
RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 17th October, 2023

Present: Councillor Paddy Short (in the Chair),
Councillors Danny Cassidy (Vice Chair), Mike Booth, Andrew Clegg,
Joyce Plummer, Judith Addison and Bernard Dawson

In Attendance: Councillors Peter Britcliffe

Apologies: Councillors Josh Allen and Scott Brerton

167 Apologies for absence and substitutions

There were apologies from Councillors Josh Allen and Scott Brerton. Councillors Judith Addison and Bernard Dawson substituted.

168 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

None.

169 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 5th September 2023 were submitted for approval as a correct record. No questions were raised.

Resolved - That the minutes of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5th September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

170 Customer Contact Centre

The Chair invited Councillor Peter Britcliffe, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Lee Middlehurst, Head of Benefits, Revenues and Customer Contact to present this item.

Councillor Britcliffe presented the report and drew attention to the following:

- Overview of the Customer Contact Centre and the Council services they provide assistance with
- Telephone enquiries received including a breakdown of the nature of those enquiries, showing a reducing in the number as customer move more towards email
- Average wait times and call abandonment rate
- Email enquiries including a breakdown of the nature of those enquiries
- Online services available
- Face to face appointments
- Dealing with bereaved customers

Lee Middlehurst responded to questions on the following topics:

- Customer enquiries received via facebook messenger
- How face to face appointments are made available to the community

- How staff deal with “non-standard” enquiries, or enquiries not related to Council business
- Enquiry response times

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and the Officer for the presentation and responses to questions.

Resolved - That the report is noted.

171 Revenue Budget 2023/2024 Monitoring - Quarter 2 to end of September 2023

Councillor Peter Britcliffe, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Martin Dyson, Executive Director (Resources) presented this report.

Mr. Dyson highlighted the Revenue Budget Forecast, with spend to the end of the financial year in March 2024 forecasted at £13.385m compared to a Budget of £14.383m. This forecast produces a positive variance of £0.998m by the end of the financial year.

Mr. Dyson drew attention to the variance in forecast by service area, reporting the following:

Environmental Health Services are predicting a year-end adverse variance of £70,000 and the main variances is due to increased agency costs for backfilling of vacant posts of £19,000, additional licensing enforcement costs on legal fees of £11,000 and reduced income in year due to staff vacancies and the inability to carry out enforcement £40,000.

Environmental Services are predicting a year-end positive variance of (£61,000) and the main variances are: Page 3 of 13 Environmental Maintenance is forecasting an adverse variance of £70,000, due to forecast increased vehicles maintenance costs of £104,000, additional building cleaning costs of £6,000 and staffing savings of (£13,000) and utility savings of (£49,000) and increased software licences and general rises in equipment costs of £22,000.

Legal and Democratic Services are indicating a forecast adverse variance of £141,000 for the year. Service expenditure on Democratic Services is forecasting an adverse variance of £80,000 with the main variances due to additional costs of £67,000 in undertaking local elections and £13,000 for Modern Government software upgrades to maintain democratic and committee reporting.

Planning & Transportation are predicting an adverse variance for the year of £209,000 for the year. This is due to additional spend on agency and salary costs of £232,000 due to recruitment and retention issues, plus £34,000 additional costs on energy and property rates, less an additional (£57,000) of forecast increased allotment income in year.

Regeneration & Housing Services are predicting an adverse variance of £37,000 at year-end. Facilities Services has an adverse variance of £40,000 due to increase fee income for Disabled Facilities Grants of (£24,000) offset by £12,000 of additional costs for Christmas decorations and the need to undertake £52,000 worth of condition and safety surveys at the Oswaldtwistle theatre, since the lease has been returned to the Council.

The Resource Directorate is predicting a positive variance of (£430,000) for the year.

Non Service Items are predicting a positive variance for the year of (£964,000). This is due to forecast savings on borrowing and leasing costs of (£171,000). This is due to slippage in the capital programme plus additional treasury investment income of (£793,000) due to

utilising new methods of investing funds, the increase in interest rates available and also the significant balances that the council has been able to invest largely due to slippage in the capital programme.

Mr. Dyson summarised the difference between Q1 and the current forecasts and the reasons for such, and highlighted potential in year risks including:

- Waste disposal site / transfer station
- Oswaldtwistle Civic Theatre
- Crematorium / Cremators
- Leisure Trust / Swimming pool support

Cllr Britcliffe said he wished to thank officers for sound financial management which has led to the forecast underspend, and puts the Council in a good position to deal with any unexpected financial pressures which may arise.

Cllr Britcliffe and Mr Dyson responded to the following questions from committee members:

- Is Blackburn crematorium closed permanently? How long is the increased demand at Accrington likely to continue for?
- Regarding recruitment, retention and the growing costs of using agency staff – Has there been any work done on identifying why these are growing issues for the council and have any steps been taken to resolve them?
- Due the unsuccessful bid to Sport England for the revenue element of the Swimming Pool Support Fund, does the council foresee itself providing further subsidies or support to Hyndburn Leisure, and does this itself present a risk?
- What is the Council doing now to plan for the major risk associated with Waste Disposal at Whinney Hill?

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Cllr Britcliffe and Mr. Dyson for the report and responses to questions.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

172 Capital Programme Monitoring 2023/24 - 2nd Quarter Update to 30th September 2023

Councillor Peter Britcliffe, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Martin Dyson, Executive Director (Resources) presented this report.

Cllr Britcliffe presented and highlighted the following:

The Council authorised new additions to the capital programme of £8.374m at its meeting on the 23rd February 2023, with £1.440m approved and added to the programme since then. In addition, the capital spend outturn from 2022/2023 slipped £37.615m into 2023/2024, which £35.294m relates to the Levelling Up scheme for Accrington Town Centre, the Leisure Estate Investment and Housing Schemes including Disabled Facilities Grants. The total approved Capital programme now totals £47.429m.

Financing of the programme comes mainly from external grants and contributions (66%) with the remainder coming from capital receipts, earmarked receipts, Section 106, direct revenue financing and external borrowing. Cllr Britcliffe emphasised that borrowing would only occur if required.

The current programme of £47.429m will not be capable of being delivered in the current financial year and it is proposed to now rephrase the programme over a longer period. The Actual expenditure to 30th September 2023 is £2.771m against the latest rephrased budget for 2023/2024 of £14.418m. This equates to 19.22% spend. As the programme has been rephrased, the latest forecasts are now that there will be a small underspend in year of £11,552 with all other schemes in line with the budgeted profile and are expected to be spent in year.

Cllr Britcliffe highlighted the risks to the programme, including capital receipts and external grants not being at the expected levels. These were flagged as a medium level risk but officers are working hard to ensure these risks are mitigated. Other risks include external borrowing and the fact that the majority of the programme covers major schemes which will require close monitoring.

The Chair invited questions from the committee. Cllr Britcliffe and Mr. Dyson responded to the following questions:

- There is £5 million in borrowing and £5 million from reserves allocated to the Leisure Centre project. Can the Council afford to do this considering the financial issues facing many Councils across the country? What are the revenue budget implications of the borrowing?
- Leisure Estate Investment Programme – The extent of this programme is dependent on the Council being successful in obtaining external funding of around £6.9m. To date there has been no confirmation on the outcome of these bids and the level of spend on Leisure transformation will be contained within Council resources should these bids be unsuccessful.” What is the situation if some or none of these bids are successful?
- There’s been several investment projects at Oakhill Park. How can the Council justify this when other parks are in need of expenditure?

The above question prompted a discussion on investment in parks across the borough, notably Peel Park. Cllr Plummer asked if the committee could be provided with a detailed response on investment in Peel Park and the Coppice over the last 5 years. Mr. Dyson agreed to provide this at a later date.

- Is the Council confident Levelling Up money can be spent by the deadline? Does the external funding for the new leisure centre development come with a deadline and if so is the Council confident this can be met?
- What is the £50k “Fly Tipping Intervention” for?
- What is the Council’s current plan for the Civic Theatre and Arts Centre? If required, can capital funding allocated but not yet spent on other projects be diverted to this?
- How likely is the Council to receive the remaining forecast of £2.5 million in capital receipts?

The Chair thanked Cllr Britcliffe and Mr. Dyson for their report and responses to questions.

Resolved -

That the contents of the report be noted; and;

That the Executive Director be requested to provide the committee with details on investment at Peel Park and the Coppice over the last 5 years.

Signed:.....

Date:

Chair of the meeting
At which the minutes were confirmed