

Minutes



Meeting name	Cabinet
Date	Wednesday, 8 September 2021
Start time	4.00 pm
Venue	Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH

Present:

Chair Councillor J. Orson (Chair)

Councillors R. Browne A. Freer
M. Graham MBE

Observers Councillor R. Bindloss
Councillor P. Cumbers

Officers Chief Executive
Director for Corporate Services
Director for Growth and Regeneration
Assistant Director for Governance & Democracy
Democratic Services Officer (HA)
Democratic Services Officer (CR)

Minute No.	Minute
184	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Apologies for absence were received from Councillors de Burle and Higgins.</p>
185	<p>MINUTES The minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2021 were confirmed and authorised to be signed by the Chair.</p>
186	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Councillor Freer declared a personal non pecuniary interest in the Melton Business Improvement District (BID), as a member of the BID Board.</p> <p>Councillor Orson declared an interest in any items relating to Leicestershire County Council, due to his role as a County Councillor.</p>
187	<p>MATTERS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES No items had been referred from Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules.</p>
188	<p>HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) - BUDGET MONITORING - 1 APRIL 2021 TO 30 JUNE 2021 Dawn Garton, Director for Corporate Services introduced the report, the purpose of which was to advise Members of the financial position and year end forecast on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) at 30 June 2021.</p> <p>Mrs Garton advised that the revenue position indicated a £270k underspend, which would result in an increase to the regeneration and development reserves to maintain the working balance at its agreed level of £750k. Capital spend was also forecast to be underspent by £2.17m. Any key variances in excess of £10k were detailed in the report and were due to the impact of Covid-19 on some services, the difficulties in recruiting staff (resulting in salary savings), and savings from 2 procurement exercises. The savings were offset to some extent by reduced income due to void properties. A number of Capital Programme projects would be reviewed following the commencement of the new Development Manager and the Programme would be updated accordingly.</p> <p>The Leader commented that whilst the underspend on the revenue budget was good news, particularly where it resulted from savings on procurement, it was important to maintain the momentum on planned improvements within the HRA. There was good progress on the stock condition surveys and these would be vital in informing the HRA Business Plan and would better inform the Capital Programme Plans alongside the work of the new Development Manager. Covid-19 had resulted in delay in areas of repairs and delivery of the Capital Programme. Expertise of the Development Manager would help to ensure capital money was</p>

allocated to the right development projects and that the Council could progress quickly with delivery.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- It was important to be aware that the sector was currently under a considerable amount of pressure relating to increased costs.
- Costs may increase following the results of the stock condition survey and upon allocate new contracts.
- Undertaking 'stress testing' may be a good tool to ensure the Council was fully informed on the sector and on the Council's position.

Cabinet **NOTED** the financial position on the HRA at 30 June 2021 and the year-end forecast for both revenue and capital.

Reason for Recommendation

The Council, having set an agreed budget at the start of the financial year, needs to ensure that the delivery of the budget is achieved. Consequently there is a requirement to regularly monitor progress so that corrective action can be taken when required, which is enhanced with the regular reporting of the financial position.

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GENERAL FUND AND SPECIAL EXPENSES BUDGET MONITORING - 1 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 2021

Dawn Garton, Director for Corporate Services introduced the report, the purpose of which was to advise Members of the year end forecast and financial position for the General Fund and Special Expenses at 30 June 2021.

Mrs. Garton advised that the forecast on General Expenses was an underspend of approximately £120k at Quarter 1. She updated Members that additional information showed that a slightly reduced underspend was anticipated. This took into account any ongoing financial implications of Covid-19, the specific Covid contingency budget (set up as part of the budget) and the additional carry forward which Members had approved from last year's underspend (providing additional support for the ongoing impact of Covid-19). The Covid-19 position and financial impact was detailed at paragraph 9.1 of the report and showed a net impact in year of £108k to date, after taking into account specific income compensation grants.

Mrs. Garton highlighted that there were a number of non Covid-19 underspends and overspends forecast for the year. Those over £10k were detailed within the report but the main area of non Covid-19 impact related to the latest pay offer, which was not budgeted for based on government guidance. This added a further £80k of expenditure and was taken into account with the forecast of £120k underspend.

Mrs. Garton confirmed that a small overspend was forecasted for Special Expenses, which had increased slightly when taking into account Quarter 4. The capital expenditure forecasts were broadly in line with the budget, with a number of key projects already underway or being procured. There were 2 log-term projects

where there was likely to be some delay into later years (disabled facility grants and the asset development programme).

The Leader advised that when setting the budget, the Council had anticipated 2021/22 being a challenging financial year. It had prepared for this by setting aside a Covid-19 contingency by carrying forward some unspent budget from the last financial year. This had proved to be the right approach and despite Covid-19 continuing to affect the Council financially, there remained some flexibility to meet any further unforeseen costs for the rest of the financial year.

However, it was important to not become complacent. There would be further challenges ahead as the budget setting process for the next financial year was undertaken.

The Leader highlighted that the Council had a modest Capital Programme within the General Fund and commented that he was pleased with the progress made to date on the delivery of these schemes, alongside other pressures the Council faced.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- Members thanked officers for their work to ensure a balanced budget during this challenging time.
- While the Council's incomes decreased, it continued to spend on services for the community, such as housing and homelessness, which continued to areas of priority.
- It was disappointing to see an overspend on homelessness. It was suggested that the Council consider ways to reduce homelessness costs to the taxpayer.
- It was important to note that windfall projects (such as Lake Terrace) would offer additional capacity to help house those who may be at risk of becoming homeless.
- It was positive that income from the Cattle Market had exceeded budget expectations by £35k. Cattle Market activity was progressing with increasing success and was an important source of income to the Council.
- The Council had supported households and businesses during the last 18 months and needed to continue to do so over the coming period of the recovery.

Cabinet **NOTED** the year-end forecast and financial position for the General Fund and Special Expenses at 30 June 2021 for both revenue and capital.

Reason for Recommendations

The Council, having set an agreed budget at the start of the financial year needs to ensure that the delivery of this budget is achieved. Consequently there is a requirement to regularly monitor progress so that corrective action can be taken when required, which is enhanced with the regular reporting of the financial position.

Councillor Freer here left the meeting

MELTON MOWBRAY BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID) RENEWAL BALLOT

Pranali Parikh, Director for Growth and Regeneration introduced the report, the purpose of which was to inform Cabinet of the work done so far and the implications arising from the ballot process and seeking approval for the relevant documents.

Mrs. Parikh advised that the Melton Mowbray BID, established in 2011 had undertaken 2 successful terms and a renewal ballot would be held in October 2021. The Council had worked with the BID to improve town centre vitality, vibrancy and economic growth for businesses within the BID area. The role of the Council to support a successful BID ballot process were:

- As Returning Officer and ballot holder. A timetable for the BID ballot was detailed at paragraph 5.1.2 of the report and subject to Cabinet approval, the ballot would be held in October.
- In establishing the Business Plan. The draft Business Plan was detailed at Appendix B of the report and would be finalised following the consultation process. The Key priorities, BID boundary and structure of the BID Board remained the same as for the previous term. The Business Plan complied with all Council key priorities, policies and procedures.
- As billing authority for the levy collection. The Council was required to collect the levy including issuing invoices and carrying out enforcement action), dealing with customer enquiries and reporting monthly to the BID Board. This was at a cost of approximately £18k per year to the Council (not including any services that the Council provided within the BID area). The draft Operating Agreement as detailed at Appendix C would be finalised following discussions and negotiations with the BID and in consultation with the Leader.
- As major service provider. The Council worked with the Town Estate and BID Board in provision of services within the town centre. Appendix D detailed basic services provided (statutory services and discretionary services). The Council was able to amend, review, change or cease the provision of its discretionary services, subject to approval by Cabinet.

Mrs. Parikh highlighted the Council's role as a levy payer and its significant contribution towards the levy. There were 19 Council owned properties within the BID levy area, resulting in approximately £8k towards the levy collection. This was in addition to contributions from rate payers within the properties (as tenants, occupiers etc.)

Mrs. Parikh updated Members on the consultation to date, advising that approximately 12% of businesses had responded. Of those 80% were in favour of the BID renewal and approximately 20% were against. She noted that Cabinet may wish to defer its decision on Council votes in the ballot until it had considered all comments in relation to the draft business plan.

The Leader noted receipt of a number of late consultation responses and proposed amendments to the recommendations to read as follows:

2.1 Note that the BID Proposal (Appendix A) and the Draft BID Business

- Plan (Appendix B) comply with the Regulations;
- 2.2 Provide formal comments for the consideration of the BID Board and requested that those comments were reflected in the Final Business Plan document;
 - 2.3 Delegate authority to the Director for Growth & Regeneration to finalise the Draft Operating Agreement, including the levy collection charges, in consultation with the Leader;
 - 2.4 Approve the Statement of Baseline Services (Appendix D);
 - 2.5 Defer the decision in relation to the Council's votes in the upcoming ballot, pending receipt of the Final Business Plan;
 - 2.6 Note arrangements in place for the ballot in October 2021 and that the Returning Officer (Edd de Coverly - Chief Executive) would formally instruct Civica to conduct the ballot in accordance with the Regulations.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- That the following representation, received from the northern section of the BID area be considered by the BID Board and reflected in the Final Business Plan:
 - i. The BID Board take into account fair and equal distribution of projects and activities across the BID area to ensure the benefits reach out to all levy payers.
 - ii. The BID Board ensure that the membership of the Board reflected fair geographic and sectoral representation.
 - iii. The BID promotional material and activities promote all businesses in the levy area equally.
 - iv. The business plan include actions and governance to ensure that the BID was measurable and accountable to this fair and equal treatment.
- Members noted that there were no proposed changes to the key priorities within the business plan. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting challenges for businesses in Melton, the Council should impress upon the BID the importance of ensuring the key priorities were reflective of business priorities and needs.

Cabinet

- 1) **NOTED** that the BID Proposal and the Draft BID Business Plan complied with the Regulations;
- 2) **PROVIDED** formal comments for the consideration of the BID Board and **REQUESTED** that those comments were reflected in the Final Business Plan document;
- 3) **DELEGATED** authority to the Director for Growth & Regeneration to finalise the Draft Operating Agreement, including the levy collection charges, in consultation with the Leader;
- 4) **APPROVED** the Statement of Baseline Services;
- 5) **DEFERRED** the decision in relation to the Council's votes in the upcoming ballot, pending receipt of the Final Business Plan;

- 6) **NOTED** arrangements in place for the ballot in October 2021 and that the Returning Officer (Edd de Coverly - Chief Executive) would formally instruct Civica to conduct the ballot in accordance with the Regulations.

Reasons for Recommendations

Priority 6 of the Council's Corporate Strategy (2020-2024) connected with and led by our community focuses on reviewing and reinvigorating partnership structures and frameworks.

'Regenerating our town centre and encouraging inward investment to create jobs is a key focus area under Priority 3 - Delivering sustainable and inclusive growth in Melton.

The Melton Mowbray BID (Business Improvement District) has already had two successful terms with ballot held in 2011 and 2016 and has played an important role in promoting the town centre and supporting businesses in enhancing town centre vibrancy by marketing and improving the trading environment.

The BID is a key partner for the Council in delivering services and enhancing the benefits for levy payers in the town centre. BID levy raises approximately £160,000 each year resulting in the total spend of over £800,000 in five years to deliver the projects in addition to the Council's services and initiatives. This adds value to Council's efforts, ambitions and resources which is especially important in post-COVID times.

It is the Council's responsibility to ensure it has complied with the Regulations, a formal approval is in place for casting votes on the Council's hereditaments and to make the financial provision for the levy costs assuming a successful ballot.

Councillor Freer here returned to the meeting

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ANNUAL OMBUDSMAN REPORT

Kieran Stockley, Assistant Director for Governance and Democracy introduced the report, the purpose of which was to inform Cabinet of the contents of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) annual report letter and providing a summary of the complaints received by Melton Borough Council for the year ended 31st March 2021 by the LGSCO.

Ms. Stockley advised that the LGSCO provided the Council with an annual letter, reporting on all complaints it had received during the year (summarised at paragraph 5 of the report and detailed fully in Appendix 1). The number of Housing Ombudsman complaints and its decisions on those complaints were detailed at paragraph 5.8 of the report. Corporate complaints data for the period 1 April 2020 to the 31 March 2021 was detailed at paragraph 5.10 of the report.

Ms. Stockley highlighted that the LGSCO had confirmed that no public interest reports had been issued against the Council in the last eight years, which was positive.

The Leader noted the summary provided by Ms Stockley, highlighting that in 100% of cases, the LGSCO had been satisfied that the Council had successfully implemented its recommendations. This compared to an average of 16% at other councils.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- Members noted that the report was positive and were pleased that the Council had implemented the LGSCO recommendations, particularly in relation to its housing tenants.
- Members thanked officers, particularly the Housing team for their work in responding to issues for improvement.
- The Council encouraged the community it served to help it improve. Good organisations learned from identifying problems and implementing improvements.

Cabinet

- 1) **NOTED** the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2020/21;
- 2) **NOTED** the contents of the report in respect of LGSCO findings, Housing Ombudsman findings and complaints statistics for 2020/2021.

Reasons for Recommendations

It is a constitutional requirement for Cabinet to have strategic oversight of complaints data to support priority 1 – excellent services positively impacting on our communities and priority 5 – ensuring the right conditions to support delivery.

Receipt of regular complaints data also demonstrates good governance in line with the Governance Framework.

The meeting closed at: 4.35 pm

Chair