. The operational risk register was noted to have no significant changes.

Cllr Adeleke requested an explanation of the comment regarding pressure on waste services on page 46. N Howcutt noted that ongoing pressure is due to additional routes and hiring additional agency staff in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, and that the waste transformation service is looking at route optimization to reduce the pressure in 2023-2024 and bring it back in line with budget. Cllr Adeleke wondered how much reliance there was on consumer services. N Howcutt explained that it depended on the time of year, but varied between 10%-15%, depending on sickness.

Cllr Symington referred back to pages 41 and 42, showing £4 million and £2 million respectively, and wondered if it was correct that there had been nearly £6 million for commissioning around parking enforcement, and additionally wondered if the £800,000 for tree maintenance was linked to trees contracted with Hertfordshire County Council, also noting that a resident had complained about paying for a green bin when its only use was to dispose of leaves from a DBC-owned tree. B Hosier confirmed that the parking commissioning had been split into two parts, one for back office and hardware, and the other for the enforcement team and staff, and that those were on the contract register for a ten-year contract. B Hosier also noted that the tree maintenance had been split into two separate lots, and believed that as part of the contract recommissioning these would be split into four lots, but couldn't confirm whether that included the work for Hertfordshire County Council and agreed to look into this and let Cllr Symington know. In regard to the resident's complaint, B Hosier was unable to comment. Cllr Symington further wondered what criteria had been used to assess how much money should be spent on parking. B Hosier clarified that the amount was from the contract agreed five years previously, and that it would be reviewed when the contract came up for renewal, and Cllr Symington asked if that meant it would be a contractor. B Hosier explained that it would go through the normal process of assessment and tender, and if the budget remained the same it would be the value of the contract over a set period of years.

Cllr Guest wondered how the nurse-led absence management project on page 41 linked in with the occupational health services project on page 42. M Rawdon clarified that the two projects are separate contracts, being a reporting system for sickness, and an assessment by a qualified nurse, respectively.

The Chairman wondered, on page 47, whether it was possible to know the number of GDPR requests rather than the percentage. M Brookes agreed that this could be done once he was back in the office.

ACTION: B Hosier to check whether work for Hertfordshire County Council is included in the tree maintenance contracts and confirm with Cllr Symington.

ACTION: M Brookes to circulate numeric statistics relating to GDPR requests.

Outcome

The reports were noted.

QUARTER 3 PEOPLE & TRANSFORMATION PERFORMANCE REPORT

Cllr Douris noted that in Aiden's absence M Rawdon and S Choudhury would be presenting, and that some slides regarding KPIs would be explained, but had not been included in the meeting pack, therefore would be sent out separately.

ACTION: Omitted slides to be circulated following the meeting, with questions to be sent via email and copied to T Angel.

S Choudhury noted that fewer incidents had been resolved by the ICT team, primarily due to two vacancies within the team, one of which had since been filled, but the other being for a short-term secondment. M Rawdon highlighted a continuing trend in sickness reduction, with Q3 lower than Q2 and also than Q3 in the previous year, as well as staff turnover remaining healthy and below 10%. Within the communications service key projects were identified as support around the garden waste service, of Hemel Garden Communities' vision survey, of the Hemel Old Town Halloween party, and of various staff update sessions.

S Choudhury noted that call waiting times in the last quarter had been much higher than the target, primarily due to vacancies and staff turnover, with a dedicated training officer role having been created to offer mitigation by quickly upskilling new team members. It was noted that times are expected to remain high due to garden waste subscription, annual housing rent, and Council Tax letters all going out this quarter, and that mitigation strategies include reviewing the automated telephone scripts, and offering call-back services or encouraging self-service channels where possible at peak demand times. S Choudhury also noted that the new customer complaints policy had been launched, and that the next report would have KPIs around this.

In regard to 10% turnover being healthy, Cllr Freedman wondered what benchmarking was being used to use that definition, and also noted that on page 59 it was mentioned as being 15%, questioning whether that was because one figure was for a month and the other for a quarter. M Rawdon clarified that CIPD was the source for turnover of under 15% being healthy. Cllr Freedman expressed surprise, and admitted concern that turnover had only been compared to other local councils with similar issues, but deferred to the team's assessment if it was against the UK environment as a whole. Cllr Freedman requested a follow-up and lessons learned regarding the green bin subscription service, particularly in regards to sign-ups after the first collection and complaints received. M Rawdon agreed to take the feedback to the Head of Communications, who was not present at the meeting.

Cllr Claughton referred to page 58, paragraph 2.3, wondering if any trends or areas of concern had been identified, particularly in regard to the underlying causes of the increase in mental health problems, and whether they would be identified in the

upcoming deep dive. M Rawdon confirmed that the underlying reasons were investigated and that there hadn't been a specific cause, noting that support is tailored to each individual case.

Cllr Adeleke referred to page 60, paragraph 4.1 regarding call handling times, and wondered what the industry standard call length was. S Choudhury noted that the target was 300 seconds, but would need to investigate what the industry standard was.

Cllr Adeleke further referred to page 61, 6.3 regarding problems recruiting for service desk, and wondered if a recruitment drive for the council, possibly at local colleges, had been considered. S Choudhury reiterated that the first vacancy had been filled, and that the second was due to the individual being on a six-month secondment, where the short-term basis made it difficult to fill, so the issue was more timescales than lack of candidates.

Cllr Guest referred to page 59, paragraph 2.7 regarding staff turnover, and wondered if there was a breakdown of turnover by department or service and role. M Rawdon agreed that this could be produced and circulated. Cllr Guest further wondered whether anything was being put in to address areas where staff turnover was significantly higher than normal. M Rawdon agreed that this was a key area of work, with various programmes currently running as part of the people strategy.

Cllr Symington wondered how large the service desk team was, and whether pay was an issue. S Choudhury apologised that he couldn't give a confident answer, but estimated twenty people, and reiterated that a customer strategy had been developed, along with one of his key roles being a transformation programme to improve customer service. It was noted that an area of interest was determining why calls might take longer to resolve.

Cllr Douris referred to the first slide on ICT incidents, and wondered what the definition of incident was. S Choudhury explained that he thought it was related to support tickets raised internally, but noted that he would refer the question back to the Head of ICT for a definitive answer.

ACTION: M Rawdon to take request for follow-up and lessons learned regarding the green bin subscription service to the Head of Communications.

ACTION: S Choudhury to investigate the industry standard for call length and inform Cllr Adeleke.

ACTION: M Rawdon to produce breakdown of staff turnover by department or service, and role, and circulate this to committee members.

ACTION: S Choudhury to request the Head of ICT to send Cllr Douris a definitive definition of the term incident in the context of ICT incidents.

Outcome

The report was noted.

9 EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT

M Brookes summarised the rationale for reviewing the employee code of conduct, noting that other local authorities had been examined for examples of best practice. Of specific note was the change introducing a declaration of interest form similar to that completed by committee members, and both unions were confirmed to have been consulted with no suggestions for amendment arising.

Cllr Adeleke wondered how the new code of conduct compared to the seven principles of public life, and also whether recent police misconduct and similar misconducts can be summarised to come under the proposed new code of conduct. M Brookes confirmed that the Nolan Principles are noted at the start of the code of conduct and have been taken into consideration throughout, and also confirmed that discrimination or inequality will not be tolerated.

Outcome

The code of conduct was noted and recommended to cabinet and council for adoption.

10 WORK PROGRAMME

There was no changes to the work programme.

11 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman advised the meeting would now move into part two.

12 COMMERCIAL PROGRAMME UPDATE

Full details can be found in the Part 2 Minutes.

13 ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGE POINT UPDATE

Full details can be found in the Part 2 Minutes.

14 GARAGES BUSINESS PLAN – PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Full details can be found in the Part 2 Minutes.

The Meeting ended at 9.43 pm