

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY

1 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 6.30 PM

PRESENT: Cllr C Ladkin - Chairman
Cllr P Williams – Vice-Chairman
Cllr JMT Collett, Cllr SM Gibbens, Cllr K Morrell, Cllr LJ Mullaney and Cllr R Webber-Jones

Officers in attendance: Matthew Bowers, Rebecca Owen, Rebecca Valentine-Wilkinson and Ashley Wilson

195 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Sheppard-Bools.

196 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was moved by Councillor Williams, seconded by Councillor Webber-Jones and RESOLVED – the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September be confirmed as a correct record.

197 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

198 BUSINESS RATES AND POOLING UPDATE - QUARTER 1 2021/2022

Members were updated on the 2021 quarter 1 position in relation to business rates and pooling.

The report was noted.

199 BUSINESS RATES AND POOLING UPDATE - QUARTER 2 2021/2022

Members were updated on the 2021 quarter 2 position in relation to business rates and pooling. It was noted that the S31 Grant had decreased between Q1 and Q2 because there had been a large number of various “reliefs” given to retail businesses that had been reversed in Q2.

It was also highlighted that in two tier areas all business rates income would be retained by the local planning authority as the decision maker for new renewable energy businesses that locate within the council area. This meant that HBBC would keep 100% of the business rates where it agreed the planning permission for renewable energy schemes.

Members noted the report.

200 SUNDRY DEBTS - QUARTER 2 2021/2022

Members were updated on the quarter 2 position in relation to sundry debts.

It was noted that the Council had a performance indicator (KPI) for debt over 90 days old and included within that was an "in dispute" debt for £395,095 where the council had agreed certain terms with large organisations in relation to Covid. Unfortunately invoices were sent out just before the terms were finalised so it was confirmed that these figures were not really disputes and that the debtor ledger had not been adjusted for these agreements.

It was confirmed that the authority was in a better position compared to the previous quarter 4.

Members noted the report.

201 MONTHLY OUTTURN REPORTS FOR THE PERIOD APRIL 2021 TO JUNE 2021

The financial outturn position as at June 2021 was presented to Members. It was highlighted that the overall position was a worsening position in terms of the deficit that was increasing. The key reasons for this were all Covid related:

- Homelessness pressures that were still being picked up leading to an overspend on this budget
- Negotiations with the Leisure Centre who were struggling and asking for ongoing support
- Car park income was £110k down, but it was not known whether this was due to peoples' behaviour that had changed or whether it was a longer term implication.
- There was a variance on the capital spend on the crematorium. There were ongoing discussions with regards to the ground conditions. This meant there was a slippage in the capital spend. It was confirmed that once there was update on this position that budget would be re-profiled.

Members noted the report.

202 TREASURY MANAGEMENT QUARTER 2 2021/22

Members were presented with a report on the council's treasury management activity in the second quarter of 2021/22.

It was highlighted that forecasts and interest rates were low. Also the level of short-term investments had a very low return which had an impact on income and the MTFs.

The short-term borrowing for managing cash flow purposes was noted.

Members noted the report.

203 PLANNING SERVICE REVIEW

Members were updated on the performance of the planning service. It was highlighted that:

- Performance in the development management team had been good in the first six months of the pandemic
- Performance in the last few months had reduced
- There had been an increase in planning applications and more of a complexity in those applications
- There had been an increase in the number of appeals which had unfortunately diverted officers attention to work on these appeals
- For strategic planning the local plan was moving forward and was going to Council at the end of November. This was then going out for consultation and then on to government.
- Twycross Zoo was successful with the £20 million levelling up fund which the Major Projects team had worked on.

With regards to recruitment and retention within the planning team, work had been going on behind the scenes for interim cover and to recruit to those vacant posts.

In response to Members questions it was confirmed that a number of the vacant posts had been vacant for some time within the team and it was a known issue across the country that there was an issue in recruiting to these planning roles.

It was confirmed that support was being received from Harborough DC with some of the positions and some interim staff were already in place with three more starting in the next few weeks. Support had also been secured from Capita who were undertaking some of the backlog in planning applications.

A member raised a question regarding the local plan and the county council's suggestion that they would oppose the plan on examination. It was confirmed that the team had been working closely with the highways team at Leicestershire County Council and that the indication was that the strategy would not place any significant barriers to development.

A member raised his concern around the planning performance over the last nine months and the risk of falling into special measures by the government due to the increase and complexity in applications and them not being determined in the statutory period.

It was confirmed that performance for major applications was above the national indicator at 80% with minor applications at 61% against a target of 65% with others significantly below at 63%. It was confirmed that measures were in place to resolve the situation as long as the major application indicator stayed above target.

Members asked that their thanks go to the Major Projects team for their work with Twycross Zoo and their successful funding application.

Members noted the report.

204 FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the work programme for 2021/22 and beyond.

A Member asked that the Leisure Centre performance review report that was due in March 2022 be forward looking rather than backward looking.

Members also requested an update on the Planning performance and performance targets and the position in relation to key issues and work to evidence and adjust these problems. It was confirmed that this would be included in the quarterly performance and risk management framework report but members would be kept updated.

Members noted the work programme.

(The Meeting closed at 7.36 pm)

CHAIRMAN