

Minutes

Meeting name	Scrutiny Committee
Date	Tuesday, 21 January 2020
Start time	6.30 pm
Venue	Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH

Present:

Chair Councillor P. Cumbers (Chair)

Councillors R. Bindloss (Vice-Chair) R. Browne
R. Child J. Douglas
C. Evans R. Smedley
J. Wilkinson

In Attendance J. Orson, Leader
R. de Burle, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance & Resources
A. Freer Jones, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Access and Engagement
L. Higgins, Portfolio Holder for Growth & Prosperity

Observers Councillor S. Carter
Councillor M. Graham MBE

Officers Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive & Director for People & Communities
Director for Corporate Services
Director for Governance & Regulatory Services
Assistant Director for Strategic Planning and Delivery
Revenue Business Partner
Corporate Services Manager
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (CR)

Minute No.	Minute
41	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fisher and Holmes.</p>
42	<p>MINUTES The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2019 were approved and authorised to be signed by the Chair.</p> <p>The minutes of the ad hoc meeting held on 7 January 2020 were approved and authorised to be signed by the Chair.</p>
43	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Councillor Browne declared an interest in any items relating to staff budgets due to his wife's employment with the Council.</p> <p>Councillor Orson declared an interest in any items relating to Leicestershire County Council, due to his role as a County Councillor.</p>
44	<p>SCRUTINY OF THE CORPORATE STRATEGY, BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY The items below would be reported to Cabinet on 12 February 2020. Cabinet had requested that Scrutiny Committee review and comment on proposals. The items would be reported to Council for approval on 26 February 2020.</p> <p>The Committee received a presentation on the Corporate Strategy from the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive (copy attached).</p> <p>The Committee received a presentation on the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy from the Director for Corporate Services (copy attached).</p>
	<p>QUESTIONS PROVIDED IN ADVANCE OF THIS MEETING The Chair thanked Members who had provided questions in advance of the meeting and advised that before Members were the questions put forward and answers provided. Answers to any outstanding questions would be provided following the meeting and would be circulated to all Members.</p> <p>Members would be allowed 10 minutes to consider the questions and answers.</p> <p>[The meeting adjourned at 19:19]</p> <p>[The meeting reconvened at 19:31]</p> <p>Cabinet Members and Directors provided a brief summary of the answers to questions 3, 4, 10, 14, 5 and 12, which may have been of wider interest to all Members.</p>

44a	CORPORATE STRATEGY 2020-2024
45	REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020/24
45a	CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2020/21
45b	REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2020-2021 - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA)
	<p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members were pleased with how the new governance structure was progressing, noting that Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee were able to work together to achieve the best solutions for the Council and the community. • Members thanked the Scrutiny Officer (Democratic Services Manager) for her work, particularly in relation to this meeting and officers for their work on the Budget and Corporate Strategy. • It was noted that this was a balanced budget and was the first budget 'in surplus' for many years. Difficult decisions had been made by officers and Members, the results of which were beginning to be realised. • Previously there had been two Council meetings during February to consider the Budget. The new governance structure, provided consideration of the budget by Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Council (on 26 February). • The Council's Contracts Register was up to date and the Director for Governance and Regulatory Services would ensure that this version was published on the Council's website. Currently officers were responsible for proactively monitoring expiry dates. However, the Council were considering how to maximise system functionality to automatically identify expiry dates. • Concerning the predicted forecast outturn position on the General Fund of £98k overspend. It was highlighted that this figure relied on details of service and financial performance, provided by budget holders. Senior Leadership Team aimed to identify savings and there were often small underspends, which amounted to reasonable sums. CIPFA had launched its Financial Resilience Toolkit last year, which could be used to identify information relating to the Council's financial reserves. The proposed balanced budget would assist in reducing the previous draw on the reserves. • Referring to Risk Items 9 and 10 (relating to Universal Credit and homelessness costs) at paragraph 14.4 of the General Fund Revenue Budget 2020/21 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 to 2023/24 report. The Director for Corporate Services confirmed that the omission of Risk Item 9 from the Risk Table would be addressed and reiterated that although costs associated with homelessness were a sizeable risk, the risk being assessed was in comparison to the budget. This would be reviewed prior to the report being finalised for Cabinet. • Concerns were raised over the Council not contributing to the Investment Income Reserve fund in 2019/20, in order to minimise the projected

overspend on the General Fund and any potential draw on the Corporate Priorities Reserve. The Director for Corporate Services advised that it was anticipated that a 'double contribution' for 2020/21 would be made to mitigate this.

- Investment in the Council's Commercial Property team to enable the use of assets to build homes, create jobs and generate income (one of the Council's key investment proposals) would need clarification, as concerns had already been raised about how this would work in practice. The impact of this on Council assets would need to be considered and it was the Council's aim to engage all Members on this issue.
- The reduction in planning applications and lack of larger scheme submissions was unexpected but was mirrored at other local councils. This may have been partly due to the Local Pan, which gave developers indications of application success and had resulted in far fewer speculative applications. The result of this would be a significant reduction in projected fee income.
- The Council had received Disability Confident Leader status. It had renewed its Equalities Statement and this would impact on all future reports and policies. In addition, discussion were ongoing between some Members concerning the reestablishment of the Disability Access Group.
- Tackling nuisance and antisocial behaviour (ASB) quickly was essential and the Council's Legal and Enforcement teams needed to be funded effectively. Officers advised that additional resources resulting from the new Corporate Structure and Strategy would strengthen the Council's position. Collaborative working between Legal and Enforcement teams and the Police Service was key to ensure that appropriate action could be taken when necessary. The Council's Corporate Enforcement Group would also be involved to ensure this issue was tackled proactively.
- Cabinet was due to consider additional resources to improve debt recovery. An improved performance was anticipated in 2020/21.
- Two or three Section 106 contributions remained outstanding and had been pursued earlier this week. It was highlighted that 95% of these monies were passed onto third parties.
- Concerning the expected shortfall on the Cattle Market (confirmed at £31k, which was a slightly improved position since it was last reported). Officers were considering all aspects of the Cattle Market, including the limitations and renegotiation of its lease, as currently there was limited opportunity to affect change at the Market. This issue was to be considered further by Scrutiny Committee as part of its Work Plan and this was welcomed by officers.
- The Consultation on car park charges had revealed a 75% support for ending the 'Tuesday premium', which had originally been put in place to deter overcrowding in the town car parks. Ending the premium would result in no loss of income for the Council. It was noted that Committee Members were in favour of ending the 'Tuesday Premium'. The issue would be considered by Cabinet the following day.
- The Council recognised that local pubs were the 'hub' of the community and anticipated that Rural Pub Relief would help to support them.

- Concerning the environment:
 - i. Members commented that the Corporate Strategy lacked a focus on tackling the climate emergency. The Council needed to enhance not simply protect the environment.
 - ii. Members suggested that they themselves reduce paper consumption by receiving only electronic versions of agenda packs (rather than hard copies, as was current practice). It was suggested that those who wished to receive hard copies 'opted in' to receiving them. The Director for Governance and Regulatory Services advised that her team would follow this up.
 - iii. Members recognised that there was an increase in the use of electric vehicles. Currently Melton had only two electric vehicle charging points (in the town). More would be needed. District councils were considering a collective scheme around this issue, which could link in with growth and tourism.
 - iv. The Leader highlighted that this Council had been the second in Leicestershire to declare a climate emergency and had established a Climate Change Working Group, which would receive £5k funding. It was noted that the Consultation revealed that the 70% of the public were not in favour of paying more to support 'greener initiatives'. He reassured Members that although there were limitations, the Council would make every effort to support an environmentally friendly agenda and would influence the community to do the same.
- Concerning Key Priority 6 (Connected with and Led by Our Community), as detailed in Appendix 1 of the New Corporate Strategy 2020-2024 report. Citizens Panels would be used to help introduce and develop policy (a list of contacts had been gathered during the recent Place Survey). There would be a huge focus on community engagement and those who did not use the internet would be targeted to ensure inclusion. The aim was to undertake this work thoroughly and comprehensively.
- Members were concerned that the Council was not maximising its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) income, via health and safety service charges. This had been previously raised at a meeting of Scrutiny Committee on 7 January. Housing was a high priority for the Council and despite some challenges, performance was improving (required legionella, asbestos checks etc. were being undertaken). The Council had acted swiftly to mitigate the risks identified by the Regulator of Social Housing. The Housing Improvement Plan had been approved by Council on 4 November 2019 and the first meeting of the Housing Improvement Partnership would take place tomorrow. Members expectations concerning service charges may have been raised but the Council had prioritised securing compliance with the Regulator over pursuing income.

[At 21:30, the duration of this meeting reached 3 hours and Members voted in favour of continuing the meeting until 22:00]

The discussion continued and the following points were noted:

- Concerning Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing. The new Corporate Structure provided roles (Housing Asset Manager and Commercial Asset Manager) to support this agenda. Members were encouraged to highlight any capital investment opportunities for consideration.
- Setting out how the Council would achieve its Key Priorities over the next 4 years was vital. It would need to, engage, communicate and campaign effectively.

The Chair reiterated that Cabinet would receive the Corporate Strategy and Budget reports at their meeting on 12 February 2020. Cabinet would consider the views of this Committee and other Members in their deliberations.

Council would be the ultimate decision maker and would be asked to approve the proposals at their meeting on 26 February 2020.

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URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at: 9.50 pm

Chair