

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee

At 7.00 pm on Tuesday 14th September, 2021 in the Committee Room, Municipal Offices, Bowling Green Road, Kettering, NN15 7QX

Present:-

Members

Councillor Mark Pengelly (Chair)
Councillor Valerie Anslow
Councillor Scott Brown
Councillor Jim Hakewill
Councillor Ken Harrington

Councillor David Jenney
Councillor King Lawal
Councillor Malcolm Ward

Officers

Janice Gotts - Executive Director of Finance
Adele Wylie – Director of Legal and Democratic
Mark Dickenson – Assistant Director of Finance & Strategy
David Pope – Senior Committee Administrator

Also in attendance

Councillor Lloyd Bunday – Executive Member for Finance and Transformation
Councillor Wendy Brackenbury – Chair of the Scrutiny Commission

8 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Larry Henson, Ian Jelley, Richard Levell and Steven North.

9 Minutes of the Meeting Held on 13th July 2021

RESOLVED that: The Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 13th July 2021 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

10 Members' Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

11 Notification of requests to address the meeting

None.

12 Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - Period 4

Members received the Budget Monitoring Report 2021/22 for Period 4. The report sought to advise the Scrutiny Committee of the budget monitoring position for the Council as at the end of July 2021. The report was based on the latest monitoring report as presented to the Executive on 26th August 2021.

The Committee noted a forecast General Fund underspend of £266,000 against an approved budget of £292.5million net. This showed a favourable movement of £325,000 from Period 3, at which point a £59,000 overspend had been forecast. The main budgetary movements were outlined, with details for the variations provided.

It was noted that the most significant financial risk to the Council was Adult Social Care, with more detailed work being required to better understand the likely ongoing impact of social care requirements, with the recent government announcement in relation to the Social Care Levy likely to have a significant impact alongside the ongoing Covid pandemic. In addition, disaggregation of care packages from the former County Council needed to be up to date and correctly aligned to each unitary authority.

Members noted that the Council was awaiting further information on the detail of lead authority arrangements that it had entered into alongside West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) in regard to specific service areas, with details of applicable cost and recharges also being reviewed. It was noted that WNC had just produced its first monitoring report and the report would be considered by the Council's finance team in view of the impact on any recharges.

The Committee heard that the Council continued to closely monitor commercial income, and collection rates for both Council Tax and Business Rates were currently holding up.

It was acknowledged that there had been some movement of Council staff since vesting day, with internal staffing structures forming and settling. There were a number of staff vacancies, with work ongoing to confirm funding and identify which posts required recruitment.

The Committee heard that a significant proportion of the Council's budgets were ex County and based on the disaggregation principles and amounts agreed as part of the budget setting process. Any changes arising which varied from the disaggregation or were need to align the budget would be reflected in virements or picked up through the new Medium Term Financial Strategy from 2022/23.

Members asked a number of questions in relation to:

- The mitigation of risks associated with charging arrangements for lead/host arrangements with WNC, due to late financial information being received
- A request to highlight budgetary movements relating to vacant posts

- Further details on post-Covid leisure contracts in terms of income losses and whether services were seeing a return to normal operation
- Concerns were raised regarding the number of staff vacancies, especially within the planning department
- Progress of the Transformation Programme and savings achieved as a result
- Car parking charges and the need for consistency across North Northamptonshire
- The Adult Social Care budgetary forecast
- The reasons for the forecast pressure on Fixed Penalty Notice income for on-street parking
- Potential funding sources for the “levelling-up” agenda
- The Council’s winter plan for rough sleepers
- A request to receive details of the Council’s asset register
- Funding sources to cover the support of Afghan refugee placements
- The percentage of local businesses that had ceased trading due to Covid pressures
- Availability of outturn figures for the final budgets of the former Corby Borough Council, East Northamptonshire District Council and Northamptonshire County Council
- A request that percentage of the budget be inserted into future outturn figures
- Concessionary bus fares underspend
- A request to invite the Children’s Trust to a future meeting of the Committee

The Committee was advised that the Directorate for Adults, Communities and Wellbeing Services would be contacted for details of the Council’s winter plan for rough sleepers and information on this would be circulated to members. In addition, details of the Council’s asset register would also be circulated.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted and commented on the budget monitoring position as at Period 4 as outlined above.

13 **Scrutiny Work Planning Event**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Director for Legal and Democratic regarding the upcoming Scrutiny Work Planning Event scheduled for 9th October 2021.

It was noted that the event had originally been scheduled for August, however member availability had resulted in a change of date. The event, to be held at Wicksteed Park, Kettering, would be hosted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, an independent body that sought to support organisations by promoting better governance and scrutiny, both in policy and in practice.

Ahead of the event a press release had been issued containing a survey seeking the views of the public, stakeholders, members and staff as to which local issues required consideration by the Council's scrutiny arrangements. This press release was backed by both Cllr Mark Pengelly and Cllr Wendy Brackenbury, the Chairs of the Council's two scrutiny committees. Feedback received from survey responses would be collated and circulated to members, who would then be requested to prioritise the areas for review to inform the creation of the Annual Work Plan for Scrutiny at the event on 9th October.

It was noted that undertaking work on this basis offered an ordered approach to scrutiny and adhered to best practice. Such scrutiny work needed to have a meaningful impact and the Council would ensure that there were sufficient resources made available to members to enable efficient, beneficial outcomes. The Annual Work Plan would be published publicly, with the opportunity provided to the scrutiny committees to present an annual update of work undertaken to Full Council.

Members broadly welcomed the concepts outlined above and asked questions in relation to smaller work plan elements and the annual budget scrutiny process.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 8.42 pm