

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 22 JUNE 2022

PRESENT: Councillors Gerry Clark (Chairman), John Story (Vice-Chairman), Simon Bond, Karen Davies, Greg Jones, Geoff Hill, Helen Price, Julian Sharpe, Shamsul Shelim, Leo Walters and Simon Werner

Also in attendance: Councillor David Hilton, Councillor Donna Stimson and Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra

Officers: Mark Beeley, Andrew Vallance, Julian McGowan, Rebecca Hatch, Ellen McManus-Fry and Emma Duncan

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Mark Beeley, Democratic Services Officer, explained that the Panel needed to elect a Chairman and Vice Chairman for the municipal year 2022/23.

Councillor Story proposed that Councillor Clark was Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Councillor Sharpe.

Councillor Werner proposed that Councillor Price was Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Councillor Bond.

As two nominations were received, a named vote was taken.

Election of Councillor Clark to be Chairman of the Panel (Motion)	
Councillor Gerry Clark	For
Councillor John Story	For
Councillor Simon Bond	Against
Councillor Karen Davies	Against
Councillor Greg Jones	For
Councillor Geoffrey Hill	Against
Councillor Helen Price	Against
Councillor Julian Sharpe	For
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	For
Councillor Leo Walters	For
Councillor Simon Werner	Against
Carried	

RESOLVED: That Councillor Clark was elected Chairman of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel for the 2022/23 municipal year.

The Panel then elected a Vice Chairman for the municipal year.

Councillor Price proposed that Councillor L Jones was Vice Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Councillor Werner.

Councillor Clark proposed that Councillor Story was Vice Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Councillor Sharpe.

As two nominations were received, a named vote was taken.

Election of Councillor L Jones to be Vice Chairman of the Panel (Motion)	
Councillor Gerry Clark	Against
Councillor John Story	Against
Councillor Simon Bond	For
Councillor Karen Davies	For
Councillor Greg Jones	Against
Councillor Geoffrey Hill	For
Councillor Helen Price	For
Councillor Julian Sharpe	Against
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	Against
Councillor Leo Walters	Against
Councillor Simon Werner	For
Rejected	

The motion fell.

Election of Councillor Story to be Vice Chairman of the Panel (Motion)	
Councillor Gerry Clark	For
Councillor John Story	For
Councillor Simon Bond	Against
Councillor Karen Davies	Against
Councillor Greg Jones	For
Councillor Geoffrey Hill	Against
Councillor Helen Price	Against
Councillor Julian Sharpe	For
Councillor Shamsul Shelim	For
Councillor Leo Walters	For
Councillor Simon Werner	Against
Carried	

RESOLVED: That Councillor Story was elected as Vice Chairman of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel for the 2022/23 municipal year.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L Jones. Councillor Hill was attending the meeting as substitute.

Councillor Price asked the Chairman how the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel would be conducted in relation to the updated constitution. She felt that scrutiny was failing and said that things needed to be changed.

The Chairman said that there was a remit that the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel could consider, all corners of the council wanted to have a working scrutiny function. The work programme linked with the Cabinet Forward Plan, he invited Councillor Price to inform him how the Panel could be improved.

Councillor Price said that her experience had been with the previous Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel. She suggested that there was an agenda item at each meeting which considered what had gone well and what could be improved as the Panel considered how it had performed.

The Chairman said that the business of the Panel was what needed to be held publicly. A discussion amongst Members on how the Panel was conducted could take place outside of the meeting.

Councillor Hill felt the issue was that the Conservative group was scrutinising itself, with each Panel chaired by Conservative Members. This was a failure of scrutiny, he commented that the election of the Chairman and Vice Chairman at the Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel the previous evening had been a disgrace.

The Chairman said that Councillor Hill was able to bring items to scrutiny, make comments and ask questions of officers and Cabinet Members. Any comments about the conduction of business could be taken offline and discussed with the Chairman and officers.

Councillor Sharpe said that there were opportunities for discussion and a consideration of views at scrutiny, he did not agree with the comments made by Councillor Hill.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th April 2022 were noted and approved as a true and accurate record.

Councillor Price noted a comment made by the Chairman at the last meeting, that the Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel was the best place for the waste contract to be considered and scrutinised. During her time on the Panel, they had been unable to look at contractual or financial issues and therefore the item had not been dealt with by the Panel. Councillor Price did not want this to become lost between two Panels.

The Chairman felt that there were two elements of the waste contract, the financial side and the delivery side, which could include value for money. He would need to take advice on how the waste contract should be taken forward, this would be noted as an action and dealt with outside of the meeting.

ACTION – The Chairman to investigate what the best way to scrutinise the waste contract was after the meeting.

Councillor Sharpe suggested dealing with the issue as part of the work programme.

FINANCE UPDATE

Councillor Hilton, Cabinet Member for Asset Management & Commercialisation, Finance and Ascot, said that there had previously been discussion at scrutiny about the role that Cabinet Members played. It was important for the Panel to hear from officers and ask questions of the experts, Cabinet Members were there to answer any questions if required.

Councillor Werner thanked Councillor Hilton for his comments.

Andrew Vallance, Head of Finance, reported that the council had an underspend of £2.35 million. As a result, the general reserves had been increased to £8.75 million, which was above the minimum level required. The final outturn on the schools budget was an overspend of £257,000, the final capital outturn was expenditure of £26 million with slippage of £42 million. There was movement of £2 million from the month 10 monitoring report, the reasons for this had been outlined in the report.

Julian McGowan, Senior Finance Business Partner, talked through the revenue budget outturn. For each service area:

- The Chief Executive service area had underspent by £1.6 million.
- Law and Governance had underspent by £700,000.
- Children's Services had overspent by £200,000.
- Adults, Health and Housing had underspent by £139,000.
- Resources had underspent by £743,000.
- Place had overspent by £662,000.

A member of the public, Mr Andrew Hill, addressed the Panel. The report showed a pleasing underspend and Mr Hill thanked all Members for limiting their special responsibility allowances in the public interest. He had noted that remote meetings and remote working were saving the council large sums of money, for example over £100,000 had been saved from printing and stationary costs, while the use of Zoom meetings had saved £55,000 on petrol claims. Mr Hill asked officers if they thought that there needed to be an even bigger push towards entrenching and expanding home and remote working in RBWM. Mr Hill continued by commenting on the £487,000 underspend on libraries and resident services. He asked if there were plans to use this underspend to reverse the decision to reduce library opening hours.

Mr Hill asked a number of further questions:

- There had been a transfer into the reserves of £140,000 for art funding, did this represent potentially new money which could be available to organisations like Norden Farm?
- The Vicus Way car park was mentioned and had some new cladding, was this scheme projected to come in on the original budget that had been set for the project?
- Was the delay mentioned in 15.3 in the report due to the contractual termination date of 2025 for Maidenhead Golf Club?
- It was noted that there was an adverse variance of £500,000 on the train station forecourt. Who covered this cost, was it the Local Enterprise Partnership or the residents and RBWM, and what had caused this loss?
- Why was the council paying for 106 Westborough Road when it had been transferred to the RBWM Property Company?

Andrew Vallance said that the council was in an established position of hybrid working. The Town Hall office space was available for staff to work from if it was preferred but most staff worked from home most of the time. Some of the space in Zone D at the Town Hall had been reconfigured to become a collaboration zone, each service area was encouraged to use the zone once a month for team meetings and collaboration activities. The library and residents services underspend had been one off which was mostly due to the delayed weddings over lockdown, there were currently no plans to change the library opening hours. The money set aside was £140,000 in the original budget for arts funding. Vicus Way was projected to come in on the original budget, the slippage on the golf club was due to the contractual date change late in the financial year. Andrew Vallance was unable to answer the question on the railway forecourt, he would respond to Mr Hill with a written answer. On 106 Westborough Road, the property would be refurbished prior to transfer as the council could recover the VAT.

Councillor Sharpe said it was a useful financial update. There were a lot of numbers and variables in the report, he asked which numbers officers were concerned about and should therefore be highlighted to the Panel.

Andrew Vallance said that there had been an increase in spending on older people towards the end of the last financial year, this had now stabilised but was still at a high level. Vacancies were another area of concern nationally for all councils, recruitment was difficult in a number of services. Inflation was something to consider this financial year and the next financial year.

Councillor Werner thanked officers for the report, it had answered a number of his questions. He highlighted the big change in underspend since month 10, this seemed to be based on a number of one-off grants. Councillor Werner felt this was similar to past budgets from the previous administration. He commented that officers would have known that some funding, for example on the Property Company, did not need to be used, this money could have been factored into the budget. Councillor Werner asked how the 'veering' could be prevented going forward.

Andrew Vallance said that there had been significant volatility over the past couple of years with Covid. The projected overspend for the Property Company had been reduced in tranches and the outturn forecast for the company had changed over the course of the year. Julian McGowan had been brought in to help deal with the issue and a number of other business partners had also been employed by the council.

The Chairman said that the last year had been the most unpredictable year in all areas of finance. Handling fiscal management and measures over this period had been a difficult job and officers had done well in the circumstances.

Councillor Hilton said that he shared Councillor Werner's view, he felt that some of this money could have been identified earlier. The finance team had been through a significant period of change since 2020, it was important that the team were on top of every budget line so that it could be challenged effectively. Considering where the risks were, around 70% of the budget was spent on adult and children's services, this was where small movements could make a big difference. There would be a change shortly which would see a difference in how adult social care was funded.

The Chairman agreed that it was a significant area of the budget where the council was exposed to fluctuations in financial variants.

Councillor Bond commented on funding including council tax being nearly £1 million short, he was puzzled by this figure. He asked if the answer to Mr Hill's question on the train station forecourt could also be shared with Members of the Panel. Councillor Bond felt that the dedicated schools grant was high level and was therefore a general risk area for the council.

Julian McGowan confirmed that a written answer on the council tax query would be provided to Councillor Bond after the meeting.

ACTION – Written answer to be given to Councillor Bond on the query about funding including council tax after the meeting.

ACTION – The answer to Mr Hill's question on the train station forecourt to also be circulated to the Panel.

Councillor Hilton said that the dedicated schools budget was something that he kept an eye on as it was a risk.

Councillor Price clarified that the council had been operating with an underspend, but the underspend could not be repeated in the current financial year due to the nature of the underspend. Therefore, there would not be savings as they were one off. Councillor Price asked if this interpretation was correct.

Andrew Vallance said that it was difficult to say, a significant proportion of savings were one off but officers were currently undertaking a review to see how much of the savings would be recurring and how much was one off. This would part of next year's budget process.

Councillor Price commented on the inability to recruit staff, she asked if as a result of this any work had been done to investigate the impact on the service which was delivered to residents.

Emma Duncan, Deputy Director for Law & Strategy, said that recruitment did affect the quality of the service that the council could deliver. The pool of people that the council could recruit from had expanded, which showed the positive impact of remote working. A number of these positions were new posts which had been created, it was important to get the right person for the job to ensure a good quality of service.

Councillor Price noted the capital slippage and asked what the negative effects were of this, she assumed that the slippage rate had been built into this year's budget.

Andrew Vallance said that slippage was an issue for all local authorities. He had chaired the last meeting of the Capital Review Board and the last agenda was focused on slippage, there would be a further examination of scheduled works and how likely they were to happen on the outlined timeframe. Some delays had been caused by Covid, issues getting hold of labour and raw materials. It was being looked at as an urgent priority, slippage would always happen but officers hoped to minimise the impact.

Councillor Price said that general fund reserves should only be used in an emergency. Inflation was an issue of concern, would the general fund be used to deal with the level of inflation.

Andrew Vallance said the Medium Term Financial Plan was currently being developed, there was an assumption made about inflation and how long the level would remain high. Reserves should not be used for recurring costs, only a temporary spike in inflation could be a justified use of reserves. If inflation and costs were to remain high for a long period of time, using the reserves would not be beneficial or sustainable.

Councillor Price asked why reserves had been earmarked at £3 million.

She was informed that there was a specific reason for each earmarked use of reserves, he gave a few examples of where this was the case.

The Chairman queried the figure of £188,000 on budget objections which was an unforeseen cost to the council.

Andrew Vallance said that this cost had been set aside due to the additional cost of external audit, including investigating the objections to the 2019/20 accounts.

Councillor Walters believed that remote working was not entirely satisfactory, he felt it was not as efficient as in person working. There had been a significant number of risks discussed, he asked if there was a significant sum of money coming into the council.

Andrew Vallance said that the significant sum of funding would come from the development of Maidenhead Golf Club. Government funding was on a year by year basis, so there was no long term certainty.

Councillor Shelim commented on the current business rate discount, he asked if this had affected the council's budget.

Andrew Vallance explained that the government compensated the council through grants.

Councillor Werner said that there had been an agreement with some parishes to help fund the libraries but Maidenhead and Windsor did not have their own parish councils. He asked if the Special Expenses could be used to help fund libraries and extend their opening hours. On the property that had been mentioned by Mr Hill, Councillor Werner asked if the council would be reimbursed by the Property Company. Councillor Werner was pleased to hear about the line-by-line budget review that the Head of Finance had mentioned, had this happened each year or was this the first year a review like this had been done. Councillor Werner commented on

the Property Company overestimating the amount of money that they would need to spend, he asked if the finance team were able to review the financial performance of the Property Company independently.

Andrew Vallance said that the funding for the libraries could be considered as part of the next budget. He was not sure on the reimbursement, this would be double checked and an answer given to Councillor Werner after the meeting. The line-by-line review had occurred in last year's budget, this had recently been introduced and would be continued for future years. The finance team engaged in regular dialogue with the Property Company.

ACTION – Andrew Vallance to check how the council was reimbursed in relation to 106 Westborough Road.

Councillor Werner suggested that any difficulties encountered by the finance team could be brought forward to the Panel.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Panel noted the Finance Update.

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023/24 - 2027/28

Andrew Vallance said that this was the first look at the budget process for next year. The strategy and the plan would be considered by Cabinet in July, before it came back to the Panel at its next meeting a few days later. The report would then go to Full Council in September for approval. The strategy was a high level look at long term savings, with the main aim this year being to align the strategy with the areas set out in the Corporate Plan. Health and wellbeing and the climate were not included as they were difficult areas to achieve savings, but all other areas were included. The Medium Term Financial Plan would look to identify any gaps and there was a starting point of £4.8 million deficit which was identified as part of the budget process from February. Officers would be testing all of the assumptions that had been made as part of the plan, with particular emphasis on inflation, interest rates, pay and government funding. The report would feed into the budget process and would help to identify the savings gap. This savings gap would then be filled as part of the draft budget at the end of the year.

There was one registered public speaker on this item, Mr Andrew Hill. He had noted in the report that 'RBWM had moved up the financial risk curve', the council was not a commercial company and he asked what officers had meant by this. Considering the current financial position of RBWM, Mr Hill questioned whether this was the time for the council to be 'moving up the financial risk curve'. He felt that there should be policies in place to ensure that the council moved down the curve to avoid bankruptcy. On the Property Company, Mr Hill said that the business plan had been discussed entirely in Part II which meant that members of the public were unable to view the report or see what had been discussed. Officers had been unable to answer his earlier question on the train station forecourt loss of £500,000, he felt that officers and the Cabinet Member should be aware of this sum. Mr Hill continued by asking what the inflation assumptions were for the report, he asked if the £15 million over five years saving figure took into account inflation at or above 10%, or would the council need to make in excess of £15 million of savings. Mr Hill concluded by asking if officers were planning for that eventuality.

Andrew Vallance said that the comments on the financial risk curve was an acknowledgement that the council was undertaking more commercial activities and was therefore more reliant on income generation, this was the same for most other councils. On the train station forecourt, there was one capital accountant at the council, she had been on leave and therefore an answer could not be provided at the meeting. The budget for this year had been made on an assumed inflation figure of 4.5%, assumptions would be tested over the coming weeks and it was almost certain that this inflation assumption would be increased. Services had put forward budget bids which outlined their anticipated growth, therefore the budget should reflect the demand of the council.

The Chairman said that the council would look at all opportunities from a commercial viewpoint to drive value for money.

Councillor Davies considered the report in relation to the Corporate Plan objectives, the council had an aim to reduce carbon output by 50% by 2025. She asked if the council would therefore not be in a position by 2027/28 to make some decisions on savings that were good for the environment.

Andrew Vallance said it was a good idea and he would add a section on climate change related savings to the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Councillor Hill noted that there were a number of savings outlined in the report that would be achieved by 2026/27. He asked how officers planned to achieve these savings, given that council tax increases were capped at 3% and inflation was forecast at 11%. Councillor Hill was worried about staff retention and he felt that some of the savings were extremely ambitious and that there was a heavy reliance on the Maidenhead Golf Club scheme going ahead.

Andrew Vallance said that it was challenging, there would be a line-by-line review and there were various reserves that could be used. Work was being done to identify the correct cost of social care, this could then be used to lobby government to gain the correct level of funding.

The Chairman felt that it was premature to be negative but it was right to be aware of the risks, the council needed to be flexible with its projections going forward.

Councillor Hilton referred to the table at 5.1 in the report, the total was around £12 million. Of that, £7 million was a result of the loss of business rates as a consequence of the regeneration of Maidenhead. The council received around 16% of business rates but received all of the contributions from council tax. The finance team had tackled issues very well and the transformation team had saved £5 million.

Councillor Price asked if the strategy was achievable with all the cuts, financial uncertainty and the inability to raise the council tax cap above the current level.

In response, Andrew Vallance reminded the Panel that the council had a legal duty to set a balanced budget, so the strategy needed to be achievable. Councils nationally would be lobbying government on the council tax cap.

Councillor Price said that an increase in the number of residents in the borough meant more council tax but this also meant a greater demand on services. This could be more significant than the amount gained through council tax. On the risk factors, she asked if these could be explained and evidenced further.

Andrew Vallance confirmed that this would be done in the report which would come back to the Panel in July.

Councillor Price asked if a savings tracker would be included to show how savings were being achieved and the progress that had been made.

Andrew Vallance explained that the financial update reports that were considered by Cabinet included a savings tracker. There would also be a growth tracker, ensuring that the service had been delivered.

Councillor Price said that the council would not get things right first time. It was better to take longer and test things multiple times, this would release resource from things that needed to be corrected.

Councillor Werner reiterated the concerns raised by Councillor Hill, the developer at the golf club could decide that it did not want to develop the land at the current moment in time, until the market picked up. He asked what the consequence was of this project not going ahead. Councillor Werner commented on long term borrowing, he asked if there was going to be a strategy to consider borrowing more long term than short term. Councillor Werner said that he believed that the Leader of the Council, Councillor Johnson, had written to the government asking for the cap on council tax to be raised. He asked if this was correct and if a copy of the letter could be shared with the Panel. Things set out in the strategy relied upon the transformation programme, Councillor Werner underlined that transformation should lead the savings rather than savings leading the transformation programme.

Andrew Vallance said that there were no significant capital receipts on the golf club in the next two to three years so there would not be a short term impact. Long term there would be higher borrowing costs, this would be in the capital programme. The assumption on borrowing was 0.6% in the current budget, not all borrowing would increase as the council had hedged in a number of cases. A significant amount of borrowing for next year had been secured at a lower rate. Risks were reduced by having a mix of borrowing lengths which ensured that not everything was short term. Andrew Vallance was not aware of the letter the Leader of the Council had written, he would take this away from the meeting. On transformation, estimations needed to be made on when the savings would be factored into the budget.

ACTION – Andrew Vallance to investigate if the Leader of the Council had written to the government about the council tax cap being raised and if the letter could be shared with the Panel.

Councillor Story asked if officers were aware of what the impact might be from the new health and social care proposals, which were due to come into effect from April 2023.

Andrew Vallance said he would be briefing the Cabinet Member for Finance and the Leader of the Council at the end of the week, the team were beginning to calculate what the costs to the council could be.

Councillor Bond added that he had seen a presentation on the proposals at the People Overview & Scrutiny Panel, he said that the proposals were planned to be coming in October 2023 rather than April 2023.

The Chairman said that this was potentially exciting as it could lead to a better delivery of services in a joined up approach, if it could work it would lead to a fairer system.

Councillor Price said that she had a general understanding of the difference between statutory and non-statutory services, she understood that the non-statutory services were at risk of being cut and asked if this was a fair assumption to make.

Andrew Vallance said that while some services were statutory, the level of the service could vary.

Councillor Hilton clarified that the council had not made cuts, over three years £10 million more had been added to children's services.

Councillor Werner suggested that the comment raised by Councillor Davies, that the Medium Term Financial Strategy should include reference to the other two Corporate Plan objectives, should be put forward as a recommendation by the Panel.

This recommendation was proposed by Councillor Davies and seconded by Councillor Werner.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Panel noted and commented to Cabinet on:

- i) The proposed key themes of the Medium Term Financial Strategy set out in the report.**
- ii) It was recommended by the Panel that the Strategy contained reference to the Corporate Plan objectives on the climate and health & wellbeing.**

WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Werner said that there had been discussion at a previous meeting about having the transformation programme on the work programme, the report could consider the progress of the transformation programme and to check that things were on track.

Councillor Bond commented on the peer review which had been undertaken by the council a couple of months ago. Specific recommendations had been made as part of the review and an action plan had been developed by officers, with some strategic aims identified.

Emma Duncan said that the corporate peer review team would visit the council again virtually to follow up in October 2022, the Panel currently had an item based on the corporate peer review for the October meeting. The action plan and any further recommendations could be considered at this meeting.

Councillor Davies questioned which of the three scrutiny panels the climate and environment strategy could be considered by.

Emma Duncan said that a number of the key performance indicators from the strategy would be included as part of the performance management reports. The Panel would have oversight of how the strategy had been implemented and progress that had been made. The Panel could do a deep dive and refer pieces of work to the other Panels, for example the climate strategy could be considered in further detail by the Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Werner said that he was happy with this approach.

Councillor Price was cautious about duplicating workloads, she suggested that the Chairman of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny discussed the topic with the Chairman of the Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel, particularly as the remits of the various scrutiny panels had been altered.

Councillor Sharpe said that climate change and sustainability was part of every area of the council. Task and finish groups could be used, this could be an appropriate method to consider any deep dives that the Panel wanted to investigate. Councillor Sharpe suggested that a joint task and finish group could be established with the Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel, which could also be an option to spread the workload.

Councillor Shelim was also a Member of the Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel and said that climate change formed part of the Panel's work programme.

Councillor Werner said that the Corporate Plan was primarily the responsibility of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel and the climate strategy had more targets in the plan than any other area.

Mark Beeley said that there had been a suggestion made by Councillor Price in advance of the meeting about equality, diversity and inclusion in the council and community. This had been discussed with officers and could be discussed by the Panel to see if it was something that they would like to add to the work programme.

Councillor Price added that it was critical for Members to have an understanding of the work that was taking place in this area. She wanted to investigate how the Panel could support officers with this work.

Ellen McManus-Fry, Equalities Officer, gave a presentation to the Panel. She explained that the corporate peer challenge had highlighted a recognition that the council was at an early stage of addressing equality, diversity and inclusion. Understanding and working with communities across RBWM consisted of a number of areas:

- Collecting and sharing information
- Analysing and using data and information
- Fostering good community relations
- Participation in public life
- Effective community engagement

This had led to the council to develop a number of priorities to help achieve its equality, diversity and inclusion objectives:

- Develop and promote the engagement framework
- Strengthen relationships with communities
- Embed equalities within the wider RBWM priorities
- Review Equality Impact Assessments

Councillor Sharpe felt that the scope of this topic went across the council and he could understand where scrutiny came in. He felt that the topic could be more suited to the People Overview & Scrutiny Panel. If the topic was brought for review in, for example six months time, there would be something for Members to review.

Ellen McManus-Fry said that it was likely that processes would be in place by the end of the year.

The Chairman asked what the timetable would be for the Panel to be able to consider what had been achieved.

He was informed that there were no set timescales currently as this piece of work was only just being developed.

Rebecca Hatch, Head of Strategy, said it was something for the Panel to consider how much of a role they wanted to play, progress could be reviewed at a set point in time. Assessing the equalities of the council would be ongoing, work was being done with the LGA and the Equalities Lead, there was a suggestion that they could be invited to do a peer review.

The Chairman welcomed an update report to come to the Panel in due course.

Councillor Walters asked what the legislative background was.

Rebecca Hatch explained that there was a range of legislation around the council's equalities duties, ensuring those groups with protected characteristics were always considered.

Councillor Walters asked if the council was currently undertaking any work on equalities.

Rebecca Hatch said that a lot of work was being done on equalities in each service areas, with Equality Impact Assessments regularly completed. The corporate peer review had noted that equalities was not embedded across the organisation.

Councillor Walters asked how officers could monitor equality in the organisation.

Rebecca Hatch said that the LGA framework could be used which allowed councils to compare with each other.

Councillor Walters asked how the equality requirements could be tested.

Councillor Werner suggested that officers could give Councillor Walters a briefing on equalities.

The Chairman requested that Councillor Walters contacted officers to answer any further questions that he had. He suggested that the presentation could be circulated to the Panel after the meeting.

ACTION – Mark Beeley to circulate the presentation on equalities to all Panel Members.

Councillor Price said that Members could support the project rather than just receiving information.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 9.50 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....