

FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)

25<sup>th</sup> July 2019

**PRESENT:-**

**Conservative Group**

Councillor Fitzpatrick (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Angliss, Billings, Mrs. Brown, Corbin (substituting for Councillor Roberts) and Ford.

**Labour Group**

Councillors Dr. Pearson, Rhind, Singh (Substituting for Councillor Richards), Southerd and Taylor.

FM/20 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Watson (Chairman) and Councillor Richards (Labour Group).

FM/21 **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meetings held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2019 and 13<sup>th</sup> June 2019 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

FM/22 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Committee was informed no declarations of interest from Members of the Council had been received.

FM/23 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO 10**

The Committee was informed no questions from members of the public had been received.

FM/24 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO 11**

The Committee was informed no questions from Members of the Council had been received.

FM/25 **REPORTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Committee was informed no reports had been received.

**MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE**

**FM/26 AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Open Minutes of the Audit Sub-Committee Meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2019 were submitted.

**FM/27 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19**

The Head of Finance presented the report to the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

***1.1 The Committee approved the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2018/19.***

***1.2 The Committee approved the Prudential Indicators and Limits for 2019/20 to 2023/24 updated for 2018/19 actuals.***

***1.3 The Committee approved the updated counterparty (lending) list as at 1st April 2019.***

**FM/28 BUDGET OUT-TURN AND FINAL ACCOUNTS 2018/19**

The Head of Finance presented the report to Committee, noting the Statement of Accounts remained as draft as the external audit had been delayed and was expected to be reported to Members at the November Committee. The Head of Finance reviewed the variances against the budget, noted the Housing Revenue Account was set with a surplus and noted the identified earmarked reserves.

Councillor Rhind queried the recovery of Housing Benefits overpayments due to a processing error if the claimant was not at fault. The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) noted the question and advised the Member he would seek further information.

Councillor Mrs. Brown sought clarification on the Better Care Funding allocation process and if interest rates were regularly tracked. The Head of Finance responded to the queries, advising further information would need to be sought from the Strategic Housing Manager who was involved in the Better Care Funding allocation process. In relation to tracking interest rates, the Head of Finance advised interest rates were tracked, but regulations were in place which stipulated where funds could be secured.

Councillor Dr. Pearson welcomed the report, noting the Council had been prudent with money and had been investing wisely, but he queried if large sums stored within the reserves would run the risk of missing opportunities, such as being eligible to apply for grants. The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) advised there is no limit on the amount kept in reserves, however there is a minimum requirement, which would be reviewed by the External Auditors if below the minimum amount.

Councillor Dr. Pearson made reference to Appendix 3, requesting further transparency is provided around large financial commitments, such as Section 106 funds, to ensure money is being discharged as expected. The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) informed Members the Head of Finance was reviewing Section 106 allocations with the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing and would be submitting a report to Committee, which included a breakdown of Section 106 money, later in the year.

A discussion ensued amongst Members regarding Members being invited to be part of the Section 106 monies allocation to be able to share an opinion on where the money is spent. Councillor Mrs. Brown, as Chairman of the Planning Committee, advised Section 106 monies are tightly managed through legislation and linked to particular developments.

Councillor Ford commended the report and remarked the level of prudence displayed by the Council had resulted in an envious financial position, which was applauded given the state of uncertainty.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 The Committee approved the final out-turn position for:**
  - **The General Fund Revenue Account 2018/19**
  - **The Housing Revenue Account 2018/19**
  - **Capital Expenditure and Financing 2018/19**
  - **The Collection Fund 2018/19**
  - **The Balance of Reserves and Provisions at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.**
- 1.2 The Committee approved a net appropriation of £2,951,610 in 2018/19 be made from the General Fund Reserve to other Earmarked Reserves as detailed in the report.**
- 1.3 The Committee noted the following contributions and adjustments have been made to Bad Debt and Appeal Provisions in 2018/19:**

Sundry Debtors	114,960	General Fund
Temporary Accommodation	-7,872	General Fund
Housing Benefit Overpayments	39,033	General Fund
Council Tax Arrears	27,975	General Fund
Business Rates Arrears	163,853	General Fund
Business Rates Appeals	169,324	General Fund
Planning Appeals	-37,500	General Fund
Housing Rent Arrears	17,113	HRA

**FM/29 ANNUAL REPORT ON SICKNESS ABSENCE**

The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) presented the report to Committee, highlighting a Joint Consultative Committee was held earlier that day where proposals to decrease the trigger points for managing short and long term absences were approved by Members and Union representatives.

The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) further noted the report did not include the first quarter absences, which were the most positive figure within the last few years.

Councillor Dr. Pearson welcomed the report and noted it was positive steps were being taken to address the level of absence. He queried if there was an understanding of the underlying causes for stress and work related absences to ensure the management culture was not contributing to the absence figure. The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) responded to the query, noting not all absences related to stress was due to work-related stress, but an understanding of culture is missing and will hopefully be addressed in the Ethic and Cultural Survey due to be distributed in the Autumn.

Councillor Ford welcomed the report and praised the positive Joint Consultative Committee outcome.

**RESOLVED:**

***1.1 The Committee approved the planned actions detailed in section 4 of the report to improve attendance levels across the Council.***

***1.2 The Committee approved to receive quarterly updates on the levels of absence in line with the corporate performance framework and any actions taken to ensure that attendance levels show continued and sustained improvement.***

***1.3 That the Improving Attendance Working Group continues to meet to ensure that planned activities are implemented and other initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of the workforce are progressed.***

FM/30 **PAYMENT FACILITIES AT THE CIVIC OFFICES**

The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) presented the report to Committee, highlighting the consideration given to each option as detailed within the report, but clarified the recommendation was seeking the removal of the cash payment facilities and alternative facilities would be available at local Post Offices and Pay Points.

Councillor Rhind expressed his disappointment in the recommendation and advised he would be unable to support the option put forward as the Council had no control over private businesses remaining open.

A discussion took place amongst Members regarding possible benefits of the recommendation, such as increased footfall to local shops and more shops remaining open. An Amendment to the recommendation was put forward by Councillor Dr. Pearson to only replace one cash payment facility as it seemed risky to transfer Council services to a private enterprise. The Amendment was not carried by Committee.

Councillor Mrs. Brown, whilst recognising the concerns raised by some Members, queried if the effects of removing the cash payment facility could be monitored and if the decision proved disadvantageous for the community, the

decision is reviewed. The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) noted the query and advised the cash flow from pay points would be monitored.

Councillor Southerd welcomed the comments made by Councillor Mrs. Brown and compared the situation to when Members were asked if the Council should follow a paperless or paperlite policy.

Councillor Rhind raised he did not feel the decision was being done for the benefit of customers.

**RESOLVED:**

***1.1 The Committee approved that cash payment facilities at the Civic Offices be withdrawn with effect from 1 January 2020.***

***1.2 The Committee approved for payment machines to be made available but be limited to card payments only.***

***1.3 The Committee approved that in the intervening period, a communication plan be drawn up and publicity be provided regarding alternative payment methods, pay point locations and people are supported in using alternative facilities ahead of January 2020.***

FM/31 **COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED:**

***Members considered and approved the updated work programme.***

FM/32 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [ACCESS TO INFORMATION] ACT 1985)**

**RESOLVED:-**

***That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the Meeting as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that there would be disclosed exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Act indicated in brackets after each item.***

**MINUTES**

***The Exempt Minutes of the Meetings held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2019 and 13<sup>th</sup> June 2019 were received.***

**TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 11**

***The Committee was informed no questions had been received.***

**APPLICATION FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF**

*The Committee approved the recommendation in the report.*

**PLANNING SERVICES-VARIATION TO ESTABLISHMENT**

*The Committee approved the recommendation in the report.*

The meeting terminated at 7.05pm.

COUNCILLOR M FITZPATRICK

VICE-CHAIRMAN