

Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
17 February 2020

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Monday 17 February 2020 at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE

PRESENT: Councillors S.Markiewicz (Chairman)  
G.Michaelides (Vice-Chairman)

ALSO M.Birleson, J.Broach, H.Quenet, J.Quinton, P.Smith,  
PRESENT: S.Thusu, M.Cowan (substituting for J.Skoczylas),  
P.Hebden (substituting for S.Kasumu)

D.Bell (Executive Member, Resources)

OFFICIALS Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) (K.Ng)  
PRESENT: Head of Resources (R.Baker)  
Senior Finance Business Partner (Y.Krishnan)  
Senior Performance and Strategy Officer (G.Crawford)  
Governance Services Officer (S.Keenlyside)

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32. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

The following substitutions of Committee Members had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules:-

Councillor M. Cowan for J. Skoczylas  
Councillor P. Hebden for S.Kasumu.

33. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S.Kasumu, L.Musk and J. Skoczylas.

34. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

35. ACTIONS UPDATE

The status of actions agreed at the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 8 January 2020 in the report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

36. SOPRA STERIA CONTRACT PERFORMANCE - 2019/20

Report of the Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services), which provided the Committee with an analysis of the service performance for Sopra Steria against contractual key performance indicators and service level targets for benefits, council tax, business rates, Information Communication Technology (ICT), contact centre, reception and switchboard.

The overall performance had been good since the commencement of the partnership despite the period of economic uncertainty the Council had gone through and the welfare reform changes which had impacted on performance.

Performance for some of the key performance indicators for Quarter 3, October 2019 to December 2019 was shown in Appendix A.

The Committee noted that business rates collection was slightly behind target partially due to two large organisations not making their December payments. The payment from one of these organisations was received in early January and had this been received a few days earlier, the KPI would have been above target.

The following point was raised:

- When contacting the contact centre, it took 28 seconds before accessing the available options. Officers advised that the options had been improved and callers were encouraged to use online services. There were previously 3,000 calls to the contact centre which meant callers were held in the queue for a long time. Queuing times had now been reduced with callers accessing the service they required first time.

RESOLVED

That the Committee notes the contents of the report.

37. PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT

Members received a report of the Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) and verbal update on the performance indicator data collected for those services that fell within its remit. It provided Quarter 3 along with comparative information. The report and verbal update enabled the Committee to identify which of the Council's services were improving, not improved, or had remained the same in their key performance areas. Service comments were also included to explain the performance shown, along with any further action needed.

Members noted that Key Performance Indicator (KPI) BPI 62 had not achieved its target. BPI 62 was the level of sundry debt as an average number of days to collect (Debtor Days). It was explained that the figures were averaged over a 12

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month period, so a delay in payment of significant value invoices issued to other councils in previous months continued to have an impact on the rolling average for the year. This was further compounded by another large overdue invoice issued to another Local Authority. This was paid on 3 January 2020.

All other KPIs had achieved or exceeded their targets.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- KPI BPI 04 - Members enquired about the time taken to process new housing benefit and council benefit claims. Officers would find out and report back. Members suggested that the target levels should be reassessed. Officers advised that target levels were reviewed annually with Sopra Steria and would be looked at within the current year.
- KPI BPI 05 – Members were surprised that stress and anxiety accounted for 111.75 working days lost due to sickness absence and asked if this was being monitored. A Member highlighted that compared to private employers, the Council was performing very well. Officers explained that if a member of staff was absent due to stress, a cause of stress assessment would be undertaken to find the root cause of the stress and may be looked at independently by external Occupational Health. The Head of Service would also be informed

RESOLVED

That the Resources and Overview Committee note the performance indicator data collected and reported.

To discuss and agree any feedback to be provided to the service teams on the trends shown in these performance indicators.

38. REVENUE & CAPITAL Q3 BUDGET MONITORING 2019/20

Members considered the report of the Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) on the revenue and capital budget monitoring 2019/20. The purpose of the report was to present the General Revenue Fund (GRF), Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Programme outturn positions as at the end of the third quarter 2019/20. These reports were presented and discussed at the Cabinet meeting on the 11 February 2020 and were attached to the summary report. The Cabinet reports analysed the reasons for changes between the current budget and projected outturn.

Members raised questions and sought clarification on the following:

- There was an error in the Officers report on page 47. The variance to year date forecast outturn for the telephone network charges should have been £40,021 not £8,991.

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- Members enquired as to why income levels were not being met for Houses of Multiple Occupation licences. Officers would find out and report back.
- Members asked how many people were in bed and breakfast accommodation. Officers would ask Housing Team to confirm.
- Members discussed the £120k grant funding that the Council had received as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act. Officers advised that the Housing Team were considering how to use this funding most effectively. Members were concerned about homeless people who were unable to help themselves or who had refused help. Officers would ask the Head of Community and Housing Strategy to issue a briefing note to Members.
- Members enquired about the reason for the variance in parking fee income. Officers would report back.
- Members enquired about the under spend on both electricity and gas and asked if green energy providers could be considered. Officers advised that they would feedback their enquiry to the Climate Change Group.
- Members asked why there was an under spend on housing repairs. Officers said that they will find out why and report back.

RESOLVED

That the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ROSC) note the monitoring reports.

Meeting ended 8.10pm  
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