

Minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

17th January, 2018 at 5.30pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor P Hughes (Chair);
Councillors Edis, E M Giles, Hickey and Underhill.

In attendance: D Carter (Executive Director – Resources);
J Leivers (Interim Director of Children’s Services).

1/18 **Declaration of Interest**

Councillor P Hughes declared an interest in any matters relating to the Sandwell Leisure Trust as he was a Council-appointed member of the Sandwell Leisure Trust Board.

2/18 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd November, 2017 be approved as a correct record.

3/18 **Council Wide Budget Monitoring – Quarter 2**

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 13th December, 2017, had referred the Council-wide budget monitoring report for Quarter 2 for consideration by the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board.

Details of the Council’s revenue and capital expenditure as at the end of September 2017 were received.

At a service level, excluding Public Health, there was a forecast year-end deficit of £2.4m made up as follows:

Corporate Management – balanced budget;
Resources – surplus of £1.216m;
Adult Social Care – surplus of £0.099m;
Children’s Services – deficit of £1.6m;

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Regeneration and Planning – surplus of £0.735m;
Housing and Communities – balanced budget;
Central Items – surplus of £1.950m.

In addition, there was a projected year end surplus of £0.091m within Public Health that related to ring fenced funds carried forward from previous years.

The Board noted the reasons for the variances at the end of Quarter 1 for each service area.

The Interim Director of Children's Services attended the meeting to provide further background information on the reasons for the projected overspend within the Children's Services directorate. There had been changes in thresholds for children's social care, creating an increase in referrals and assessments. In turn, this had increased numbers of children on Child Protection Plans or that were In Need. In order to ensure caseloads were manageable it had therefore been necessary to take on additional social workers.

Members enquired about the ringfenced grants for Public Health and if part of it could be utilised to fund the Schools Athletics Programme on an interim basis until a sustainable solution could be found. The Executive Director – Resources undertook to investigate this.

From the comments and questions by members of the Board, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- Current numbers of children subject to a Child Protection Plan were at a level that should be expected for local authority areas similar to Sandwell. Based on the available information, it was expected to stay at this level now that the amended thresholds were embedded.
- The increase in bank charges was attributable to the Council trialling alternative payment methods such as Paypal. A review would be carried out to determine if the trial was successful.
- The Council had drastically reduced its use of agency staff; this had caused a reduction in income for Templink.
- The projected surplus on the Waste Partnership was attributable to driving costs out.

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- The Children's Workforce Development earmarked reserve was the last elements of an already allocated resource. Going forward, this area would be the responsibility of the Children's Services Trust.
- The Executive Director – Neighbourhoods was working on a strategy around the Council's built assets.
- The biggest impact on housing rent debit was the Government's 1% reduction in public sector rents.
- While 94% of payments were made by electronic means, further analysis would be carried out of the remaining 6% to determine ways of further improving this figure.
- The Scrutiny Management Board reiterated its request for tolerances to be included in the performance ratings to ensure they were a more accurate reflection of performance.
- The Executive Director – Resources reaffirmed his approach to only writing off aged debt when provided with robust evidence as to why it should be done.
- The Scrutiny Management Board placed on record its thanks to all those involved with securing the replacement of the civic regalia of Tipton and Wednesbury, which had been stolen some years ago.
- The Executive Director – Resources undertook to discuss the Supporting People earmarked reserves with the Executive Director – Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing.
- Further information on the cause of the slippage on the West Bromwich Car Parking Main Programme Capital Budget was requested.
- The Director – Housing and Communities and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Investment were carrying out a piece of work looking at all local funding (including grants, Local Area Budget and s106 monies) to review how it was approved and spent and how it can be used to link to Town Plans and therefore the Vision for Sandwell.

The Board thanked the officers for attending the meeting.

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Resolved that:-

- (1) the Executive Director – Resources provide the following information to scrutiny:-
 - (a) an update position on Welfare Reform roll-out in Sandwell;
 - (b) further detail on the Supporting People earmarked reserves;
 - (c) further detail on the pressures reported in the surplus carry forwards for Regeneration and Growth;
 - (d) clarification on the cause of the slippage on the West Bromwich Car Parking Main Programme Capital Budget;
 - (e) the reasons for 'not enough capacity' in relation to HRA income management legal costs.
- (2) the Executive Director – Resources liaise with the Interim Director – Public Health about the possibility of funding the Schools Athletics Programme on an interim basis from the Public Health – Ringfenced Grant;
- (3) the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board be requested to include Improving Recycling in Sandwell on its work programme;
- (4) the Executive Director – Resources report the outcomes of the review of alternative payment methods to a future meeting of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board;
- (5) to facilitate pre-decision scrutiny, reports on the following topics be presented to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board at the relevant time:-
 - (a) the revised Asset Management Strategy;
 - (b) the outcomes of the review of local funding arrangements;

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- (6) the Executive Director – Resources ensures that future budget monitoring reports include further detail in relation to the projects funded by Section 106 monies.

4/18

Communities and Local Government Committee Report – Effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees

It was reported that the Communities and Local Government (CLG) Committee, one of the departmental select committees of the House of Commons, had conducted an inquiry into the effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees. In December it published its report and the Council's Scrutiny Officers had prepared a preliminary responses which was discussed at the meeting.

A number of the recommendations of the CLG committee relied upon the Department for Communities and Local Government to issue revised guidance to local authorities. A more detailed response would be prepared and submitted to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board once this guidance had been issued. The response would also reflect any pertinent outcomes from the recent Peer Review conducted by the Local Government Association and other work on reviewing governance in Sandwell.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the preliminary response to the Communities and Local Government Committee Report – Effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees be noted;
- (2) that the Director – Monitoring Officer submit a further report to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board to address any emerging guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government, the outcome of the recent Peer Review conducted by the Local Government Association and any other work on reviewing governance in Sandwell.

(Meeting ended at 7.46pm)

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