

MINUTES
FINANCE & RESOURCES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 NOVEMBER 2022

Present:

Cllr Adeleke	Cllr Suqlain Mahmood
Cllr Douris (Chairman)	Cllr Stevens
Cllr Freedman	Cllr Symington
Cllr Guest	Cllr Wilkie
Cllr Sobaan Mahmood	

Officers:

Catherine Silva-Donayre (Strategic Director, Corporate and Commercial)
Aidan Wilkie (Strategic Director, People and Transformation)
Nigel Howcutt (Chief Finance Officer)
Mark Brookes (Assistant Director, Legal and Democratic Services)
Matt Rawdon (Assistant Director, People)
Ben Hosier (Head of Commercial Development)
Hannah Peacock (Head of Transformation)
Kelvin Soley (Head of Communications and Engagement)
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)

The meeting started at 7.30 pm.

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed by the members present and then signed by the Chairman.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chapman, Claughton, Elliot, Tindall and Townsend.

Councillor Stevens substituted for Councillor Townsend.

Councilor Wilkie substituted for Councillor Tindall.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman declared an interest as the Company he owns rents a garage from DBC.

Councillor Guest advised that one of the performance reports made reference to a TRO in Old Fishery Lane. She declared an interest as that work was being funded by her HCC locality budget.

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 Chairman drew attention to the two sets of action points that had been circulated prior to the meeting. He advised that responses to questions raised at the meeting should be replied to within 14 days. Officers should notify the Chairman of any delays.

7. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT – FINANCIAL SERVICES

N Howcutt introduced the report. Of the 9 KPIs (key performance indicators), 1 is currently red and is regarding the time taken for debtors to pay. This has become a regular occurrence since the onset of Covid. Due to changes in government policy on the collection of debt, debt levels have therefore increased and a larger number of clients are now on payment plans. In response to this, they are looking at changing the KPI target as well as breaking this KPI down to measure performance against new and old debt. The government's Covid policy on debt recovery for commercial property and rent has changed since October and this KPI should therefore start to improve.

The scores have not changed in the Operational and Risk Report from quarter 1 to quarter 2 and performance remains strong. There are vulnerabilities, particularly around income generated from commercial assets due to bad debt and the current economic status. Overall, the risk targets for quarter 2 have been achieved.

The Chairman referred to FIN06 on page 14 of the report, noting that the position is of end of June. He asked if it was appropriate that the report should only run up to June given that it is now November, and whether this report was now irrelevant.

N Howcutt responded that it was not completely irrelevant, though the report could be timelier. N Howcutt advised that the original agenda included the quarter 2 budget monitoring report, though this was removed due to the pay award announcement made

today, as the report would've changed significantly in light of this. This report will therefore come back to the Committee next month with a more up-to-date position. N Howcutt added that comments included in the report do take the more recent economic situation into account and that there has not been a significant change since quarter 2, notwithstanding the pay award change made today.

Cllr Guest referred to FIN02a on page 10 of the report regarding the time taken for debtors to pay, and asked if there were any announcements regarding other types of debt.

N Howcutt commented that other than commercial property and CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) payments, all other areas are achieving the target, and that the issue is primarily linked to commercial debt. As commercial debt is around 80% of overall debt, it therefore overlaps all other areas.

Cllr Guest advised that she is Chair of the Development Management Committee and asked if any actions are being taken to achieve CIL payments.

N Howcutt confirmed that there is an additional KPI regarding CIL payments and it is being monitored closely. CIL payments are generally very large and are due as soon as development starts, though this is the hardest point for developers from a cash flow perspective, and 1-2 CIL payments not being made can affect 60-70% of overall CIL payments. This is being monitored separately and has significantly improved over recent years.

The Chairman commented on the new infrastructure levy proposed by the government and asked if it would make it less onerous on developers in terms of timing.

In response, N Howcutt stated that the new infrastructure charge will come in when planning permission is approved, which will make it easier for the council team to manage as they will not need to monitor when developments have begun.

Cllr Freedman commented that the report was more reassuring than previous. On the red KPI, it was asked when this may affect commercial decisions and if there is any change in the provision of bad debt in relation to this KPI.

N Howcutt confirmed that there is no cash flow issue currently. On provision for bad debt, N Howcutt advised that they had to make more provisions during Covid and it will have no impact on the bottom line. The key is to ensure that the council liaises with commercial property partners given that they drive the local economy, and the aim is to ensure that they are sustainable and support the local economy. This may require looking at historic debt going forward and whether this can be written off or paid through longer-term payment plans.

Cllr Guest referred to RBF01 on page 16 regarding the average time taken to respond to benefit-related contact and asked what '14.64' was referring to. It was also noted that there is no RAG rating or target included.

N Howcutt confirmed that the measure is for internal performance management and relates to 14.6 working days. The benefits service is facing additional work, particularly with asylum and refugee work, causing delays to the service. The service is also receiving an increase in queries regarding potential benefit claimants. Work has been undertaken to help educate residents on when they should contact the council and signpost them to relevant organisations. There is no overall target, though individuals in the team have their own targets, and cases are looked at on an individual basis given the complex nature of some issues.

Cllr Stevens commented on RBF01 and asked if it would be beneficial for the Committee to understand how many people are involved in the days stated. The number of days had increased by 50% in the quarter.

N Howcutt noted that there is a lot of information behind the days stated and that the figure is to help give members an indication of how much time is spent on that service. There is no more resource going into the team and it is experiencing an increase in workload.

Cllr Freedman commented on the FIN06 target, noting that it was green due to not spending as much on major projects as initially planned. He asked if other projects are being discussed and decisions are being made on money between projects.

N Howcutt advised that no capital spending is on hold and that HRA capital expenditure is around 50% higher than in pre-Covid years, and the council is getting new contracts approved. On inflation, construction inflation was high before overall inflation increased and this is now starting to tail off with demand for construction reducing across the sector. There may be an impact on affordability and the medium-term capital programme may require review to decide what is affordable. This will be assessed as part of budget setting and it is currently felt that the existing capital programme is affordable and sustainable.

Cllr Suqlain Mahmood queried the process around recovering debt from local businesses.

N Howcutt confirmed that there is a debt process and policy in place and that the debt collection team will be in touch with the business if a debt hasn't been paid within 30 days. A period of time will then be set for a payment plan, and if new terms aren't met then the case will be escalated to the Head of Service who will look at a historical payment plan or any external impact. Any changes to payment plans over £15,000 will be escalated to the Assistant Director. The business' impact on the community is always

assessed as an increase in vacant properties should be avoided and therefore there is a commercial reason to liaise with businesses as much as possible. Prior to Covid, arrears were around 8% and this has now increased to around 19%, with a target to reduce them back to pre-Covid levels by quarter 3, 2023-24. There is currently double the amount of debt on pre-payment plans and the aim is to avoid sustainable businesses becoming bankrupt due to historical debt and so there is some leniency around payment plans.

Cllr Suqlain Mahmood asked if debts are ever sold on.

N Howcutt advised that they do go to court and evict businesses, though this is much further down the line compared to other organisations.

Cllr Symington noted the pay award and asked if this was in line with expectation.

N Howcutt confirmed that it is and that the effect on the council will be approximately 5.90%. Now that confirmation on the pay award has been received, the numbers will be reviewed, though the impact is expected to be the same.

Cllr Adeleke commented on the aim to return to pre-Covid levels for arrears and queried what impact this would have on the medium-term forecast if this isn't achieved.

N Howcutt advised that he is less concerned about arrears given the healthy provision for bad debt. If occupancy and rental income starts to fall then this will have an impact on the short and medium term budget. There is an expected income stream of around £5.5m and any decrease would then need to be found from other service areas or income streams. The impact of the wider economy will be felt if there is an impact on commercial rentals and people start to use fewer discretionary services, such as leisure and car parking.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

8. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT – LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

M Brookes introduced the report and welcomed questions from the committee.

Cllr Guest referred to page 28 regarding animal licensing reports and enforcement. She asked how the team were currently processing that work if the officer mentioned in the report hadn't yet completed the training course.

M Brookes advised that there was another officer within the team who was already trained.

Cllr Guest referred to page 29 in relation to the print and post room processing 73,170 mail items at a cost of £37,082. She questioned if the mail was checked to ensure everything was sent out, as some residents within her ward had not received post regarding a mobile mast.

M Brookes advised that the team receive mail from all teams across the council who cross-check what is sent against their records, and therefore checks are conducted at departmental level.

Cllr Guest noted the statement on page 29 that 609 cheques were processed with an income of £140,071.90. She asked what payments were being made by cheque and whether people were being encouraged to pay by more efficient means.

M Brookes advised he was unsure what the cheque payments were for as they were from across the council. He added that the council does encourage people to pay via electronic means where possible.

Cllr Freedman referred to animal control and advised of a number of links on the DBC website and those of other organisations that refer issues to the dog warden email address, which then states that the email is not monitored.

M Brookes advised that this comes under Environmental Services, though he would pass the comment on. **Action.**

Cllr Freedman noted the data regarding Legal cases and asked if this is a highlight reel or if other cases had not been reported.

M Brookes confirmed that these were the cases that went to Court during the quarter.

Cllr Freedman referred to the Mayoralty budget, noting that Berkhamsted Town Council have decided, given the current climate, to reduce the budget and scope in terms of Mayoral engagements, and recommended that a similar discussion be had at borough level.

The Chairman suggested that this is not a question that M Brookes could answer as he had presented an operational report and that the question was a policy decision.

Cllr Freedman acknowledged the comment and noted that his question was if the discussion was being had.

The Leader of the Council stated that he did not envisage that the Mayoralty budget would be reduced in the next financial year.

Cllr Adeleke commented on item 4 of the report and asked how the council is getting value for money and measures its success rate.

M Brookes advised that the fines are received by the HM Treasury and not income-producing in any way. They act as a deterrent to prevent inappropriate behaviour across the borough and that the individuals receive a permanent criminal record. Improvements are measured by the teams and prosecution is a key part of this.

Cllr Suqlain Mahmood questioned if two of the fly-tipping prosecutions were the same case.

M Brookes stated that his understanding was that they took place at different times and are therefore listed as separate offences.

Cllr Suqlain Mahmood explained that a taxi driver had contacted him recently regarding an officer following him and then questioned him when he got home. He said he felt harassed by the officer.

M Brookes suggested that Cllr Mahmood email him the details of this case so he can look in to it.

Cllr Stevens referred to a sentence on page 30 that read 'manual checks on over 76 markers have been completed' and asked what a marker was.

M Brookes said he would need to check with his team and would provide a written response. **Action.**

Cllr Stevens commented on the 2023 Election and expressed concern that this will clash with the Coronation for King Charles III and Bank Holiday. He was unsure how this would impact the Election count, which typically takes place overnight.

M Brookes confirmed that representations have been put in by the LGA (Local Government Association) and that they are awaiting guidance.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

9. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT – COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

B Hosier presented the report, particularly noting the red KPI on car parking income and that this is running 20% below target as at the end of quarter 2. Usage is yet to pick up since Covid, suggesting that customer behaviour has changed.

Cllr Symington referred to pages 34-35 regarding procurement activity and asked how the information could be presented if they are still going out to tender.

B Hosier confirmed that the values have been taken to the contract register, which is published online. Once it goes out to tender, the amount may change as this will depend on the market and what is required, so the value provides an indication for the committee on the value of the contract.

Cllr Symington asked what price inflation they are expecting to see on the values indicated.

B Hosier stated that he would not know until they have been through the commissioning process. Whilst inflation will impact the value, it will also depend on how the requirement is packaged. There is a budget in place and commissioning must be within that.

Cllr Symington commented on non-compliant expenditure, noting that this was raised in the audit report. Cllr Symington asked why commissioning didn't take place before a contract expired and why this wasn't being reduced.

B Hosier advised that a commissioning and procurement period are built in, and there can be slippage in terms of client officers and workloads. A commissioning plan has been developed, and any activities that are 2-3 years overdue are flagged, though there will be some slippage.

Cllr Freedman asked for further information on the tree maintenance service contract and the facilities management services contract.

B Hosier stated that the current facilities management contract is due to expire and recommissioning has commenced where they assess the level of service required. On the tree maintenance contract, B Hosier noted that it was reported in quarter 1 that there were standing orders to award a direct contract on the basis that one contractor was struggling post-Covid and therefore a direct contract was offered rather than going out to tender. The tree maintenance service is split between rural and woodland.

Cllr Freedman made reference to the maintenance work provided to other Councils on behalf of HCC and asked if this was being carried out by the internal team or by outsourced teams.

B Hosier stated that he would need to confirm this, though he would assume that work is carried out by both. **Action.**

Cllr Freedman asked if procurement decisions are benchmarked against bringing the work in-house.

B Hosier advised that this would be undertaken as part of the commissioning stage where there is an assessment on whether the council has the capacity and capability to bring work in-house. Typically, the approach to market is only done once a decision is made that the service can't be delivered in-house.

Cllr Freedman commented that he would like to see the decision-making process and asked for reassurance that there is a review taking place.

B Hosier confirmed that they look at the capability of the market to help make a decision on whether to go out to tender and to better understand the capacity of the market. It was noted that a full tender evaluation would take place at the end of the process and if it was found that the value coming back from the market was considerably different than the one assumed during commissioning then a review would take place.

Cllr Guest commented on nurse-led absence management and asked what professional will provide the service if an in-house service is provided.

M Rawdon advised that the nurse-led system gives an opportunity for staff to contact a nurse if they are unwell, and if staff require advice then they can contact the Occupational Health service, though they are finding that people will get similar advice when calling 111, and they are therefore looking at the costs of this option.

Cllr Guest asked what profession the Occupational Health service would be.

M Rawdon confirmed that Occupational Health advisors are qualified nurses.

Cllr Guest asked if work is being done to compare costs of a nurse-led versus an in-house service.

M Rawdon confirmed that a paper is being taken to the strategic meeting this month.

Cllr Adeleke commented on the car parking income and that they are unlikely to return to pre-Covid levels. He asked if they had contacted other councils to find out what measures they were looking into to counteract this reduction.

B Hosier advised that he had not done this research but agreed that it would be worthwhile contacting other local councils to identify their shortfalls and the actions they are taking.

Cllr Freedman commented that part of the mitigation should be around EV charging points as this will help encourage people to use spaces. The Chairman noted that some of these items would be brought to the March committee meeting.

Cllr Symington referred to the reduction in car parking income, noting that the biggest drop was for on-street parking, and that the place strategies should be looking at ensuring people are coming into these areas. Cllr Symington continued that the quarter 2 figures for PCNs (penalty charge notices) were down nearly 60%, noting that they are due to go to tender for a £4m contract for parking enforcement. She asked how this would work in terms of financial return.

B Hosier advised there is a shortage of Civil Enforcement Officers, which is causing a drop in PCNs, and that the number of on-street parking sessions has also dropped, which is where PCNs are typically issued. Whilst there is cost to the parking enforcement contractor for not providing sufficient staff, this does not cover the loss of revenue generated through PCNs. Regarding a new contract, it is difficult to put a value on the performance of a contractor based on income, as covering an area with officers will deter illegal parking and the streets would be safer, and whilst the council would not receive any income, the purpose of enforcement is to make people safer. The council has looked at introducing technology to reduce the cost of enforcement, though this isn't currently possible.

Cllr Symington observed that the garage service has not moved on and requested that this be discussed at a later date.

In relation to PCNs, Councillor Stevens asked if the annual monitoring report was still produced.

B Hosier confirmed that the annual report was still produced. Last year we were highly commended by PATROL for how the report was written. The latest report is available on the website, and the 2021-22 report is due to published in the coming weeks. The Chairman asked that the link be circulated to members when available. **Action.**

Outcome

The report was noted.

10. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT – PEOPLE AND TRANSFORMATION

A Wilkie introduced the report. In relation to People, sickness continues to be higher than they would like, though this is being experienced across all sectors. An action plan has been signed off by the SLT (Senior Leadership Team) and it is hoped this will soon have a positive impact on numbers. Turnover remains consistent, notwithstanding that

recruitment continues to be challenging. On transformation, customer service performance is below the desired level, though recruitment gaps have now been filled, and the Customer Service Strategy is now in delivery phase. On communication, there was a large programme of events over summer, and having events fall under the People and Transformation team has been successful. A new Head of Digital will start next week. Performance has been strong over the quarter.

Cllr Freedman asked how many current vacancies there are, how long it takes to fill a vacancy on average, and the percentage of vacancies versus total staff numbers.

M Rawdon advised he would collate the data and circulate it to the committee. **Action.**

Cllr Adeleke commended the team and noted the improvements in communication with the community. He also commented that the playground refurbishment in Berkhamsted was well received.

An observation was made regarding sickness reducing and it was suggested that this may be a result of the new wellness programme.

M Rawdon confirmed that there has been a focus on staff wellbeing and signposting staff to mental health support.

Cllr Symington commented that it would be useful to understand if staff are returning to the office and whether this is being monitored.

A Wilkie advised that there has been a recent increase in staff returning to the office. A new project has begun; this will focus on what working looks like for different groups of staff and for different roles. M Rawdon noted that a session was held with the leadership team to discuss this and that they want to ensure that there is a hybrid approach that supports staff, customers and the overall service, and therefore the aim is to empower managers to work with directors to put a business case forward on the new way of working.

Cllr Symington asked for an update on the situation last week where staff were unable to work remotely.

A Wilkie explained there was an initial issue with the server that was identified quickly and was rectified. Another policy became corrupted and therefore needed to be fixed, and Microsoft had issued an update that, in conjunction with other security features, meant they were unable to deploy the fix remotely. A corporate decision had to be made to bring everyone into the office, which was largely well received. A Wilkie confirmed they are now looking at a lessons learned piece, and whilst the risk of the issue occurring again is minimal, a number of improvements have been identified.

The Chairman observed the large reliance on digitalisation and electronic communication, and they therefore need a facility that is 100% reliable.

Cllr Symington commented on item 5.1 regarding the climate and ecological emergency and queried the current policy following previous discussions around rolling out EV (electric vehicle) charging to car parks.

The Chairman advised that a report would be received in March 2023, to which Cllr Symington responded that this was counter to what was stated in June/July 2022.

The Portfolio Holder advised that they are in the advanced stages of negotiations with 2 suppliers to provide both fast and rapid chargers to car parks. The necessary application for funding has been submitted and a response is expected in the coming weeks. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that, by March 2023, they will be able to proceed. The importance of the situation was acknowledged.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

11. TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES – PEOPLE, DIGITAL AND COMMUNICATIONS

A Wilkie presented the Digital Strategy, Communication Strategy and People Strategy, noting that they should provide the foundation for both transformation and delivery programmes. Due to being in a rapidly changing environment, items may need to be updated in future, and members were asked to take the strategies collectively and understand the need for agility whilst they are implemented. Delivery programmes are in place for most with development ongoing where required.

First looking at the Digital Strategy, A Wilkie advised that they need to harness the opportunities that digital presents to deliver efficient and effective services for their communities and businesses. This requires focus on internal processes, service design to avoid jumping to solutions, and making strategic decisions, such as reusing equipment and systems where possible. There will be a move towards the cloud, mobile first to allow officers to work away from the office, and having an IT system that focuses on how residents interact with the council.

M Rawdon next looked at the People Strategy, noting that it sets out to enable the workforce to have the greatest impact on meeting corporate objectives and DBC's transformation journey. There will be a focus on recruitment attention, as well as developing skills to support the current change process. It recognises the organisation's broader transformation, particularly commercialisation, and HR (Human Resources) will support this from a people perspective. There is also a lot of work around leadership

and organisational culture, and the programme that has looked at leadership culture will now filter down to middle-management level. Cost of living and the job market will also be covered by the strategy to look at how DBC is in the best position to support vacancies and bring in the right workforce. Investment is also required into HR to ensure they have the capabilities to support the transformation journey.

K Soley presented the Communication Strategy, which focuses on the strong communication foundation at DBC and will help with the creation of a more proactive communications service. Digital channels have become critical in local government communications and these therefore feature heavily in the strategy, and whilst it is imperative that the strategy ensures the council keeps pace with digital transformation, it also needs to ensure that no resident is left behind. The strategy also encompasses wider work on events and filming, and there will be a focus on how to develop these areas of work, such as the recent Halloween event in the Old Town.

Cllr Suqlain Mahmood noted that a new Head of ICT was in place and asked how they can make a document when they've had no input into the work.

A Wilkie advised that the new Head of ICT has seen the document and is comfortable with it, and it is expected that the strategy will remain under review so she can bring in further ideas.

Cllr Adeleke asked if there was any member input on the Transformation Board.

H Peacock advised that her team supports the Board and is also responsible for the project management office, which is the key administrative function for the Transformation Board to ensure that they scrutinise programme and project performance. On member input, H Peacock advised that bringing the strategies to this committee was to gain member input, and that some projects may come back through member groups to provide updates and gain further input. Input will depend on the nature of the individual projects within the strategies and it will be sought where appropriate.

Cllr Adeleke asked if the IT department was now fully staffed.

A Wilkie stated that there may be 1 outstanding vacancy, and once the new Head of Service has come in, they can look at whether further resourcing is required. Those conversations are expected in the coming months and any updates will be brought to the committee.

Cllr Adeleke suggested that the majority of our communications related to Hemel Hempstead. He asked if this could be expanded to include Berkhamsted, Tring and the surrounding villages.

K Soley advised that this is part of the strategy to ensure that every corner of the borough is included in all the work that is being done and that communication covers all channels.

Cllr Symington commended the reports and asked if all strategies were produced internally.

A Wilkie confirmed that some external support was sought for the People Strategy. M Rawdon explained that this was on how to support the team in terms of skillset through staff focus sessions to help generate ideas. It was confirmed that around 80-90% of the strategies were created internally.

Cllr Symington commented on the challenges faced by older residents, and whilst the vast majority will engage online, she asked if the council understands its responsibility to communicate with all residents or it would fall to the voluntary sector to support the older community.

A Wilkie confirmed that the Digital Strategy recognises that different cohorts will behave in different ways and that DBC needs to be organised in the most efficient way to meet this. There is no intention to digitalise every process immediately, and instead the aim is to bring in efficiencies and meet the needs of the community.

H Peacock added that the Digital Strategy also has to marry up with the Customer and People Strategies with an understanding of how residents wish to communicate. Whilst there is a gradual move to digital first, this is not the case for all residents and that is recognised across the strategies. A Wilkie confirmed that the core of the strategies is user-centred design through understanding what residents want and then building the service based on this feedback.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

12. COMPLAINTS POLICY

H Peacock presented the updated Complaints Policy, noting that this is part of the Customer Strategy that is now in implementation. The main changes to the policy are around response times and on levels of responsibility, it also recognises that more customer contact is required to help reduce the number of formal complaints that the council receives. The draft policy will be presented to all OSCs before being presented to Cabinet in November.

Cllr Adeleke asked how realistic it is to have 1 December 2022 as the launch date and how they intend to train staff in time.

H Peacock stated that they believe the launch date is realistic and that work has been undertaken throughout the policy development to ensure that it is ready for 1 December. All templates have been revised to ensure they are in line with the Customer Policy and training has taken place through the intranet for all staff members. There will also be individual training with team leaders and above. She added that the Customer Services unit will have a central complaints team.

Cllr Adeleke referred to item 3.1 in the report and the definition of a complaint. He noted his concern around the use of 'expression' as there could be dissatisfaction without being expressed.

H Peacock acknowledged the comment. She explained that they need to encourage people to vocalise their dissatisfaction to ensure that the matter can be investigated, and any unexpressed dissatisfaction will be picked up through customer satisfaction surveys.

Cllr Freedman commented on the escalation to a formal complaint, particularly regarding a resident's view of who they have complained to. Cllr Freedman noted that sometimes residents will complain to a member and that members may treat these conversations as informal so won't note it down.

H Peacock acknowledged the comment and noted that some conversations may escalate into a complaint, which is highlighted within the policy and the fact that some complaints may come in on behalf of residents. Once this dissatisfaction is expressed, members have one team that they can direct people to for complaints handling rather than seeking an outcome themselves.

Cllr Freedman stated that they need to ensure that when a formal complaint is made, they bring in all the conversations that led up to it as residents will feel they started the process a lot earlier even if it is not treated in this way.

H Peacock agreed, adding that it is beneficial to see the history of the conversation to help gain this context and understand the nature of the complaint. The Complaints Management System is also in place to add background notes relating to the complaint.

The Chairman suggested that the point when a complaint becomes a formal complaint be reviewed, noting that members may need to ask residents if they wish to make a formal complaint. The Chairman continued that if a complaint is made online then the 10 days starts at this point, and if a complaint is made by letter then the 10 days starts from the date of the original letter, meaning they are potentially disadvantaged by having a shorter time for investigation.

H Peacock said she would take the Chairman's comments on board and feedback with any amendments if appropriate. **Action.**

Cllr Symington asked what quantum of complaints they receive.

H Peacock added that the KPI is noted under M Brookes' report and they are transitioning to the new central team, meaning that a new report will come from her team in future. The metrics are also being looked at to provide more detail on the number of complaints received and what issues they highlight. These reports will be brought back to members with further detail.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

13. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman noted the work programme, highlighting that the Leisure Contract will be covered in December.

The meeting ended at 10.20 pm.