

Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee
13 September 2017

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the RESOURCES Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 September 2017 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors N.Pace (Chairman)
J.Boulton (Vice-Chairman)

M.Birleson, H.Bower, C.Gillett, T.Lyons, G.Michaelides,
S.Roberts, D.Fuller, Robbins, M.Cowan, K.Holman and
D.Bell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor D. Bell – Executive Member for Resources

Tenants D. Fuller
Panel B. Rhodes

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Executive Director (Resources, Environment & Cultural Services)
(K. Ng)
Head of Resources (R. Baker)
Client Support Services Manager (F. Cantel)
General Fund Business Partner (D. Williams)
Financial Accountant - Cap & Tech (T. Fortune)
Governance Services Officer (G. Paddan)

14. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

The following substitution of Committee Members had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 19-22:

Councillor M. Cowan for T. Bailey

Councillor K. Holman for S. Markiewicz

15. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T. Bailey and S. Markiewicz.

16. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17. ACTIONS UPDATE

Members received an update on the actions identified at the meeting held on 17 July 2017, including the requested information in respect of bank charges.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

19. SOPRA STERIA CONTRACT PERFORMANCE - 2017/18

Members received a report of the Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services), which provided 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 performance has been good since the commencement of the partnership despite the period of economic uncertainty which has been noted and the welfare reform changes which have had an impact on performance.

The report noted that performance for some of the key performance indicators for Quarter 1, April 2017 to June 2017, as shown in Appendix A. The Enforcement Agent data was shown in Appendix B, following a recommendation from the ROSC scrutiny sub-committee.

It was noted that Sopra Steria continued to experience staffing issues this quarter with the Contact Centre, including high levels of short term sickness. As a result this showed a dip in performance for some of their performance indicators.

Members asked whether there had been an increase in the volume of work and enquired about the level of outstanding benefit correspondence compared to last year. It was agreed that this information be provided to Members by email.

Customer Services in respect of visitors greeted at reception within three minutes was discussed and it was suggested that perhaps this could be reduced to two minutes. Members were advised that over time targets have changed but these need to remain challenging but achievable.

There have been some people who refuse to pay their bills and enforcement action is taken and figures have been provided to Members as requested at the last meeting.

Members gave consideration to the impact on householders and asked that comparable figures be provided in respect of enforcement action taken as shown in Appendix B. It was agreed that a meeting be arranged before the next ROSC meeting with Councillor Roberts, Ka and Farhad to look at any requests made to the Chairman in respect of hardship on householders.

The following issues were also raised:

- The meaning of error messages that appear on computers are not always very clear. Officers advised that it was not always possible to impede in third party systems.
- When does 2016/17 Council Tax for the whole year becomes payable when enforcement action is taken. Officers advised that it becomes payable as soon as someone has lost the right to pay by instalments and prior to a summons going out.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

20. PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT

Members received a report of the Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services), with an accompanying presentation which provided the Committee with the performance indicator data collected for those services that fall within its remit. It provided Quarter1 data for 2017/18, along with comparative information.

The report and presentation enabled the Committee to identify which of their services were improving, not improving or remaining the same in their key performance areas. Service comments were also included to explain the performance shown, together with any further action that is required.

The level of business rates collected as a percentage of the total due was considered and it was suggested should it be 25% instead of 30% as Business rated were now paid over 12 months. Overall target had been met and performance was good.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted together with the performance indicator data for the services with its remit.

21. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING AT 30 JUNE 2017 (PERIOD 3 2017/18)

Members considered the report of the Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services), which presented the Revenue, Capital and HRA budget monitoring position, as at the end of June 2017 (Month 3) for the financial year 2017/18. These reports were presented and discussed at the Cabinet meeting on the 8 August 2017 and were attached to the report. The Cabinet reports analysed the reasons for changes between the current budget and projected outturn.

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Members asked about the copier costs, as paperless offices were being proposed for the future. Clarification was sought on the following:

- Risk consideration and spending on Local Plan.
- Utility costs – billing, could this be seasonality of weather?
- Roller City – reduction in usage. Soft play. Officers explained that there are changes being proposed to the operation to help improve the facilities and that this is part of the Campus West review, the progress of which was reported through the Campus West Member Panel.
- Housing budget there has been an increase in the grant from the Government from 11% to 16%.
- The term basket of goods was explained – it includes fuel, vehicle and wages.
- Planning income increase – a number of new developments in the Borough, which has increased the income.
- The variation in garage rents – this was explained as some garages were in a more desirable area and popular. Queries relating to garage charges to be forwarded to Ka for a response.
- Recycling credits and sales income (excluding garden waste) – income being two months behind, this was explained as a timing issue.

The Executive Member for Resources explained the Property Company Investment and that there was a monthly investment bullet that is sent to Members, which showed the investments and current position.

Members asked about the projects including Splashlands. Officers could not provide any further information on this as the information was confidential but the progress was being reported to the Splashlands Member Procurement Board, which is a Cross Party Group.

Further consideration was given to affordable housing and developments of properties on reasonable scales. It seemed that the Council at present was unable to take on large scale developments due to potential risks. Greenfield sites and garage sites have been put forward for redevelopment and these appear to be manageable small projects. Members were advised that options were being considered for affordable housing and that it was not for this Committee to discuss housing issues.

The Committee was informed that fees and charges were reviewed each year as part of the budget process.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

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22. COMMITTEE OVERVIEW WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

Members received a pro-forma of the work programme for the Committee for 2017-18.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

Meeting ended at 8.30pm
GP