

MINUTES

FINANCE AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

7 MARCH 2017

Present:

Members:

Cllr Adeleke	Cllr Douris (Vice Chair)
Cllr B Chapman (Chairman)	Cllr Silwal
Cllr Clark	Cllr Taylor
Cllr E Collins	Cllr Tindall

Also Present:

Councillor Elliot – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources; and
Councillor Harden – Portfolio Holder for Residents and Corporate Services

Officers:	D Skinner	Assistant Director - Finance & Resources
	M Brookes	Solicitor to Council
	B Hosier	Group Manager - Commissioning, Procurement and Compliance
	R Smyth	Assistant Director - Performance & Projects
	M Rawdon	Group Manager – People and Performance
	C Baker	Group Manager – Revenues, Benefits & Fraud
	B Trueman	Group Manager – Information, Communication & Technology
	R Baker	Group Manager (Financial Services)
	J Doyle	Group Manager - Democratic Services

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

25 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7 February 2017 were agreed by the Members present and signed by the Chairman.

26 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Birnie, Guest and Howard.

27 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

28 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

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

None.

30 **Q3 FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT 2017/18**

D Skinner, Assistant Director - Finance & Resources (DS) introduced the report drawing attention the significant matters.

Councillor Tindall noted the increase in costs to effect the upgrade of Council operated parking pay and display machines to accommodate the new £1 Coin. Councillor Douris sought assurance that there would be a transition period, when the machines will accept both coins. B Hosier, GM - Commissioning, Procurement and Compliance agreed to look into the matter and let the councillor have details on how the transition will be carried out.

On another matter, Councillor Tindall then asked what initiatives were tried in the Cemeteries Service that had been found to be unsuccessful. DS advised that DBC had invested in some new style memorial items that had turned out not to be taken up at the present time. He advised that DBC would either sell them to others who may be able to dispose of them or to hold on to them ourselves until demand arises. Councillor Douris pointed out that there were two items relating to the Cemeteries Service in this report and questioned if asked if there had been a lack of care in the spending at the cemeteries. DS responded that it was not a lack of care but an attempt at 'spend to save' did not succeed as expected.

Councillor Silwal asked about the overspend at the Forum and was informed that it involved Herts County Council expenses. The cost was to fit out the library and the HCC share of the cost has since been received.

The matter of changes in the planning regime and recruitment was then raised by Councillor Tindall who asked if the vacant posts would cause DBC problems. DS responded that this lack of recruitment is a national issue and DBC are responding by further training staff and inviting new trainees. Councillor Tindall felt one approach would be to enter into partnerships with neighbouring authorities to share resources and staff. DS agreed that this is one of a number of options being considered by officers.

Councillor Douris then moved to the deficit of income on works referred to on Page 15 of the agenda and asked if officers had underestimate the costs. DS responded that the matter is being examined and addressed and we may have overestimated income. A new member of staff dealing with this issue has been in place for six months, so has not had the opportunity to make an impact yet, but it is expected they will do so in time.

A short discussion then took place on the implications of a reduced contribution on pensions and the reasons for it being no longer required.

The meeting moved on to waste issues, beginning with the surplus on recycling credit for waste services and the percentage increase on co-mingled waste last year.

DS agreed to investigate the matter and try to identify the differential between authorities.

The committee noted the additional cost to refuse collection of new 'hard to access properties' and welcomed the attempts to identify where they are and the work underway to register them and existing ones in the costs of the service.

Action:

B Hosier to send a note to the committee on the implementation of converting pay and display parking meters to the new £1 coin

Outcome: The report was noted.

31 FINANCE AND RESOURCES Q3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The report was introduced by D Skinner who highlighted good performance in all areas, with Risk scores maintained at 'green' levels and the majority of the amber indicators being covered by the finance forecast outturn. He then took questions on the report.

Councillor Tindall drew attention to three 'red arrows' that require monitoring and suggested that these are monitored and highlighted in future if, in any two quarters, there is a continuing downward turn.

Councillor Douris congratulated the Revenues and Benefit Team on their continued good performance which he said is to be applauded. Councillor Elliot reiterated these views on the good shape of revenue and benefits.

Actions: None

Outcome: Report was noted.

32 LEGAL GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES Q3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Cllr Harden introduced the report and M Brookes, Solicitor to Council (MB) highlighted that there had been a good deal of activity in Courts as set out in the report.

The Electoral Registration Team has been running their annual canvas which has had a high response and is going to plan, with an updated register produced in March for the forthcoming County elections.

M Brookes was happy to take questions on the report.

The committee applauded the good work being done in the courts.

They noted the couple of negative scores relating to delays responding to Freedom of Information requests. MB advised that his service is continually chasing responses in order to keep the performance up.

MB advised the committee that the negative on Commercial Leases is the result of only one missed but this puts the figure in the red as the target is 100%, however this is not a major concern.

The committee then had a discussion on Member Development after Councillor Taylor drew attention to the low attendance of councillors on training courses. He

suggested that Member Support repeat the call to councillors to improve attendance at courses. Councillor Chapman suggested that attendance at courses be made compulsory or alternatively councillors have to choose to attend a minimum of 3 events. Councillor Taylor felt that attendance at training should remain on a voluntary basis for the moment.

Councillor Douris welcomed the licensing team's examination of the illegal use of Blue Badges. MB advised that, strictly speaking, it is not a licensing issue but a police matter in which the local authority has limited powers. Councillor Tindall said he would support any proposals to put the photograph of the user on the front of the badge instead of the back as this would make identification easier.

Actions: None

Outcome: Report was noted.

33 **PERFORMANCE, PEOPLE AND INNOVATION Q3 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

R Smyth, Assistant Director - Performance & Projects (RS) introduced the report stating that all the indicators are positive and green: Performance is generally good.

He drew attention to the work being done to address sickness absence and that; as a result, the figures are halved from previous years.

He went on to praise the incident resolution of the ICT section, who have moved DBC into a new building, while maintaining a good service.

Members enquired about resignations of staff going to other authorities. They noted the 13 voluntary resignations indicated; asked if they completed exit forms and if the reasons were analysed.

M Rawdon, GM – People and Performance, admitted that this figure is slightly higher than expected and he will investigate. RS added that each service undertakes annual workforce planning which includes an analysis of 'leavers'.

Councillor Adeleke asked if the officers had identified any 'feel good factor' in the move to the forum. RS agreed that the sickness project showing a positive performance could be evidence of this.

He went on to say that we undertook a spot survey of staff and 97% thought the move was well managed. In addition 80% were happy in the improved building and that the breakout areas have proved popular.

Councillor R Tindall echoed these feelings and said he had heard 'nothing but good' said of the move.

He inquired if any issues had been raised by the shift to hot-desking? RS replied that staff seem to have welcomed and adapted to the 'flexible workspace/working' arrangements including more opportunity for working from home. He advised that, desk usage is now being monitored to identify trends.

Councillor Collins enquired if any distinction has been identified in the acceptance of the new ways of working by the older age ranges. RS was of the opinion that flexibility (of staff and employer) had avoided any problem and has been the big success. He felt this was partly due to good preparation - and everyone being up and

running within 60 mins of moving to the Forum. In response to councillor Taylor, he added that there were significant numbers of replies to the questionnaire - 215 people out of 330/340 People – and a follow up of regular staff group meetings to address the little niggles - lots of engagement!

Councillor Douris sought some detail on the percentage of high priority KPIs not being entirely achieved – by his reckoning 69%, which seems a bit low. RS surmised that this may be due to the 5 or 6 targets missed by substantial amounts which affect the overall figures. He went through the plans in place to monitor and take steps where necessary to improve on these.

Both councillors Douris and Tindall sought assurance that they would be reported to this committee. RS agreed but pointed out that the overall figure covers the whole of the organisation and the shortfalls may need to be taken up at other OS committees.

34 ACTION POINTS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The action points had all been addressed.

35 WORK PROGRAMME 2016/2017

Agreed.

The Meeting ended at 8.27 pm