

<b>MINUTES OF</b>	<b>SCRUTINY BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE PANEL</b>
<b>MEETING DATE</b>	<b>Monday, 3 August 2020</b>
<b>MEMBERS PRESENT:</b>	Councillors David Howarth (Chair) and Colin Coulton
<b>CABINET MEMBERS:</b>	Councillor Paul Foster (Leader of the Council) and Matthew Tomlinson (Cabinet Member for Finance, Property & Assets)
<b>OFFICERS:</b>	Darren Cranshaw (Assistant Director of Scrutiny & Democratic Services), James Thomson (Deputy Director of Finance) and Victoria Willett (Service Lead - Transformation and Partnerships)
<b>OTHER MEMBERS:</b>	Councillors Margaret Smith and Phil Smith
<b>PUBLIC:</b>	0

## **9 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Will Adams, Colin Sharples and Karen Walton.

## **10 Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

## **11 Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 22 June 2020 of Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel**

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 22 June 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

## **12 Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 2 July 2020 of Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel**

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 2 July 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

## **13 Budget Outturn 2019-20**

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets presented a report of the Deputy Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) on the budget outturn for 2019-2020.

The report outlined the Council's overall financial position at the end of the financial year on 31 March 2020, which would be considered at Cabinet on Wednesday, 5 August 2020. The overall revenue outturn was a net budget surplus of £1,400,000. This included a £270,000 surplus ring-fenced income and £166,000 relating to budget that will be utilised in 2020/2021, leaving a net surplus of £964,000. This surplus would be used to increase earmarked reserves.

Reference was made to the impact of COVID-19 and business rates, which were difficult to predict, but there was confidence that the Council had healthy reserves to deal with future challenges.

The Panel raised the following queries/comments, which the Cabinet Member and Deputy Director of Finances responded to:

- ▶ With regards the overall budget surplus, it was felt that the variances were relatively small overall and that the bulk had come from business rate income, which was difficult to assess due to the complex formula involved.
- ▶ In response to a question as to whether the council tax increase for this year was required, the position at the time identified that the budget was required and appropriate. There were now risks and challenges facing the Council with regards COVID-19 and business rate collection.
- ▶ Reference was made to the surplus green waste income, which had generated more income than envisaged. However, based on experiences elsewhere it was not expected to continue to increase greatly.
- ▶ Following a query about the Leisure Campus abortive project costs, clarification was provided that the costs were part of a long-term project by the previous administration. Following a review it was felt that the costs of the Leisure Campus were not affordable to the Council. Some of the costs might be useful for future projects, but some of the preparatory costs would not be and therefore had to be written-off.
- ▶ The reduction in relation to income from the Trade Waste Service was mentioned, which was a competitive market. Further information would be provided to the Panel on the reduction.
- ▶ With regards the increase in the provision for bad debt, Members were advised that there was a modest increase in provision, which is based on a formula that looked at age of debts etc.
- ▶ In response to a question around staffing costs and whether the Council had the capacity to deliver our services and the corporate plan, re-assurance was provided that this was in place. The corporate strategy was being re-freshed and the Chief Executive was looking at ensuring the resources were in the right place to deliver the strategy.

- ▶ Re-assurance was provided that the current 3 vacancies in Gateway were being recruited to and were not impacting on the level of service provided by the team. The Panel requested further information on the staffing vacancies in the Gateway Team.
- ▶ Reference was made to whether the credit union reserve would need to be increased in the current climate. It was not envisaged that it would be increased at this stage as the Council's funding was 'pump prime' at its start-up with a view to the credit union being self-sustaining.
- ▶ Further detail was requested on the capital programme in future reports and it was agreed that the Panel would identify the information required so that this could be included.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

1. The Panel thanks the Cabinet Member and Section 151 Officer for their detailed report and answering the Panel's questions.
2. The Panel requests further information on the reasons for the reduction in trade waste income.
3. The Panel welcomes the inclusion of staffing vacancies within the report and the improvement in staff vacancy rates over the previous 12-months.
4. The Panel feels re-assured about the staffing situation in the Gateway customer service centre and asks for an update on the recruitment to vacant posts in Gateway to be provided to the Panel.
5. The Panel asks for more in-depth narrative on progress with the capital projects to be provided in future reports.

## **14 Corporate Strategy Refresh**

The Leader of the Council presented a report of the Interim Chief Executive updating on the Corporate Strategy re-refresh.

It was reported that the COVID-19 crisis was fundamentally changing the lives of our residents and the context in which the Council operates. This was an appropriate time to review the current Corporate Strategy to ensure that it remains fit for purpose as we go forward.

The Panel raised the following queries/comments which the Leader of the Council and Shared Services Lead – Transformation and Partnerships responded to:

- ▶ Following questions about the evidence-base for the re-refresh, many national and local sources of intelligence were being used from local food banks, Members and the community hub.

- ▶ The key differences from the corporate strategy agreed earlier in the year was around capturing the learning and approach that had worked successfully in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with the community hub model, engaging with communities and ensuring the services residents needed were provided.
- ▶ Suggestions were made around making the re-freshed community strategy plain English and user-friendly such as clarifying that 'exemplary' means that you are the best.
- ▶ Following discussions about the next stage of the re-fresh which would be streamlined and include outcomes, confirmation was provided that the draft would be presented to Scrutiny in the future.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

1. The Panel thanks the Leader and Shared Services Lead for their report and answering the Panel's questions.
2. The Panel welcomes the re-fresh of the Corporate Strategy.
3. The Panel looks forward to considering the draft re-freshed Corporate Strategy and performance measures before they are agreed by Full Council.

Chair

Date