



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY,
COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)

MEETING HELD AT THE BALLROOM, TOWN HALL, BOOTLE
ON TUESDAY 2ND NOVEMBER, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Byrom (in the Chair)
Councillors Brennan, Grace, Howard, Killen and
McKinley

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Lappin

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the Chair, Councillor Bradshaw and Councillors Bennett, Lewis and Morris.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

20. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

21. ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY/DISPOSAL POLICY

The Committee received a presentation from Dominic Ellis, Assets and Property Manager on the Asset Management Strategy/Disposal Policy.

Mr. Ellis highlighted the following as part of the presentation:

- Why the management of the Council's asset base was important. Aside from Staff, the asset base was the Council's next biggest resource and therefore a robust strategic approach was required to ensure assets were maximised and informed decisions could be made; and that the portfolio was made up of the following: £248.110m - Other Land and Buildings; £8.008m – Surplus Assets; and £53.110m – Investment Properties
- The up to date position in respect of the Asset Management Strategy and Asset Disposal Policy which had been approved via the Council's formal governance processes including Cabinet and Council; that the documents and processes had recently been audited; and that the next formal annual review of the Asset Management Strategy and/Disposal Policy would be February 2022
- Member engagement in the decision-making processes and the Constitutional and legislative rules that provided the framework within which the Council worked

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- Phase 1 of the Asset Disposal Policy in relation to the 15 sites approved by Cabinet in January 2020
- How the Strategy supported the Framework for Change via Asset Maximisation; Partnering Opportunities; Agile working; Alignment with ICT / Digital Strategy; Key enabler to PSR projects and reform for service delivery; Strategic Investment; and Key enabler - direct contributor to growth programme

Members asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- The procedure to adopt a building or land as a community asset; and the conflict between a building/land that is contained in the Asset Disposal Policy but has also been designated as a community asset
- The proposals and options for Vine House, Seaforth which is contained in the Phase 1 of the Asset Disposals
- The number of fully vacant non-operational properties the Council had.
- It was noted that whilst Directorates of the Council were currently responsible for their own assets which has led to a fragmented approach to asset management and asset disposal, the ongoing work and eventual Corporate Landlord implementation would create a more coordinated approach moving forward. Some of the work carried out to date included an audit on the Council's assets register which would form the basis of this centralised approach. Staff were commended for this piece of work
- Information was sought on whether it was a good time to dispose of assets in the current economic market
- How agile working, staff working from home and digital and hybrid models would impact on the Council's requirement for fixed office assets; and the use of break clauses in leases to reduce the Council's office footprint to meet the reduced demand for office space
- The Council's aspirations as a corporate landlord to provide more social housing

RESOLVED:

That Mr. Ellis be thanked for his informative presentation.

**22. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2021/22 TO 2024/25 AND
FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE 2020 - REVENUE AND CAPITAL
BUDGET UPDATE 2021/22 INCLUDING THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF
COVID-19 ON THE 2021/22 BUDGET - OCTOBER UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 55 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 7 October 2021 the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services that advised of:

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- (1) the current estimated financial impact of COVID-19 on the 2021/22 Budget;
- (2) the current forecast revenue outturn position for the Council for 2021/22;
- (3) the current forecast on Council Tax and Business Rates collection for 2021/22; and
- (4) the monitoring position of the Council's capital programme to the end of August 2021 relating to:
 - the forecast expenditure to year end;
 - variations against the approved budgets and an explanation of those variations for consideration by Members;
 - updates to spending profiles and proposed amendments to capital budgets necessary to ensure the efficient delivery of capital projects are also presented for approval.

The Cabinet had resolved (Minute No. 55) that:

A. in respect of the Revenue Budget:

- (1) the current financial implications of COVID-19 on the 2021/22 Budget together with the key issues that will influence the final position, be noted;
- (2) the current position relating to the 2021/22 revenue budget be noted; and
- (3) the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2021/22 revenue budget be recognised and it be acknowledged that the forecast outturn position will continue to be reviewed to ensure a balanced forecast outturn position and financial sustainability can be achieved; and

B. In respect of the Capital Programme:

- (1) the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme, as outlined within paragraph 7.1 of the report, be noted;
- (2) the latest capital expenditure position as at 31 August 2021 of £10.876m, as outlined within paragraph 7.4 of the report, together with the latest full year forecast of £45.436m, as

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outlined within paragraph 7.6, be noted;

- (3) the explanations of variances to project budgets, as outlined within paragraphs 7.5 and 7.9 of the report, be noted;
- (4) it be noted that capital resources will be managed by the Executive Director Corporate Resources and Customer Services, to ensure the capital programme remains fully funded and that capital funding arrangements secure the maximum financial benefit to the Council, as outlined within paragraph 7.12 of the report.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- a concern was expressed at the rephrasing of Disabled Facilities Grants and the potential for this to have an adverse effect on equality implications; and the potential for legal/judicial review action against the Council
- information was sought on the process for imposing a charge on a resident's property to cover social care costs; how much annually was recovered by such charges; and whether charges were imposed to cover council tax arrears. It was noted that a financial assessment was initially made against the resident's assets; that once a property was sold the Council realised the asset; that at the end of 2020/2021 approximately £5 million was secured by the Council against property; and that information about this balance was contained in the Council's Statement of Accounts as long-term debtors. Officers would check if any charges had been made against property for council tax arrears and provide details.
- in respect of the overspend in Children's Social Care attributable to the Covid-19 pandemic information was sought on the criteria to access the Outbreak Management Fund
- the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the 2021/22 budget, funding received from Government and associated shortfalls; and how Sefton compared to other local authorities
- in respect of the Capital Programme reference was made to the School's Programme and what schemes were contained within the Programme. Officers would provide Members with an analysis of the schemes contained within the Schools' Programme.
- how staff pay rises and pension pressures would impact on the Council's budget

RESOLVED:

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That the financial monitoring report and the decision taken by Cabinet in respect of this matter be noted.

**23. WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22, SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS
AND KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer seeking the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2021/22; the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by a Working Group(s) appointed by the Committee; the identification of any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; and providing an update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A suggestion was made that a Working Group could be established to undertake a review of the Member Development Programme and staff training. Comments were made that the review could look at the range of training offered to both elected Members and officers; the potential for sanctions to be imposed if elected Members did not complete mandatory training courses, including the publication of details of courses completed/not completed by Members; that information from the LGA Peer Review could be used to inform the Working Group review; the advantages/disadvantages of online training compared to classroom based training; and the duration of training courses to achieve the optimum benefit for attendees

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2021/22, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;
- (2) the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer and the Chief Personnel Officer be requested to investigate the potential for a Working Group to review the topic of the Member Development Programme and staff training;
- (3) the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer write to appropriate Heads of Service seeking potential Working Group topics for review;
- (4) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
- (5) the Head of Strategic support submit a report to the next meeting of the Committee on "Manage My Requests" (iCasework) system; and
- (6) the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer submit a report to the next meeting of the Committee updating on the Implementation of recommendations arising from the Ethical Business Practices Working Group.

24. WELFARE REFORM AND ANTI-POVERTY REFERENCE GROUP - UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 16 of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 the Committee considered a Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty update of the Head of Health and Wellbeing and Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.

The update provided information on the latest meeting of the Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty (WRAP) Cabinet Member Reference Group and in particular on activities associated with:

- Community Pantry
- Transport
- An update from the Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Steering Group
- Poverty Emergency and Childhood Poverty in Sefton
- Holiday Activity Fund and Summer Food Programme
- Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme
- Healthy Child Voucher Programme
- Requests for action

Councillor Lappin, Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services presented the update.

A Member commented on the low uptake of the healthy child voucher programme despite promotion of the programme from various services; and supported the work being undertaken to review barriers to accessing the programme and the consideration of options to increase uptake. This was especially important in light of the £20 Universal Credit cut.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update on the operation of the Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her update.

25. CABINET MEMBER REPORT – OCTOBER 2021

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that included the most recent report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.

Councillor Lappin, Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and

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Corporate Services presented her report.

Members commented on the excellent work of the Democratic services Team ensuring the safe return to physical meetings; and noted that that whilst no social distancing measures were in place for the Council meeting held in September 2021 there were a number of mitigations to eliminate risk; and that following the meeting a consultation had been sent to all Members of the Council and an analysis had been prepared. Members considered that it would be helpful to arrange remote or hybrid meetings but appreciated that due to Government regulations this could not be done.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her attendance at the meeting.