

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - RESOURCES

18 September 2013

Present:

Councillor Baldwin (Chair)

Councillors Bull, Donovan, Macdonald, Newby and Robson

Apologies:

Councillors Brock, Crew and Dawson

Also present:

Deputy Chief Executive, Acting Assistant Director Finance, Assistant Director Environment and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (SLS)

32 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2013 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

33 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

34 AIM Property Maintenance Progress 2013/14

The report of the Acting Assistant Director Finance, Assistant Director Economy and Assistant Director Housing and Contracts was submitted, detailing the financial position of the £1.5m programme of non-housing reactive and planned property maintenance and refurbishment for the financial year 2013/14. The report also provided, where necessary, specific details on significant programme variations. In future, any variations will be reported as part of the budget monitoring process.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the first quarter financial position of the £1.5m programme of non-housing reactive and property maintenance and refurbishment for 2013/14.

(Report circulated)

35 Budget Monitoring (Quarter 1)

The Acting Assistant Director Finance presented the report, advising Members of any material differences by management unit to the revised budget for the first three months of the financial year up to 30 June 2013, which included a variation of 0.98% from the revised budget. The report also contained the detail of two key review areas, and potential areas of budgetary risk, which would be the subject of close monitoring. Members welcomed the changes in reporting style, which now offered a more explanatory and clearer picture.

The Acting Assistant Director Finance responded to a comment on the backlog of processing housing benefit claims. A significant amount of work had now been undertaken to address this issue, with additional staff now focused on this task to provide an immediate impact. The Deputy Chief Executive considered that it was

important to highlight any such issues and he suggested a presentation be made to the December meeting, covering the Housing Benefit subsidy area of work.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the report.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

36 Overview of the General Fund Budget 2013/14

The Acting Assistant Director Finance presented the report, advising Members of the overall projected financial position of the General Fund Revenue Budget and Housing Revenue Account after three months, for the 2013/14 financial year. The report contained details of the three Scrutiny Committees and the Housing Revenue Account, together with the current budget variance after the first financial quarter of the year. The Service Committee budgets showed a forecast overspend of £57,670 against a revised Service net expenditure budget of £12,223,520. The General Fund overspend related to an impact from a reduction of costs resulting from the reorganisation, and an amalgamation of key variances of Committee. Two new elements of the report were included, the highlighting of the main areas of budgetary risk, and more pictorial information on the outstanding debt in key service areas.

The Deputy Chief Executive gave the following responses to Members' queries:-

- savings had already been identified from utilising existing staff more efficiently and ensuring a multi skilling approach as a result of the Looking Good Programme.
- the provision of the CAB Advisory Services in the City Council's Customer Service Centre had received a very positive response from clients and colleagues, enabling clients to be dealt with as part of a more co-ordinated approach.
- a review of the reporting mechanism to ensure effective performance monitoring of customer facing services had been discussed at a recent meeting of the Council's Transformation Board overseeing the reorganisation.

The Acting Assistant Director Finance responded to a comment in respect of the RAMM's appeal on their Business Rates, advising that the process was very protracted and could take a number of years to resolve. He acknowledged the positive comments on the management of the Council's property portfolio, adding that colleagues had adopted their current approach as they were mindful of the challenging financial climate.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the report and requested that Council approve the:-

- (1) General Fund forecast financial position for the 2013/14 financial year;
- (2) Housing Revenue Account forecast financial position for 2013/14 financial year;
- (3) additional supplementary budgets listed in Appendix C of the circulated report;
- (4) outstanding Sundry Debt position as at June 2013; and
- (5) creditors' payments performance.

(Report circulated)

37 **Capital Monitoring Statement**

The Acting Assistant Director Finance presented the report, advising the current position in respect of the Council's revised annual capital programme and of the anticipated level of deferred expenditure into future years.

Members were asked to support the approval of an urgent request to the Executive for of an additional sum of £36,000, to complete essential resurfacing of Leighton Terrace car park. The works were considered necessary to ensure that the car park could continue to be operated in a safe manner and avoid any temporary closure. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that an evaluation had been based on supplied information; he would investigate and circulate a reply to Members. A more proactive planned approach to commercial property maintenance would be taken. A Member referred to the uneven surface of the car park at the Exeter Arena Athletics Stadium and was currently awaiting a reply to her enquiry on this issue. The Acting Assistant Director Finance clarified that £71,000 available funding would be used for specific national cycle network projects, with the City Council carrying out the work on behalf of the County Council. He would send a breakdown of expenditure on the anticipated projects.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the current position and recommended approval by Council of the revised annual Capital Programme, and an urgent request for an additional £36,000 to complete the resurfacing of Leighton Terrace car park.

(Report circulated)

38 **Revision of Asbestos Policy**

The Assistant Director Environment presented a report and sought approval for a revision of the Asbestos Policy, which set the future framework and detailed the resource implications for specific members of staff. He responded to Members' comments on accredited quality management of policy documents, stating that there was no separate quality management system applied to all policy documents. With regard to staff being appraised of the Asbestos Policy, the policy provided the overarching framework, whilst front-line staff would be briefed in the relevant safe working practices and risk assessments, dependent upon their role. The Assistant Director Environment reassured Members that those staff and contractors likely to come into contact with asbestos were appropriately trained. He also responded about the inclusion of a continuing budget for asbestos removal in the Asset Management Programme. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that any future changes in such policies, would be identified in an appendix to the report as part of a more helpful reporting regime.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources endorsed the revised Asbestos Policy and recommended approval to the Executive.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - RESOURCES

39 **Health and Safety at Work Matters**

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report, providing Members with a quarterly update on health and safety at work and to ensure that Members were aware of strategic health and safety issues and actions taken. He highlighted a number of areas, including the revision of the Asbestos Policy, set out in an appendix to the report:-

- the procurement of AssessNET, a new modular safety management system;
- the risk assessment of all Council footpaths and associated assets had commenced (which would be the subject of a future report to Members); and
- a multi agency Exeter Safety Advisory Group including the Police, DCC Highways, and the Ambulance Service to evaluate any risk areas associated with evaluating major events planned in Exeter.

A Member also sought further information on the management of the Contract Control process. The Assistant Director Environment advised that the Principal Safety Officer was currently working on this and would respond to the Member directly.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the report.

(Report circulated)

40 **Work Schedule Programme Meeting**

Members considered suggested topics for scrutiny as put forward at a Scrutiny Work Programme on 25 July 2013. A further meeting was due to take place with the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees to consider the suggestions made and identify and prioritise any further areas.

A Member suggested an update on the Welfare Reform changes, as well as covering the actual application process.

Members welcomed the new financial reporting format, and congratulated the Finance Working Group on their work so far. The Chair referred to a forthcoming training session on Finance due to take place on 23 October, ostensibly for Members of the Committee, but an invitation would also be extended, and the session to be repeated as part of the Councillor Induction programme for new Members in May.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources supported the topics suggested of high, medium and low priority suggestions for future scrutiny work, noting that a programme of work would now be progressed in conjunction with the Chair of the three Scrutiny Committees.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.30 pm

Chair