

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE, AUDIT & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

11 NOVEMBER 2013 AT 6.30 PM

PRESENT: Miss DM Taylor - Chairman
Mr R Mayne – Vice-Chairman

Mr PR Batty, Mrs R Camamile, Mr PAS Hall, Mr JS Moore and Mr K Morrell

Officers in attendance: Julie Kenny, Rebecca Owen and Katherine Plummer

248 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

On the motion of Councillor Camamile, seconded by Councillor Morrell, it was

RESOLVED – the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

249 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared at this stage.

250 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER

Alison Breadon of PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP introduced the Annual Audit Letter, highlighting the new inclusion this year of RGF money. She explained that the letter provided a conclusion on the Council's use of resources, financial standing, how the authority was dealing with the current challenges, and actions taken to address them.

Discussion ensued and included:

- Leicestershire Revenues and Benefits Partnership: the letter had identified the absence of a separate bank account for the Partnership, and a member asked if this was ideal. In response it was explained that from a control point of view it would be easier, but from a governance aspect it would be difficult as it did not operate as a separate entity from the council. Officers had noted the point but provided assurance that the figures were accurately monitored.
- The Discretionary Discount fund: a member referred to a recent meeting which had heard that the hardship fund had so far not been accessed to the level expected, yet the press had recently reported that the fund was under pressure. Members were reassured that the fund was not under undue pressure and the position was regularly assessed and reported to the Partnership Board. It was agreed to add a report on this to the agenda for the January meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED –

- (i) the Annual Audit letter be approved;
- (ii) a report on Council Tax Support be brought to the January meeting.

251 SECOND QUARTER TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT

Members received a report which outlined the council's Treasury Management activity during the first six months of 2013/14. It was stated that no prudential limits had been breached. Members were informed that as more of the major capital projects get underway there would be more discussion required on treasury management.

RESOLVED – the report be noted.

252 HOUSING REPAIRS UPDATE

Members received an update on the progress made against the action plan produced in response to the review of the Housing Repairs service. Members were reminded that the 'backlog' discussed was not a backlog in work but in 'completing' jobs on the Orchard system. It was reported that additional controls had been introduced in relation to void costs (including kitchens), that the schedule of rates was being reviewed and that capacity had been increased whilst costs remained the same. It was also noted that work was being undertaken to develop relationships between Housing Officers and the Housing Repairs team by way of shadowing and co-location in order to build a greater understanding of the work of the teams and the needs of the tenants.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- Housemark: It was explained that this benchmarking site was for monitoring purposes and was not an accreditation. Officers agreed to confirm the cost of this;
- Voids: Members wished to view completed works on voids to be aware of the current standard. It was stated that the standard hadn't been lowered as part of the action plan, but it did standardise work to prevent too much being spent on a void on unnecessary works. Members were informed that 'tenant inspectors' were used, to look at random samples of properties of their choosing. It was also felt that members should have the opportunity to see the standard of some vacated properties before work is commenced;
- Customer care: the importance of customer care and good communication skills was emphasised;
- Customer satisfaction: Some research was to be undertaken into the response rate to surveys and the type of person who usually responds;
- Staffing restructure: It was stated that there had been no cost to the restructure;
- The cost of upgrading Orchard: it was noted that the Orchard system was not just used by Housing Repairs but also by the Housing Allocations, Rents and Anti-Social Behaviour teams;
- Boiler repair contract: concern was expressed that the contractor did not provide good customer care and seemed to have to make many repeat calls. In response it was reported that a fixed fee was paid, not a fee per call out, but that repeat calls were monitored;
- Boiler replacement programme: it was reported that there was a boiler replacement programme which was procured each year depending upon the number of planned replacements in the programme;
- Improvement programmes: it was noted that there was a kitchen replacement programme in place, but that bathroom replacements were responsive;

Concern was expressed about how a potential overspend would be flagged up, and in response it was noted that there were weekly monitoring meetings and forecasting was carried out continuously.

With regard to the standard of vacated properties and the standard of voids when returned to use, officers agreed to consider how members could be made aware of this. It was also agreed to email a copy of the standards to members.

RESOLVED –

- (i) the void standard be sent to members;
- (ii) cost of Housemark membership be conveyed to members;
- (iii) the report be noted and progress made be endorsed.

253 SUNDRY DEBTS UPDATE

Members were updated on the sundry debts position as at 31 September 2013. It was reported that in the previous month the amount of debt had significantly decreased, partly due to the new initiative of contacting debtors to discuss the reasons for non-payment and possible solutions.

Members congratulated officers on recovering debt during an economically difficult time.

254 WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the 2013-14 work programme. The following additions were requested:

- Hinckley Club for Young People: it was noted that a report was being prepared by Internal Audit and would be brought to the January meeting;
- Tenant recharge policy: members were reminded that this had been agreed for the January meeting.

(The Meeting closed at 7.46 pm)

CHAIRMAN