

OVERVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY FORUM MEETING

Thursday, 12th February, 2015

Present:-

Councillor Slack (Chair)

Councillors	Bagley	Flood
	Burrows +	Tom Murphy
	Callan	Martin Stone +
	Dyke	Paul Stone

Barry Dawson, Head of Finance +
 Martin Elliott, Committee and Scrutiny Coordinator
 Julie McGrogan, Housing Service Manager, Customer Division ++
 Donna Reddish, Policy Manager

+ Attended for Minute No. 50

++ Attended for Minute No.51

48 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' AND OFFICERS INTERESTS RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

No declarations were received.

49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bradford, Hawksworth and Innes.

50 LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION, BUDGET PROGRESS REPORT

The Leader and Executive Member for Regeneration and the Head of Finance presented a progress report on report on the Council's latest budget situation. Since the publication of the agenda the full 2015/16 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan had been published so committee members were able to receive the most up to date information available on the budget.

The Head of Finance advised that 2014/15 had been a very challenging year with regard to budget management with significant variances, both increases and decreases reported on budget monitoring reports throughout the year. At the last meeting of the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum on 4 December, 2014 the Head of Finance reported that the budget was showing a projected surplus of £9k, this however changed to a deficit of £174k by the time of the revised budget monitoring report was published later that month.

The Head of Finance reported that the situation had again changed and the final budget report now showed a surplus of £40k for 2014/15. This was due to another uplift in car parking income (+£50k), Planning Fee income up (+£30k), Innovation Centre rents up (+£32k); reduced Business Rates levy (+£47k) and net of all other (+£30k).

The Head of Finance advised that while the Local Government Finance settlement announced was much as expected, it was worrying that Chesterfield Borough Council was faring worse in reduction of the grant compared to other authorities. The Council was also faring less well with income from the New Homes Bonus, but income generated from Business Rates was looking good. For 2015/16 a deficit of £94k is currently being predicted, but the Head of Finance advised committee members that this was dependent on £600k of savings being made.

The Head of Finance concluded his progress report noting that austerity measures still have a long way to go and that savings will become harder to achieve as funding from government is reduced further.

The Leader and Executive Member for Regeneration noted the excellent work done by budget holders to make savings but that with further reductions in funding on the horizon Chesterfield Borough Council would need to move to become more self financing. The Leader also noted that due to the efforts of Members and Officers residents had been shielded from the impact of the cuts to a great extent, so did not realise how significant the cuts had been. Front line services were still functioning effectively and there had not been large scale compulsory redundancies as has been the case at other local authorities.

Members asked when the ongoing process of Business Rates appeals and the consequent budget uncertainty this has resulted in will be completed. The Head of Finance advised that as the process was dealt with by the Valuation Office, so is not something that Chesterfield

Borough Council has control over, but that the deadline for new appeals to be submitted is April this year.

Members asked several questions relating to the New Homes Bonus. The Head of Finance advised that compared to the other local authorities used by the council for benchmarking, income received is lower. The Leader also noted that the future of the New Homes bonus is uncertain as nationally the Labour party had advised they would look to end it, but had not revealed what would replace it.

Members noted the rise in car parking income and asked several questions on parking income and how the levels of parking charges are set. The Head of Finance confirmed that car parking does provide a budget surplus but that this can only be spent on areas like maintenance of parks and open spaces.

Members thanked the Leader and Head of Finance for presenting the progress report and answering their questions.

RESOLVED –

That the progress report on the Budget for 2014/15 be noted.

51 EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING, TENANT CONSULTATION SURVEY RESULTS

The Assistant Executive Member for Housing and the Housing Service Manager, Customer Division attended to provide a progress report on the Tenant's Consultation Survey results. The Assistant Executive Member noted that a new tenant survey was currently being planned.

The Assistant Executive Member advised Members that while the survey results had been broadly positive some problems had been identified that had not been known about before. He also noted that negatives identified had been used to identify areas for improvement.

The Housing Service Manager, Customer Division agreed that while overall the results were positive the service still wanted to strive to provide a better service to tenants. It was noted that by the end of March all of Chesterfield Borough Council's housing stock would meet the Decent Homes Standard which requires all of the council's housing stock to meet set criteria that ensure they are warm, protected from the weather and

have modern facilities. The Assistant Executive Member advised that the Decent Homes Standard was a basic standard and that the Council was now starting work on further improvements to the housing stock to bring homes up to a higher standard. It was noted that Cabinet had recently approved £69 million of housing stock improvements over the next three years, with planned improvements including the installation of cavity wall insulation, roof replacement and the replacement of older central heating systems.

The Housing Services Manager also provided information on planned work that will improve the environment of estates including garden space and better parking areas. Members were advised of the current environmental improvement works being carried out at Barrow Hill, and that as the Decent Homes Standard had now been met that in the future there would be more focus on improving the overall environment of the estates.

The Assistant Executive Member and the Housing Services Manager advised that different ways of engaging with tenants were also being looked at including with working with groups on specific projects or areas of interest.

Members expressed their approval that all Chesterfield Borough Council's housing stock would meet the Decent Homes Standard by the end of March, 2015 and noted the visible improvements to housing stock in the borough.

Members advised that many residents still raised dog fouling as a particular area of concern in their neighbourhoods and estates, but noted that this area of concern was being looked at with the Enterprise and Wellbeing Committee's report on dog fouling being considered by Cabinet next month.

Members noted that improving the streetscene was vital to improving the quality of life for residents and asked several questions about the possibility of more joined up working with Derbyshire County Council in relation to roads, pavements and paths on estates, the Housing Services Manager advised members that discussions were being held with Derbyshire County Council regarding joined up working.

Members asked if having tenant surveys biannually gave sufficient time for the results to be analysed, implemented and evaluated. The Housing

Services Manager advised that STAR was a nationally used methodology and to enable benchmarking against other authorities it was necessary to work within the time parameters stated in the survey methodology.

Members noted that 52% of respondents to the survey stated they did not use the internet and asked how more tenants could be encouraged to engage more with services online. The Assistant Executive Member and the Housing Services Manager agreed that this was an area of concern, and that ways of increasing online engagement were being looked at, but also noted that this showed the importance of the need to keep traditional forms of communication available for the foreseeable future.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Executive Member and the Housing Services Manager for providing the progress report and answering their questions.

RESOLVED –

That the progress report be noted.

52 FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was considered.

RESOLVED -

That the Forward Plan be noted.

53 SCRUTINY MONITORING

Consideration was given to the Implementation Monitoring Form for Scrutiny Committee Recommendations.

RESOLVED –

That the Monitoring Report be noted.

54 WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE OVERVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY FORUM

The Work Programme for the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum was considered.

RESOLVED –

1. To approve the Work Programme.
2. That Executive Director, James Drury be invited to the next meeting of the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum to update members on the Great Place, Great Service programme.
3. That Executive Director, Michael Rich be invited to the next meeting of the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum to provide a progress report on the implementation Council Corporate Plan and a discussion about how Scrutiny can be involved in monitoring the plan and future developments
4. That a progress report on Dog Control Measures be requested for the next meeting of the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum.
5. That a progress report on the ICT Strategy and Action Plan be requested for the next meeting of the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum.

55 JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Chair advised members that the next Joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting was scheduled for Monday 10 March, 2015.

Committee members agreed that Joint Scrutiny was important and useful where services are shared, but that it should also reflect new and emerging working relationships with the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority, D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership and the proposed Derby and Derbyshire Combined Authority.

RESOLVED –

That the Chair updates committee members at the next meeting of the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum on the outcomes of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting scheduled for Monday 10 March, 2015.

56 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENTS

The Policy Manager provided members with a verbal update on the corporate review of Overview and Scrutiny which is due to be completed in May, 2015.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

57 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum held on 4 December, 2014 were presented.

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.