

Minutes

Meeting name	Scrutiny Committee
Date	Tuesday, 24 January 2023
Start time	6.30 pm
Venue	Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH

Present:

Chair Councillor R. Child (Chair)

Councillors

J. Wilkinson (Vice-Chair)	S. Atherton
S. Carter	P. Chandler
J. Douglas	C. Evans
E. Holmes	P. Posnett MBE
T. Webster	

In Attendance

Leader of the Council – Councillor J. Orson
 Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Finance and Resources –
 Councillor R. de Burle
 Portfolio Holder for Climate, Access and Engagement – Councillor A.
 Freer

Officers

Chief Executive
 Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive)
 Director for Corporate Services & Section 151 Officer
 Director for Growth and Regeneration
 Assistant Director for Resources
 Senior Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer
 Democratic Services Officer (SE)

Minute No.	Minute
51	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE No apologies for absence were received.</p>
52	<p>MINUTES The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2022 were approved.</p> <p>The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2023 were approved. During the approval of the Minutes of the 11 January 2023 meeting, the Chairman noted that whilst correct, the information provided was incorrect. It was stated that housing benefit is paid 4 weeks in arrears, however it has since transpired that housing benefit is paid weekly into the rent account and that universal credit is paid 4 weeks in arrears. It was also stated that there were 800 and 900 tenants in arrears, however it transpired that the correct number was 648.</p>
53	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST An interest in respect of Councillor Posnett was noted as being on record for any matter which related to Leicestershire County Council.</p>
54	<p>REVIEW OF THE FORWARD PLAN The Chairman introduced the Cabinet Forward Plan and invited Members to comment.</p> <p>In reviewing the forward plan, Members discussed the upcoming feasibility study into the Melton Mowbray Cemetery and agreed that the issue needs reviewing. The Director for Housing and Communities stated that feasibility work had been commissioned and work was in progress and that the Cabinet would review the study at their meeting in April.</p> <p>A discussion ensued on whether the topic of Leisure Procurement should return to Scrutiny at some point prior to the award of the contract. It was noted that the topic was discussed at length at a Scrutiny workshop on 5 January 2023 and that the next stage is that it is going to be discussed at a Cabinet meeting shortly. The decision to award will be considered by all Members at a future Council meeting.</p>
55	<p>REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23 The Chairman introduced the Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23 and invited Members to comment upon the document.</p> <p>A discussion on climate change ensued during which Members were reminded that there will be a workshop on the topic. It was noted that the Scrutiny Committee agreed to have a workshop on the issue at the meeting held on 22 February 2022 and in response the Committee was informed that staff capacity issues was the reason why the workshop had been delayed. Following further discussion, it was agreed that the Director for Growth and Regeneration would provide a summary of</p>

actions to the Committee. Also the Senior Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer is to liaise with the Director for Growth and Regeneration and set a date for the proposed climate change workshop.

The topic of homelessness was raised by the Committee and it was agreed that this topic would be discussed in further detail at the Committee meeting to be held on 14 March.

56

GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2023/24 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 TO 2026/27

The Chairman informed Members that the report is due to be presented to Cabinet on 8 February 2023. Currently the report and appendices are in draft and subject to amendments.

Following an introduction by the Chief Executive, the Director for Corporate Services gave a presentation on the budget proposals for 2023/24 and the medium term financial strategy.

The Director for Growth and Regeneration was asked for the reason for the backdated service charges relating to Parkside and Phoenix House and how that had arisen. In response, the Committee was informed that the charges totalling £100k and £139k respectively, which were not included within the budget for 2022/23, was recoverable and had arisen due to how the charges were managed historically. It was confirmed that, when recovered, this would significantly improve the forecast budget outturn position and mitigate the forecast budget deficit in 2022/23. It also demonstrated the positive impact the team were having since they were established in 2019 to address the historical gaps in provision.

The query was raised on whether the £142k NNDR cost recharge to the contractor for the occupation of Lake Terrace under the terms of the lease would be paid. Members were informed that it is subject to ongoing discussion but that Officers were hoping for a positive response.

The question was asked, in light of the challenging financial situation the Council finds itself, why was it deemed appropriate to create the post of Assistant Director overseeing the Shared Prosperity Fund. In response, Members were advised that the role was necessary to ensure corporate oversight of the UKSPF plan and assured that the role is an amended role and does not represent an increase in head count. In addition, the difference between the current post and the amended post would be fully funded through the funds received from UKSPF.

The issue of funding for staff vacancies was raised, as well as the impact of hiring interims to temporarily fill those vacancies was having upon the budget. In response, the Committee were informed that the establishment is budgeted for in full and therefore where there are vacancies this would result in a saving that could be used for interim arrangements. Where interims are hired, budget considerations and affordability are taken into account. Also, it was highlighted that the local government sector is facing recruitment challenges, especially in key areas like

	<p>planning and environmental health and it was not prudent to simply repeat recruitment processes that had been unsuccessful previously. Consideration was therefore being given to different options, including shared arrangements, and whilst these were being developed interim arrangements would be maintained.</p> <p>Members were concerned that the Council did not have a figure for bringing the Cemetery Lodge up to a rentable standard. The Committee was informed that it isn't just a matter of funding and that there are other legalities involved, however the issue will be discussed in more depth at the Cabinet meeting in March.</p>
57	<p>CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022 - 2027 - GENERAL FUND AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2023/24</p> <p>The Chairman informed Members that the report is due to be presented to Cabinet on 8 February 2023. Currently the report and appendices are in draft and subject to amendments.</p> <p>The Director for Corporate Services outlined the capital programme to the Committee.</p> <p>In response to a concern raised regarding the cost to the Council of replacing vehicles, it was explained these had reached the end of their economic useful life and were now incurring higher maintenance costs. A replacement programme is in place based on estimated useful lives of vehicles.</p> <p>A concern was raised regarding employees taking vehicles home each evening and the additional revenue costs in fuel and wear and tear this incurred. The Director for Housing and Communities and the Director for Growth and Regeneration have committed to review the situation and provide a response to the Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>Following a comment regarding the underspend of Disabled Facilities Grants, Officers confirmed that any underspend may have to be returned to the grant provider, which could impact the total funds of £681k. Although Officers are going to look at innovative options for how these funds could be used, whilst remaining in line with the grant conditions.</p>
58	<p>REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2023/24 - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA)</p> <p>The Chairman informed Members that the report is due to be presented to Cabinet on 8 February 2023. Currently the report and appendices are in draft and subject to amendments.</p> <p>The Director for Corporate Services outlined the 2023/24 revenue budget proposals for Housing Revenue Account (HRA).</p> <p>In response to a concern raised regarding the voucher scheme to provide tenants a one-off payment to assist with the cost of living and how this was to be managed and audit considerations, the Committee were informed that the Director for</p>

Housing and Communities and the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services will spend time in reviewing and understanding good practice before developing and implementing a policy for the Council.

The comment was made that the Council can and should be acting more decisively when recovering garage rent arrears which currently total £18k.

A concern was raised on whether capital investments on Council-owned homes would provide sufficient reduction in energy use and carbon emissions. In response Members were informed that the Council is committed to achieving climate change targets that have been committed to but that there is a trade-off to be made between reducing emissions and reducing costs for tenants. It was also reiterated that the Council will only be able to mitigate the full carbon impact from its housing with the support of government funding.

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URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at: 8.03 pm

Chair