

Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
22 February 2016

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Monday, 22nd February, 2016 at 7.30 pm in the Salvation House, 2 Sterling Court, Mundells, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL7 1FT

PRESENT: Councillors D Bell (Chairman)  
G Dowler (Vice-Chairman)

S Chander, G Hayes, C Juggins, S Markiewicz,  
G Michaelides, N Pace, L Page and S Roberts

ALSO Councillors  
PRESENT:

OFFICIALS B Baldock, Director (Governance)  
PRESENT: F Cantel, Client Support Services Manager  
J Cika, Finance Manager  
G Crawford, Senior Performance and Strategy Officer  
Osbourne, Management Accountant - Projects  
D Williams, Financial and Technical Accountant

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35. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

None.

36. APOLOGIES

None.

37. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38. ACTIONS UPDATE

NOTED

39. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 19

None.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillor G Dowler declared a non-pecuniary interest in items on the agenda as relevant to his position with the Welwyn Hatfield Community Housing Trust.

41. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND PETITIONS

None.

42. SOPRA STERIA CONTRACT PERFORMANCE - 3RD QUARTER 2015-2016

Members received a report which provided them with information on the service performance for Sopra Steria against contractual key performance indicators.

It was explained that the reasons for target not being met for incidents being completed within Service Level Targets (this being all calls to the help desk) were:

1. The high number of calls during the period.
2. The Server Room move which had to take priority over other work for a short period.

It was noted that the change to the option for making 12 monthly NNDR payments rather than 10 had impacted on collection rates.

43. NOTED the report.  
HR TURNOVER 2015-2016

Members received a report which provided analysis of employee turnover for the 12 month period ending 31 October 2015.

The style and content of the report had been amended from those at previous meetings, to reflect changes that Members had requested.

Members commented as follows:

1. The figures for Policy and Culture appeared high. *This was explained by the type of work done in that area and the use of casual staff.*
2. Had there been many leavers following the changes with the Housing Trust? *There was no data available on this as yet.*
3. Could further analysis of the exit interviews be provided as it was important to recognise if Welwyn Hatfield was a low paying authority. *Members were advised that Welwyn Hatfield paid at the middle level of pay scales in the county but competition with London made it difficult to compete with salary levels. Management were more concerned about whether there were issues of bullying or harassment and whether morale was low. On occasions, if there were issues with recruitment, a market supplement might be offered.*
4. Members thought there might be issues with the lack of opportunity to advance and felt that staff would move to other authorities if there were no vacancies at Welwyn Hatfield.

5. Members had queried how many people left during their first year of employment with the authority. *This was reported to be 11% which equated to 14 people, 11 of whom were either from Planning or Campus West.*
6. Members commented that they thought some turnover in staff was good for the authority.

44. NOTED the report.  
PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT QUARTER 3

Members received a report which provided performance indicator data for the services within its remit.

There was only one area of concern which was the collection rate for NNDR and the reasons for this had been explained earlier in the meeting.

Members commented on the number of days lost to sickness absence and they felt that the target was high and work should be done to reduce the figures.

Officers explained that the introduction of a robust Sickness Management Scheme had reduced absences and Welwyn Hatfield was in a reasonably good position and the target set was realistic. The new scheme helped identify genuine sickness and allowed the authority to be supportive of these people.

Other Members commented that there was a noticeable improvement in the figures over the last few years and that they were pleased with the progress.

A Member asked how many people were included in the satisfaction survey. He was advised that there were 350 every quarter.

45. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING - PERIOD 9

Members received a report which provided monitoring information for the Revenue and Capital Budgets.

The following points were highlighted:

- Contribution to General Fund reserves was forecast at £1.961m rather than the £0.9m previously forecast. This was due to increased net income, increased business rates, employee expenditure savings and third party payments. Details of these can be found in the report.
- £350k would be rolled into balances for use next year for corporate projects.
- The HRA was forecast to be £560k favourable due to release of bad debt provision and a reduction in dilapidation costs at Bridge Road East.
- The addition of reserves as forecast at period six had been taken into account when preparing next year's budget.

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- The general fund growth items for 2015/16 was at 40% spent – Members would be informed of the projected year end spend.
- Debtor days had reduced, mainly due to larger debtors paying promptly.

Members made the following comments:

1. Would the 2016-2017 budget be adjusted based on the variances shown in this report? *No adjustment would be made, as the budget was close to being authorised. The underspend reported was due to both one off and ongoing items. These will be reviewed through budget monitoring processes and also reviewed as part of the next budget setting process.*
2. If the budget was more accurate, Members would have the option of doing more or cutting less if they knew the funds would be available. However, they preferred to err on the side of caution.
3. Should reserves be set at a higher level due to the volatility of business rates levels? The minimum reserve level remains at £1.6m as reported in the medium term financial strategy. Reserve levels are reviewed regularly in light of the changing financial risk assessment. The reserves are forecast to remain over £8m for the duration of the MTFs period 2016-2019.
4. Members liked the detail in the report. They were invited to send thoughts on any proposed changes in format to officers and the Chairman.

NOTED the report.

46. COMMITTEE OVERVIEW WORK PROGRAMME 2015-2016

This being the last meeting of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee in this municipal year, no work programme was presented.

47. RESPONSE FROM CABINET/COUNCIL TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A new work programme would be set at the first meeting of the next year.

48. CONSIDERATION OF ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

None.

49. COMMITTEE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2015-2016

None.

50. CONSIDERATION OF ITEMS FOR REVIEW GROUPS

51. RESPONSE FROM CABINET/COUNCIL TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS/REPORTS

None.

None.

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52. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

None.

53. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, IS OF SUFFICIENT URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

None.

54. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.  
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Meeting ended at Time Not Specified