



Council Briefing Note 17th April 2024

**CORPORATE AND COMMERCIAL PORTFOLIO – COUNCILLOR MICHELA CAPOZZI**

### **Financial Services**

#### **Significant service achievements since the last Council meeting:**

- Unanimous approval of the 2024/25 Council budgets.
- Delivery of a very positive and assuring Grant Thornton 2022/23 Value for Money (VFM) audit presented to the Audit Committee in March.

#### **Strategic or significant operational matters which the service would like Full Council to be aware of:**

- Preparation and processing of 2023/24 finances prior to year-end.
- Operational set up of the 2024/25 budget and corporate reporting framework.

#### **KPI's for last month:**

- Financial performance of the General and Capital Funds remains positive with an expected balanced budget at year end.
- The HRA remains in deficit for the 2023/24 financial year and the future pressures remain under careful monitoring.
- The number of debtor days remains outside the KPI target because of a combination of the ongoing historic commercial debt created by covid and the impact of the large amount of outstanding leaseholder debt as a result of the increase in the volume of capital works being undertaken.

### **Revenues and Benefits service**

#### **Significant service achievements since the last Council meeting:**

- The year-end collection levels are in full flow aiming to achieve the highest possible in-year collection rate.
- The 2024/25 Council Tax billing process has been undertaken following February Council approval of council tax levels.
- The annual business rates billing for 2024/25 has been undertaken with businesses receiving their bills in April.

#### **KPI's for last month:**

- Benefit payments and changes response times exceed KPI expectations.
- The roll out of the first phase of citizen access modules for council tax queries is now operational, meaning residents can carry out some queries online if they wish, rather than calling the Council.

- The in-year collection rates are up year on year but still behind the pre covid targets set. New targets, given the reduced council tax collection rates for 24/25, have been outlined to Members.

## **Legal and Democratic Services**

### **Significant service achievements since the last Council meeting:**

#### **Legal and Democratic Services**

- The team has now successfully completed phase 1 of the Electoral Review & all required documentation was submitted to the LG BCE by the deadline. Work has already begun for phase 2, which runs from 7 May to 11 July.
- All new Election Act requirements are being rolled out ahead of the May polls & the team are making every effort to ensure the electorate are fully aware of the changes, in particular to postal & proxy voting, Overseas arrangements & the ongoing requirement for voter ID.
- The Legal and Housing Team successfully prosecuted an individual for failing to licence a House in Multiple Occupation. The defendant was fined £23,800 plus costs of £29,856.

### **Strategic or significant operational matters for Council information:**

- Preparations are well underway for the PCC election on 2 May. All polling stations are booked, all staff have been contacted to fill the 350-400 roles & the plans for the verification & count are underway.

## **Commercial Development**

### **Update on strategic and significant operational matters:**

- Parking Tariff Policy Proposals– Proposals presented to Finance & Resources OSC and Cabinet in February 2024 and agreed to take forward to statutory consultation. Work is underway preparing for the statutory consultation, which will first take place with Herts County Council and then the wider public.
- Procurement – A review of procurement and contract management processes continues to progress, to assure they continue to support the Council in securing best value in the services, works and goods it procures. This will include contract management training to ensure officers continue to effectively manage the Council's contracts.
- Commercial – Electric Vehicle Charge Points (EVCPs) continue to be installed in certain Council car parks across the Borough. Over the next few weeks and months, residents will start to see these EVCPs installed and operational, which will support the Council's commitment to improving access to and the availability of charge points and addressing climate change.
- Strategic Asset Review – a cross-directorate programme of work to undertake reviews of the Council's assets is currently underway. This includes an overarching strategic review of the Council's asset portfolio, as well as more in-depth analysis of certain asset categories, such as Housing, Supported Housing and Garage portfolio. It also includes an assessment of potential options that could support delivery of the Council's strategic objectives around Housing, regeneration and Place, and ongoing financial sustainability. Updates on these projects will be provided throughout the year as they progress, and an overall programme update will be provided to Finance & Resources Scrutiny in June 2024.

## Commercial and General Fund Property Services

- Despite a challenging environment our Commercial portfolio is circa 96.88% occupied and income levels remain on target. Income target for period 11 £5,025,199.
- March 2024 update - There are 150 commercial buildings and sites that DBC own and Property Services manage. Compliance under 6 main headings: Fire; Asbestos; Legionella; Gas, Electrical, Passenger Lifts and pressurised Heating Systems Insurance inspections are reported as follows.

Area	Description	Target	Performance	Trend
<b>Fire</b>	Percentage of properties covered by valid FRA	100.00%	100.00%	
<b>Legionella</b>	Percentage of water installations covered by risk assessment	100.00%	100.00%	
<b>Asbestos</b>	Percentage of known asbestos locations re-inspected	100.00%	100.00%	
<b>Gas</b>	Percentage of properties with valid gas or combustion certificate	100.00%	100.00%	
<b>Electrical</b>	Percentage of properties with satisfactory EICR	100.00%	100.00%	
<b>Lifts</b>	Percentage of passenger lifts with current examination certificate	100.00%	100.00%	
<b>Heating</b>	Percentage of properties with current insurance inspection	100.00%	100.00%	

### Key Points

- All areas of compliance now being maintained

- **Bennettsgate Window Repairs** - Good progress to complete concrete render repairs and window replacements at Bennetts Gate although inclement weather has delayed the project by approx. 2 weeks. The render repairs are approaching completion and decoration works are underway. The project is forecast to be fully completed by mid-April 2024.
- **Victoria Hall Ceiling.** Concerns were raised due to the condition of the plaster and remedial patch repairs have been completed. We commissioned a consultant to review the ceiling who has advised that the structural condition of the roof is satisfactory, however has made recommendations to improve condition. These works will be completed during the 2025/26 financial year.
- **Nash Mills Recreation Centre** – the entrance road to the Recreation Centre has deteriorated leading to large pot holes and edge subsidence. This poses a potential health and safety risk for users. Following a successful capital bidding process, completed as part of the 2024/25 service planning exercise, funds have been approved and the works are planned to resurface the road week commencing 15 April 2024.
- **Riverbank, Two Waters Road** - A Council owned riverbank Near Two waters road / Durrants fishing lakes has been damaged by recent flooding. A contractor, Aquamaintain, who undertook a previous repair in 2016, have provided an estimated quotation for reinstatement works. The Property Services Team will continue to support and liaise with SPAR & Clean, Safe & Green colleagues.
- **Rossgate Windows Replacement Programme – Phase 2**  
Subject to approval to appoint the contractor, it is anticipated that the works to undertake Phase 2 of the window replacement programme will commence during the summer months 2024 to take advantage of better weather and thereby minimising disruption for tenants. Phase 2 involves the replacement of windows at the front of the shops which are part of the integrated curtain wall system which adds design complexity. Phase 1 comprised the windows at the rear and this work completed last year. Designers and contractor staff have completed surveys of the existing cladding and windows to produce a design which has been priced and submitted for approval. In tandem, the Building Services Team are liaising with the Planning Department

on whether a planning application is required. It is intended to replace the curtain wall system on a like for like basis.