

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - RESOURCES**

19 November 2014

### Present:

Councillor Baldwin (Chair)

Councillors Bialyk, Bull, George, Lyons, Robson, Sheldon, Spackman, Tippins and Winterbottom

### Apologies:

Councillors Mottram, Brock and Morris

### Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Deputy Chief Executive, Assistant Director Finance, Assistant Director Customer Access, Customer Access Development Officer, Museums Manager and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (SLS)

#### **45 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September and special meeting on 2 October 2014 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

#### **46 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of discloseable pecuniary interest were made.

#### **47 Business Case for the Council's Channel Shift Programme**

The Assistant Director Customer Access presented a report which summarised the Council's Channel Shift Approach, which included a request for the approval of funding on an invest-to-save basis, to improve the Council's services to customers whether they approached the Council face to face, by telephone or through an internet-enabled provision. The Customer Access Development Officer gave a short overview of the Business Case and identified the cost benefit to the Council over a six year period. The programme would provide high quality telephone and on-line services to enable staff to have more time to deal face to face with those customers with more complex needs. The on-line self service portal would offer a simple but secure point of access allowing the customer to view every aspect of their transaction with the Council. Customers would still be able to come into the Civic Centre to speak face to face or over the phone to a member of staff to progress their transaction.

The Assistant Director Customer Access responded to a number of Members' concerns about the ability of various client groups and particularly older citizens to respond to this change. She referred to the extensive research conducted, including organisations who had used voice activated phone systems successfully and also the experience of customers who had access to the web. She also thanked a Member who had queried the accuracy of the figures from the Office for National Statistics relating to web access and reassured him that they would carry out further local studies to identify those who had access, but chose not to use it. They would also continue to work with front line staff and service users as well as organisations, including the voluntary sector and carry out a robust equality impact assessment. They would ensure that the Council's reputation remained intact through the

customer's positive experience, and were confident that the support of the supplier and Strata would meet any challenge. They would ensure that good customer feedback including from a Customer Forum Group had been evaluated before the system went live. In addition, all transactions would be monitored to ensure they had been completed successfully. Any concerns over a lack of access to services through inaccessibility to the web would be addressed as the service changed over the six year roll out of the project.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources supported the report and recommended Executive and Council approve the Council's Channel Shift Programme; and identified Capital and Revenue funding for the Programme, noting the predicted savings to be subsequently accrued.

#### **48 Proposed Passenger Lift at RAMM Queen Street Entrance**

The Museums Manager presented a report relating to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum's (RAMM) existing Disability Platform Access Lift situated at the Queen Street entrance and sought approval for its replacement. She stated that the lift now needed updating to facilitate the increased footfall and regular use by young families with prams and larger mobility scooters. The lift was not included as part of the redevelopment of the Museum, and was now in use beyond its designed purpose and capacity. Members offered their support for this project and wished to ensure that all visitors to the Museum had the opportunity to visit without any incident.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources noted the report and recommended Executive and Council approve the installation of an enclosed passenger lift at RAMM's Queen Street entrance and associated works with a budget of £45,000.

#### **49 Overview of Revenue Budget 2014/15**

The Assistant Director Finance presented a report which advised Members of the overall projected financial position of the HRA & General Fund Revenue Budgets for the 2014/15 financial year after six months. He referred to the overall position in respect of the General Fund and the working balance which was projected to rise from £3,364,640 to £3,469,275. He referred to the supplementary budgets and highlighted two further requests for funding including a sum of £80,000 for the appointment of a Quantity Surveyor and a Construction Design and Management Consultant in respect of the Leisure Complex Project. An additional £11,500 was also required to develop the Business Case for the Channel Shift Programme to include the creation of a temporary post.

A Member sought a breakdown of an overspend of £111,570 in relation to the budgeted repair and hand back costs in respect of the General Fund Housing Property, which was made up of £99,680 for repair and hand back costs, and £27,390 as part of a reduction in rental income. This was partially offset by £15,500 savings from vacant posts pending a restructure of Housing Services.

The Assistant Director Finance replied to Members' questions which referred to a summary of savings of £25,000 under the democratic representation budget, which related to the budget being set prior to the recommendation for approval of the Members' Allowances. This had not progressed to the final savings stage, but the budget had remained in place. A saving was also attributed to a change in the outgoing mail delivery service, which had, in part, offset the overspend. He also responded to a Member's comment on the improved state of the Council's cash flow, which was in part a result of a change in the Business Rate Relief Scheme which had helped to generate additional funds as well as savings from the New Homes Bonus.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the report and requested that Council approve the following (where applicable):

- (1) General Fund forecast financial position for the 2014/15 financial year;
- (2) Housing Revenue Account forecast financial position for 2014/15 financial year;
- (3) additional Supplementary Budgets listed in Appendix C;
- (4) outstanding Sundry Debt position as at September 2014;
- (5) Creditors' Payments performance; and
- (6) Council Tax and Business Rates collection performance.

#### 50 **Capital Monitoring Statement**

The Assistant Director Finance presented a report which updated the current position in respect of the Council's revised annual capital programme and advised Members of the anticipated level of deferred expenditure into future years. The report also sought approval to amend the annual capital programme in order to reflect the reported variations with some projects taking longer than the current year to complete. A request for additional funding of £50,000 was made to invest in the Municipal Bond Agency created by the Local Government Association, which would allow the Council to become a shareholder. A letter of intent was required by the 4 December. There had also been an additional funding request for £37,500 for new lighting at Exton Road, as part of a health and safety recommendation to bring the lighting to an acceptable standard to enable staff to work safely in the proximity of refuse collections vehicles at all hours.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources noted the current position in respect of the annual Capital Programme, and the additional funding request set out in section 8.8 of the circulated report and recommended its approval by Council.

#### 51 **Treasury Management - Half Yearly Report 2014/15**

The Assistant Director Finance submitted the report, informing Members of the current Treasury Management performance for the 2014/15 financial year and the position regarding investments and borrowings as at 30 September 2014. Members were updated on the interest rate prospects, net interest position and the future position.

Scrutiny Committee - Resources noted the Treasury Management report in respect of the first six months of the 2014/15 financial year.

#### 52 **Budget Monitoring (Second Quarter)**

The Assistant Director Finance presented the report which advised Members of any material differences to the revised budget in respect of Resources revenue budgets for the first six months of the financial year up to 30 September 2014. The forecast suggested that the net expenditure for this Committee would decrease from the revised budget by a total of £169,630 after transfers from reserves and revenue contributions to capital, as detailed in Appendix 1 circulated with the report. This represented a variation of 2.92% for the revised budget and included supplementary budget of £172,620. An update on the approved budget savings had also been included.

The Assistant Director Finance replied to an advance question from a Member which queried an apparent shortfall in the civic ceremonials budget and clarified that the

income was from the shop unit, which sits beside the Guildhall and was currently occupied. This unit had been empty for part of the current year and, historically, had presented a challenge to rent.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources noted the report.

**53 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Exclusion of Press and Public**

**RESOLVED** that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I, Schedule 12A of the Act.

**54 Proposal for Leisure Complex and Swimming Pool**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented a report which sought approval for the funding development of the new leisure complex and swimming pool to replace the Pyramids Swimming and Leisure Centre. Members were also made aware of the relationship with the Bus and Coach Station redevelopment and of other facilities in the city.

Members were reassured that the future operation would include the appropriate quality of facility and service and be sensitive to the needs of a diverse range of users taking account of disability, gender and faith.

Scrutiny Committee – Resources supported the recommendations and requested that Executive and Council approve :-

- (1) the allocation of £19.4 million to develop a new leisure complex and swimming pool on part of the bus station site to replace the Pyramids.
- (2) that the Leader nominate and full Council appoint the Leisure Complex Programme Board as a Sub-Committee of the Executive;
- (3) that all future spend decisions in respect of the £19.4 million budget for the development of the new Leisure Complex and Swimming Pool be delegated to the Leisure Complex Programme Board;
- (4) that the Leader nominate, and Full Council appoint, the following Members to the Leisure Complex Programme Board:
  - The Leader of the Council
  - Portfolio Holder- Economy and Culture
  - Portfolio Holder- City Development and
  - Leader of the Opposition
- (5) that the Proceedings of the Leisure Complex Programme Board shall take place in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.25 pm

Chair