

Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Wednesday 24 February 2021 at 5.45pm

Present: Councillor L Giles (Chair);
Councillors E M Giles and Rollins.

In Attendance: Councillors Ali, Piper and Preece.

Officers: David Stevens (Chief Executive), Rebecca Maher (Interim S151 Officer and Head of Finance), Tammy Stokes (Interim Director – Regeneration and Planning), Surjit Tour (Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer), Sue Knowles (Head of ICT & Revenues and Benefits), Lee Constable (Strategic Assets and Land), Clare Sandland (Service Manager – Finance), Maria Price (Service Manager – Legal), Charlie Davey (Business Partner – Adults), Charmain Oliver (Social Care Partner Lead Solicitor), Elaine Newsome (Service Manager - Democracy) and Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager).

20/21 **Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Moore.

21/21 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared at the meeting.

22/21 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.



23/21

Exclusion of the Public

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order, 2006, relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

24/21

Medium Term Financial Strategy – Property Maintenance Account, Printing Devices and Legal Services

Further to Minute No. 52/20, the Board received an update on the Medium Term Financial Strategy in relation to the following topics, which were areas of budgetary pressure for the Council:-

- Property Maintenance Account
- Printing Services
- Legal Services

The Board noted the following in relation to issues highlighted:-

Property Maintenance Account

- The pressures around the Property Maintenance Account related to the inability to provide preventative maintenance works to help keep assets in good condition as there was a focus on reactive repairs which was compounded due to the aging portfolio of assets.
- There were continuing budget pressures with additional compliance works to be undertaken on council stock.
- there was a disparity between the Property Maintenance budget and the current stock that required maintenance.
- The Transforming Local Services programme was looking at redesigning services to better suit customers' needs via, digital transformation and a new operating model.



Printing Services

- There had been a significant reduction in the use of printing and telephony services due to the COVID-19 pandemic with staff working from home. This had an impact on income normally generated from these services.
- The service was transforming the way it worked, moving to more online platforms to provide agile solutions in the future.
- A rationalised approach to printing was required across the council that represented value for money.
- As more staff were now working from home, consideration was being given to creating collaboration spaces as opposed to a desk per person and office space in various other buildings was being considered as a rental income stream.

Legal Services

- There were historic unachievable income targets built into the Legal Services budget.
- There was continued financial pressure in children's social care, which was partially due to vacancies within the service that had proven difficult to fill. Recruiting Principal Advocate posts to undertake complex advocacy work had been difficult, however, creating career graded posts and growing our own talent had improved recruitment issues with only one vacancy remaining at the time of the meeting.
- There had been a considerable spike in Legal Services work and significant corporate issues that had to be dealt with, with limited resources. The service had to outsource support from local firms and relied on Counsel where necessary to meet the heightened demand.

The Board welcomed the update and thanked officers for all their hard work in continuing to run services during an unprecedented period. The Board also requested that: -

- due to the large number of buildings and the rising costs for maintenance, the Cabinet considers the use of capital borrowing in order to fund both planned and unplanned maintenance works to Council buildings and to enable a more energy efficient solution to be implemented to make the improvements more sustainable in the future;



- awareness be raised of the cost to the Council and consequently the tax payer, related to responding to the significant number of information requests it received.

Resolved that the Cabinet is recommended to:-

- (1) consider the benefits of capital borrowing to enable repairs and maintenance works to be undertaken and to consider alternative green solutions for the Council's property portfolio;
- (2) consider raising awareness of the cost to the Council and consequently the tax payer, related to responding to the significant number of requests received under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Meeting ended at 8.05pm

To view the meeting, click [here](#)

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