



HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes Of The Meeting Of The

Corporate and Performance Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Held at The Council Chamber

The Symington Building, Adam and Eve Street, LE16 7AG

On Thursday, 26 September 2024

Commencing at 18:30

Present:

Councillor Paul Dann, Councillor Peter James, Councillor Michael Rickman, Councillor Geraldine Whitmore, Councillor Amanda Burrell (for Councillor Stuart Finan), Councillor Peter Elliott (for Councillor Rose Forman), Councillor Rani Mahal (for Councillor Phil King)

Apologies:

Councillor Stuart Finan, Councillor Rose Forman, Councillor Phil King

Officers:

C. Mason - Director of Finance and S.151 Officer
J. Clarke - Equality and Diversity Officer
K. Aitken - Business Planning Officer
N. Kwasa - Senior Democratic Officer and Team Leader

Introductions

The Chair opened the meeting and asked Members and Officers to introduce themselves.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Finan, who was substituted by Councillor Burrell, Councillor Forman, who was substituted by Councillor Elliott and Councillor King who was substituted by Councillor Mahal.

Councillors Beadle and Graves also sent their apologies as Portfolio Holders.

Declarations of Members' Interests

There were none.

Performance Overview & Scrutiny Panel Minutes - 25.07.24

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 25th July 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

Portfolio Holder Update

Portfolio Holder updates from Councillors Beadle (Corporate) and Graves (Finance) were tabled. The Leader joined the meeting remotely to respond to any questions the Panel had. The Panel had the opportunity to discuss the reports including updates on;

- Plowman's Yard
- Cleaning of the war memorial in Market Harborough Town Square which has been completed. The Chair thanked the officers involved.
- Overspend on the redevelopment of the Leisure Centres which the Director of Finance and S.151 Officer confirmed is well below the limits allowed by the Constitution.
- Corporate Health and Safety which is being brought back in house following a review of the contract which the Director of Finance and S.151 Officer confirmed will give a better service and that an individual has been recruited to the role and will be starting at the Council shortly.
- How many customers are coming into the Council face-to-face for appointments which the Director of Finance and S.151 Officer confirmed is a very small number, around 10 people per month.
- Clarification sought on Harborough District Leisure Trust's use of funds which the Director of Finance and S.151 Officer confirmed the Council's is working not to recoup the money but to understand how it has been used in the community. He noted that engagement from the Trust with the Council has been difficult, and **AGREED** that the Panel would be kept up-to-date with any developments on this enquiry.
- It was confirmed that the Car Park Strategy is going to the Services and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 31st October 2024.

The Panel thanked the officers Carolyn Bland and Naomi Kwasa who will both shortly be leaving the Council for new roles.

ACTION: The Leader suggested that it would be useful for all Portfolio Holder Updates that go to Cabinet meetings be shared with the relevant Scrutiny Panel as a matter of course, in advance of the Scrutiny Panel meetings in order that Scrutiny Members can ask questions on these updates as required.

The Panel also noted that it would be helpful for Portfolio Members to attend the Scrutiny meetings in person. The Leader noted that not all Cabinet Members may be able to attend all Scrutiny meetings but **AGREED** to look into whether they could join the meetings remotely.

Q1 2024.25 - Finance & Corporate Performance Report, Scrutiny

The Director of Finance and S.151 Officer introduced the report which covered the financial and corporate performance quarter 1 for 2024/25 which was reported to Cabinet on the 9 September 2024. The Panel had the opportunity to ask questions on the report and the following points were raised;

- £400,000 underspend is being allocated to manage any changes that may be required following the Government's announcement of potential changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It was queried whether this would be spent on consultants and the Director of Finance and S.151 Officer confirmed this will give additional resilience as well as funding consultants as required to ensure the Council gets expert advice regarding these changes. He also confirmed that these changes have become apparent since the change of Government following the General Election in May 2024. The Chair confirmed the Council have written to Government to get some further information on these changes.

The Director of Finance and S.151 Officer confirmed the underspend is being generated primarily by investment interest and that the Council invest prudently and interest rates have been incredibly high as a consequence of Covid and the cost of living. He noted that base rates have not currently moved but there may be a drop in November and a second in December but that is still good in comparison to where things were before Covid. He noted that a reduction has been modelled in the MTFS (Medium Term Financial Strategy) over 4 to 5 years but how far it drops back remains to be seen and the Council continues to invest prudently.

Regarding whether this underspend was unusual or standard at this point in the budget cycle he confirmed that it is a result of the fact income and expenditure are both prudently budgeted as it is better to over-achieve than under-deliver. He noted that the Council has a Reserve Strategy so the money that goes into an earmarked reserve can be un-earmarked at any time.

In regards to how this figure was allocated he confirmed he did not think it prudent to allocate the full £486,000 underspend and in discussing with the Strategic Planning Team it was difficult to determine how much might be needed and therefore £400,000 was allocated - if in Quarters 2 or 3 the overall surplus of £486,000 goes down, the amount in earmarked reserves will be reduced.

- Regarding a question on if the overspend on temporary accommodation would keep increasing the Director of Finance and S.151 Officer confirmed that he did envisage it would increase as temporary accommodation is one of the major pressures being felt by District and Unitary Councils across the country

and the situation was being closely monitored. He confirmed that even if the need for temporary accommodation doubled the Council could meet that cost by moving reserves around and that people will still be provided for.

- Regarding a question about the Council being in a position where no more major planning applications are coming in the Director of Finance and S.151 Officer confirmed that this is the forecast outturn at this point in time but that the Council is at the behest of developers and when they choose to submit applications and this varies year on year.

- Regarding a question about the target to pay creditors within 30 days and when this will reach 100% the Director of Finance and S.151 Officer confirmed that it is a challenge and the Council is exploring innovative ways of how to improve this, including through the new finance system, and there is discipline on the services and the suppliers that needs to be built up to make this more efficient.

- Regarding a question on the allocation of £5,000 to Ward Members the Director of Finance and S.151 Officer confirmed that he had not heard any updates on this yet.

Following the discussion it was,

RESOLVED that the Corporate & Performance Overview & Scrutiny Panel considered and commented on the contents of the report.

Equality Plan 202528

The Equality and Diversity Officer presented the report which provided an overview of the Council's reviewed Equality Plan which outlines the Council's commitment to equality and diversity and how the Council intends to continue to meet its statutory responsibilities over the next 3 years. The Panel had the opportunity to ask questions on the report and the following points were raised;

- Regarding a question on the changes between the previous and updated Equality Plan, the Equality and Diversity Officer noted that the local picture has changed following pressures on the community since Covid and the cost of living, and the new plan has updated statistics and figures including demographics data from the 2021 Census. She noted there have been slight amendments to the Equality Act but that the main legislation remains the same so this plan is a refreshed version.

- Regarding a question on consultation on the Plan the Equality and Diversity Officer noted that the Equality Impact Assessment appended to the report shows information on who was consulted along with Census data about the communities across the District as well as needs assessment and levels of discrimination or barriers to accessing services.

- The Chair mentioned the fact that the number of Ukrainian people within the District has not been captured as the Census took place in 2021, before the Russian invasion in Ukraine had happened.

- Regarding a point about part-time working within the Council itself the Equality and Diversity Officer noted that the Council's workforce is majority female and that work is being undertaken within recruitment to vacancies in the Council to see where two part-time roles might be amalgamated to create one role to encourage more males to apply and have more diversity in the workforce.

It was noted that the report is going to Council for decision in December 2024 and the Chair asked for any further comments to be sent to himself or Democratic Services to forward onto the Equality and Diversity Officer before December. Following the discussion it was;

RESOLVED That Scrutiny Panel Members had an opportunity to view and consider the proposed Harborough District Council Equality Plan (Strategy) 2025/28.

To consider any urgent items (to be decided by the Chairman)

There were none.

The meeting ended at 19:37