

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 6 November 2023

Present: Councillors Chris Moriarty (Chair), Mark Howard (Vice-Chair), David Buckley, Maureen Hunt, Helen Price, Gary Reeves, Julian Sharpe, Julian Tisi and Mark Wilson

Also in attendance: Councillors Lynne Jones, Joshua Reynolds, Adam Bermange, Jack Douglas and Gurch Singh

Officers: Mark Beeley, Stephen Evans, Elizabeth Griffiths, Andrew Durrant, Kevin McDaniel, Nikki Craig and Andrew Vallance

Officers in attendance virtually: Lin Ferguson, Amanda Gregory, Chris Joyce, Alysse Strachan, Ian Brazier-Dubber and Radhika Thirunarayana-Govindarajan

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence received.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

Minutes

Councillor Price asked for an amendment to be made to include reference to her suggestion that an offline meeting should be held for the Panel to discuss the work programme.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes from the meeting held on 5th September 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Quarterly Assurance Report

Stephen Evans, Chief Executive, said that a number of measures had been put in place to improve governance, performance and risk management, with the data related to Quarter 1 of the financial year which was April to July. The report would be considered by the Executive Leadership Team and Cabinet on a quarterly basis and the Panel would have the opportunity to scrutinise the report going forward. The key performance indicators and metrics were in an interim position as work was currently being done on the creation of a new Corporate Plan which would be finalised in 2024 and would include new priorities of the administration and a fresh set of goals and objectives. The government had also been strengthening local government oversight and had set up the Office for Local Government, this compared council performance on finances, waste and adult social care. These indicators would be built into the performance reporting already undertaken by the council.

A traffic light system was used to demonstrate performance in the Quarterly Assurance Report. Overall, performance was good with notable successes but there were some challenges. 24 indicators were green, 6 were amber and 7 were red.

Councillor Price noted the quality and depth which the report covered. She asked how data fed into the Citizens Portal, which was where residents could currently review the live council performance.

Stephen Evans said that a number of teams fed data to the performance and strategy team, who could then collate the data into the report. He would provide an answer after the meeting on the relationship with the Citizens Portal.

ACTION – Stephen Evans to provide an answer on the relationship of the data between the Citizens Portal and the Quarterly Assurance Report.

Councillor Wilson felt the report was fantastic and welcomed the report being considered by the Panel. He had been interested in exploring a topic around staffing and headcount, particularly how many roles there were across the organisation. He suggested that a headcount or a resource summary with some detail could be provided in future reports.

Stephen Evans said that he was concerned about some of the capacity gaps, this was being worked on through the budget process. Growth was being explored in service areas where there had been high demand. Service areas were encouraged to put their capacity gaps on the table during budget sessions so that this could be investigated.

Nikki Craig, Assistant Director of HR, Corporate Projects and IT, said that the data came from iTrent from was the council's HR system. This did not include agency staff but this could be gained from a different system under the finance team. Nikki Craig would explore whether this could be added in to give a more complete picture.

ACTION – Nikki Craig to explore if agency staff could be included in the full headcount for future Quarterly Assurance Reports.

Stephen Evans said that there were a number of reasons why agency staff were used across different service areas. It could be difficult to recruit permanent staff and it was a competitive market with other authorities often able to pay more for specialist roles.

Councillor J Tisi felt that the Quarterly Assurance Report was a positive step forward. He asked about key performance indicators on the cross-cutting performance scorecard and how these had come about.

Stephen Evans said that the council had statutory requirements to respond to things like Freedom of Information requests and complaints, these were included so that the Panel could see how the council was performing in these areas.

Elizabeth Griffiths, Executive Director of Resources, explained that the financial indicators were explored in more detail in the budget monitoring report. Financial information had been included in the Quarterly Assurance Report originally but this had been changed to have a separate report.

Councillor J Tisi highlighted the risks which had been considered to be key in each service area and how many high risks there were. He asked how these risks selected had been selected.

Stephen Evans said that each service directorate had a risk register, a detailed process had been undertaken in January 2023 to refresh which were classed as key risks and there were plans for this to take place again in early 2024. Risks were considered on the likelihood of occurring and were considered to be a significant concern to the authority.

Councillor J Tisi commented on the performance summary table, which showed the number of metrics which were rated as green, amber and red. He asked where each metric was listed in the report as this was unclear.

Stephen Evans said that these metrics were highlighted under each service directorate, the table at the start of the report provided an overall summary of performance.

Councillor Hunt said that she was concerned about Education Health and Care Plan assessments. There was a backlog of cases and Councillor Hunt was aware of cases where the assessment had not been completed in time. Councillor Hunt suggested that there could be more scrutiny done in this area.

Stephen Evans responded by underlining that this was an area of strong performance, the council was at 97.8% for processing EHCPs received within two weeks. Some cases would fall outside of this target and any specific concerns about cases could be raised with the Executive Director of Children's Services and Education.

Councillor Buckley asked where the data which was provided to show performance had come from.

Stephen Evans explained that service areas collected their data on services that were delivered or commissioned.

Lin Ferguson, Executive Director of Children's Services and Education, said that children's services collected a significant amount of data as it was highly regulated. A monthly performance board took place where all Key Performance Indicators were examined.

Kevin McDaniel, Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Health, said that a lot of data came through the case management system. Survey responses were also used and the healthcare system called Connected Care.

Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place, added that a lot of the data in his directorate was from contractors and partners. It was important to ensure that data was quality tested.

Elizabeth Griffiths, Executive Director of Resources, said that from her perspective data was system driven and statistical in nature.

Councillor Buckley suggested that data should be tested at all times to make sure it was robust and accurate, particularly as this would form a basis for the new Corporate Plan.

Stephen Evans said that residents would flag to officers where things were not going well, as would Councillors. This data on service quality could then be triangulated and investigated.

Councillor Buckley asked if there was a system in place to make reports to the council if there were concerns about delivery and performance.

Andrew Durrant said that the 'report it' tool was the main way in which residents could report issues to the council. Work was being done to improve the system and its functionality.

Kevin McDaniel said that there were a number of front door services in adults social care, these teams would be able to receive feedback and escalate issues if necessary.

Councillor Reeves passed on his appreciation to the officers present at the meeting and their teams who had worked hard on producing the report for the Panel. He noted that there were four performance indicators in adult social care which had been highlighted as red but there were only three medium risk indicators.

Kevin McDaniel said that the Public Health team were looking into some of these indicators with the provider to understand if it was the delivery of the service or the engagement of users of the service. The number of permanent staff being at 72% was off target and was deemed to be a medium risk, as agency staff were being recruited. The final red target was the number of

residents aged 65+ who were still at home 91 days after being discharged from hospital. The model of the service had changed and therefore this group was much smaller, Kevin McDaniel had expected this to rise. In future reports, the new service data would be included to provide an accurate picture.

Councillor Reeves asked how the council were attracting and retaining permanent staff. He asked if things like training programmes would be explored to make staff feel valued and that there was a provision of social housing for staff to live.

Kevin McDaniel explained that adult social care was delivered on behalf of the council through Optalis. Plans were being explored on whether staff could be brought back on the local government pension scheme but this would impact on budget. Optalis worked hard on culture and training but there was a significant local issue on attracting permanent staff. An individual living in the borough had the choice of nine local authorities within a 40 minute drive.

Stephen Evans said that the culture of the organisation was crucial and new organisational values had been brought through at RBWM. Flexible working, an employee benefits platform, apprenticeship schemes and training were all offered as part of the package of working for the council.

Councillor Reeves commented on the risk of a lack of permanent staff was being offset with agency staff. In his view, this was a high risk due to the increased cost, particularly with the financial situation of the council and its impact on non-essential services. He asked for this to be taken into consideration. On the number of residents aged 65 and over data which was currently red, Councillor Reeves asked if officers thought that tallying the data with the new delivery model would make this indicator turn green for future reports.

Kevin McDaniel was unable to be certain currently but the indications from Home First had been positive.

Councillor Reeves noted a line in the report on risks, where some risks were deemed to be so low that they would not be referenced. He asked if these risks were categorised as low or if they did not even appear in the report.

Stephen Evans explained that some risks were time limited, for example planning for an election. The risk register was a live document and risks could be added and removed each year.

Councillor Reeves moved on to consider the rate of recycling and that data could not be provided due to staff shortages. He questioned how this goal could be monitored effectively and regarded as on target without the latest data.

Andrew Durrant said that there had been difficulties in preparing the data for this report. RBWM had usually been ahead of target on recycling and there had been a spike when the move had been made to the current collection cycle. Further information had been provided by contractors for the waste service.

Alysse Strachan, Assistant Director of Neighbourhood Services, added that the contractor had a good feel for the service and so assurance could be given on targets without the data being inputted into the system.

Councillor Reeves noted the promotional campaign on recycling but this had not been rolled out due to staff shortages.

Alysse Strachan said that the resourcing was being used effectively and gaps in the service area would be part of the budget discussion. Talks had taken place with partners and a financial contribution had been agreed on a food waste campaign.

Councillor Reeves suggested that this should be included in the next Quarterly Assurance Report.

Councillor Price commented on the staff turnover, which was regarded as on target but turnover was higher than the target set. On residential care packages, Councillor Price suggested that a long term contract could bring the price down. Households in temporary accommodation were mentioned in the report but there was nothing on rough sleepers. Those in temporary accommodation also needed to be near their support services and more detail would be useful in this area to supplement the data. Councillor Price said that Councillors would be informed of risks where they were the risk owner but she did not understand what this meant. A review of the risk register had taken place by officers in January 2023, but Councillor Price did not believe that this fed into the budget which was approved in February 2023.

Stephen Evans commented on the staff turnover and said the target was 12.9% and the current figure was 6.4% so this was within the target.

Kevin McDaniel said that there was an increased number of residents who would put themselves in a care home, being unable to pay for the care and then asking for help from the council.

Andrew Durrant agreed that there was a difference between quantitative and qualitative data for housing, behind each case there was a family story and context. There were limitations on housing stock and this meant it was challenging for families to be housed in their preferred location. There was also pressure on providing support for asylum seekers. This piece of work was being considered to understand how it needed to be taken forward.

Councillor Price questioned whether a different metric needed to be used, rather than just the number of people in temporary accommodation.

Andrew Durrant said that the team looked at a wide range of data when making strategic decisions. It could be something for the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel to look at in further detail.

Stephen Evans said that more asylum seeker applications were being processed by the government and the council had seen more asylum seekers requesting support. This had been included as a key risk and would be a challenge for all local authorities.

ACTION – Answer to Councillor Price’s question on Councillors being informed of risks where they were the risk owner would be shared with the Panel after the meeting.

Elizabeth Griffiths said that the officers that were involved in considering risks to service areas and improving performance were the same officers that were feeding into the budget process.

Councillor Howard asked if more emphasis could be given on the qualitative data to improve outcomes. He asked where and how the key performance indicators were set.

Stephen Evans said that some targets were outdated, for example the amount of time it took to answer calls. It could be more useful to judge the number of repeat calls which would evidence improvement.

Kevin McDaniel added that there was a quality assurance framework which was built on internal auditing. The targets were set based on benchmarking with external providers and partners.

Lin Ferguson said that managers regularly took part in case auditing, managers took part in practise weeks, learning plans were drafted, a performance board met monthly and benchmarking took place against south east local authorities.

Councillor Howard wanted to see a quality outcome at the end and that these were celebrated when they were achieved, so it was clear where the council had been exceeding expectations.

Councillor Sharpe noted that the measures had been picked by council officers rather than the new Office for Local Government, only 18 of the metrics matched up. He wanted to ensure that the metrics could be relatable to residents, for example did a green performance rating mean that residents felt they were getting a quality service. Councillor Sharpe asked if officers felt the council was in a good position or a poor position.

Stephen Evans said that the Office for Local Government was relatively new and he felt that the government did have a right to scrutinise local government. The council was reporting against a wider side of priorities and the local government sector needed to work with the Office for Local Government. These metrics were being captured in the council's performance reporting. It was useful to discuss the Quarterly Assurance Report with the Panel.

Councillor Sharpe said it was useful to understand how RBWM compared to other local authorities and that the metrics used could be easily compared.

Stephen Evans explained that a number of metrics were based on statutory targets and the timescales were set in law. The council needed to produce the latest performance data to ensure that both officers and Councillors were satisfied with the performance overall. Stephen Evans added that across the 10 indicators, on 8 of them RBWM was performing better than the national median. The financial indicators showed RBWM being lower on most of the indicators. The local government sector was under severe financial pressure and more councils were on the brink of failure, this needed action from both national and local government.

Lin Ferguson said that all children's services produced impact reports and a 'distance travelled' tool could be used to show positive outcomes for children in care. The qualitative angle was important and additional measures could be explored to further show this.

Councillor Wilson had read that nationally the target set on recycling was 65% by 2035 and 55% by 2025. He asked if this could be added into the RBWM target in this area. Councillor Wilson asked if there was a metric measuring the performance of grounds maintenance contractors.

Alysse Strachan said that there were metrics that were part of the Tivoli contract but these had not been included in the Quarterly Assurance Report. This could be shared with the Panel and added to future reports if appropriate.

ACTION – Alysse Strachan to share key performance metrics on Tivoli with the Panel.

Councillor J Tisi suggested that when exploring the costs for certain service areas, for example adult social care, whether key performance indicators could be considered.

Kevin McDaniel said that there was an extensive set of data which could be used, he was happy to share this.

ACTION – Kevin McDaniel to share data on how costs in adult social care informed key performance indicators.

Councillor Reeves asked if the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy was for 18-23 year olds or whether was from 2018 to 2023. Mitigations were put in place but there were no timeframes put on these. Planning strategy should address social housing and ensured that there was enough stock for those on the rough sleeper pathway. Private landowners were a higher cost and Councillor Reeves challenged this as a mitigation for providing housing which the council did not have the capacity to do.

Andrew Durrant said that it was a 2018 – 2023 strategy. The team were aware that this would need to be brought forward as a new refreshed strategy. He would take the points made by Councillor Reeves away from the meeting and discuss it with the Housing team.

The Chair summarised the discussion and some of the key points made by the Panel. He passed on his thanks to the strategy and performance team for their work in producing the report.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the report and:

- i) **Undertook scrutiny of the Quarterly Assurance Report and considered potential implications for the Panel’s forward work programme.**

Sale of Pickins Piece, Horton

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the order of agenda items was changed, so that Pickins Piece, Horton, was considered next on the agenda.

Ian Brazier-Dubber, Managing Director of RBWM Property Company, outlined the report. Cabinet were being asked to decide what to do with a piece of land, around two acres in size, just outside the village of Horton. The council had owned the site as open grazing land for a number of years but over recent years it had become disused and had been under consideration to be disposed of. The sale of the land had gone out to market, with four offers initially being received. All four offers were subject to planning permission being granted. After considering these, it was decided that the land should be sold for £200,000 as a straight sale. The Community Land Trust had offered £100,000 which was subject to a local housing survey. These were the two main options being considered.

Lizzie Jones was representing the Windsor and Maidenhead Community Land Trust and had registered to speak on the item. She clarified that the Community Land Trust’s offer was an ‘open book’ arrangement depending on certain factors at the site. They would appreciate any consultation that could be done with Horton Parish Council, particularly if a significant site was planned for the land.

Councillor Price commented that the report had only been received by the Panel late on Friday afternoon and this was only one working day in advance of the meeting. A second version had also been circulated but it was not clear where changes had been made, while the Equalities Impact Assessment had been circulated earlier today. The report claimed that various options had been considered but did not outline what these options were. Councillor Price believed the £50,000 fee if the land was to be developed on was very low. It was concerning that the offer from the Community Land Trust had been misrepresented.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that the report had been a work in progress, he was happy to support further conversations with Horton Parish Council and the Community Land Trust. The site was in the green belt and there were a number of mature trees which would make development difficult.

Councillor Buckley felt that the report was not ready to be considered by Cabinet as the decision had not been scrutinised and would impact local residents. He suggested that the report should be pushed back on the Cabinet Forward Plan. Councillor Buckley argued that the report failed on value for money, legal obligations and equalities. The land was gained in around 1970 and had been allocated for development in the past, it was surrounded by social housing and there was a good argument for the land to be used to increase the supply of social housing. Councillor Buckley claimed that Horton Parish Council had attempted to carry out a tree survey on the land but the site locks had been changed by the RBWM Property

Company. He believed that the council had only recently cleared the fly tipping on the site and incurred this expenditure, as they wanted to sell the land. There were other options that should be explored and this would be to the benefit of the local community.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that the land was owned by the council and the site had been cleared earlier this year. The Property Company had not actively stopped anyone from using the land.

Councillor Buckley hoped that following the meeting the Property Company would reengage with the Parish Council and the local community.

Councillor Hunt felt that the land was in a prime position and was surrounded by housing. She gave examples of similar plots of land which had been sold for significantly more. This was a good opportunity for the council to build social housing of which there was a short supply.

Ian Brazier-Dubber made the Panel aware that the original bids had been over £1 million but these had been subject to planning permission. There were concerns about what planning permission could be granted for the site which was why these options had not been pursued. It was difficult to compare sites, as each piece of land was different and there were various factors involved which could affect the value.

Councillor Adam Bermange, Cabinet for Planning, Legal and Asset Management, addressed the Panel. The new administration were committed to a more active Overview and Scrutiny function and he was glad to see the report considered. He apologised for the way the Community Land Trust's offer had been portrayed. The figure being offered for the site could seem small but this was taking into account the location of the site being in the green belt and other planning challenges. There was some merit in selling the land and gaining the capital receipt now, as this would also reduce the ongoing maintenance costs.

Councillor Sharpe felt that it was odd that the council was selling off land in the green belt which it had earmarked for development. He asked if there was a shortage of social housing, were the council looking for land to build more houses, and if green belt land was still needed why was this land being disposed of. Councillor Sharpe asked if the land could be used as a Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG). He suggested that the report should not be considered for a decision by Cabinet until all of the options had been fully considered.

Ian Brazier-Dubber confirmed that there was a need for more affordable and social housing. The Borough Local Plan set out land to be earmarked for housing development and this had been adopted in February 2022. Pickins Piece was not allocated for housing and had been removed after review by the planning inspectorate. SANG sites were normally in urban developments, this site was remote and not near any large scale development. This decision was seen as the disposal of land and the value which this could get on the market.

Councillor Sharpe considered that if the land was taken out of the green belt, the land would be worth much more.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that would be for the council to decide when the next Borough Local Plan came forward. However, this would mean maintenance costs would continue until this came through.

Councillor Bermange added that the council would need to demonstrate to the planning inspectorate that there were exceptional circumstances to release the land from the green belt. There were challenges on this land which would make it difficult to put it forward for adoption.

Councillor Sharpe asked how likely it was that the Community Land Trust would be able to build on the site, should it be sold to them.

Councillor Bermange suggested that the Community Land Trust would be looking at more limited development, the sale would still leave the site in the green belt.

Councillor Wilson was pleased to see the report considered by scrutiny before going to Cabinet. He was concerned that the report was not robust. The report claimed that the site was prone to extensive flooding but it was located in flood zone 1 so this was not high risk. Other sites had been in the green belt before being built on and these were more significant than the site being considered. He wondered why the company which had bid for the site wanted it. Councillor Wilson argued that the council was throwing money away with the current proposal. He would be interested in seeing the Community Land Trust offer in greater detail or other options which the site could be used for.

Councillor Howard felt the process had not been transparent and he had concerns over the sale. There was a huge need for social housing, he noted that the company who were looking to buy the land had been involved in care homes previously. In his ward of Cookham, there had been two sites which had been taken out of the green belt by the Borough Local Plan and this was a relatively quick process. The Community Land Trust offer should be welcomed and could help fill local needs. Councillor Howard was concerned by the report.

Councillor Buckley agreed that there had been other sites taken out of the green belt for inclusion in the Borough Local Plan. Local need should be prioritised in addition to gaining best value for money.

Councillor J Tisi was pleased to see a number of Cabinet Members in attendance at the meeting and that the report had been considered by scrutiny before Cabinet. A number of concerns had been raised and it seemed like the proposed decision was hasty, particularly as there had been offers of up to £1.5 million.

Councillor Reeves made the point that the council had been the victim of rushed sale of land in the past. There was no need to sell the land at the earliest opportunity. He was confused by the Community Land Trust offer, it sounded like a lot depended on the planning permission being granted for the council to be paid for the sale but it was not clear what the plans could be.

Ian Brazier-Dubber clarified that this was correct, the sale would only go through should planning permission be granted. This condition would be placed on the contract.

Councillor Reeves suggested that the council should look at how fly tipping could be reduced so that the £10,000 spent on maintenance each year would not be needed.

Councillor Howard requested that the Property Company engaged with residents and worked in partnership with the council to gain something from the site. Land was scarce and it would be more worthwhile to lease the land rather than to sell it.

The Chair considered the recommendation which the Panel could make to Cabinet, it was clear from the discussion that Panel Members felt the report should be delayed.

Councillor Sharpe said that the report should either be delayed to allow for further options to be explored or that Cabinet made their own decision but noted the concerns of the Panel.

Mark Beeley, Principal Democratic Services Officer – Overview and Scrutiny, explained that the Panel could make a recommendation to Cabinet, for example they could recommend that the report was pushed back on the Cabinet Forward Plan to allow for more time.

Councillor Howard proposed that the report was flawed, there were serious concerns and that as a result the report was delayed until the proposal had been reviewed and refined.

Councillor Buckley felt the recommendation should be for Cabinet to defer the item.

Councillor Hunt said that Cabinet could decide themselves to delay the report if they wished.

Mark Beeley clarified that the Panel was unable to force Cabinet to delay the report, the Panel could only make a recommendation which would be considered by Cabinet.

Councillor Wilson added that it was important that Cabinet noted the Panel's comments and concerns.

Councillor Buckley proposed a recommendation that the report was delayed on the Cabinet Forward Plan and was considered at a later date, noting the comments and concerns by the Panel. This was seconded by Councillor Howard.

A named vote was taken.

Recommendation that the report was delayed on the Cabinet Forward Plan and was considered at a later date, noting the comments and concerns by the Panel. (Motion)	
Councillor Chris Moriarty	For
Councillor Mark Howard	For
Councillor David Buckley	For
Councillor Maureen Hunt	For
Councillor Helen Price	For
Councillor Gary Reeves	For
Councillor Julian Sharpe	For
Councillor Julian Tisi	For
Councillor Mark Wilson	For
Carried	

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny recommended to Cabinet:

- i) **That the Pickins Piece, Horton decision was delayed on the Cabinet Forward Plan and was not considered at the meeting in November.**
- ii) **That the comments and concerns by the Panel were noted by Cabinet.**

Vote to continue the meeting

Mark Beeley explained that as per C25 Part 2 of the RBWM Constitution, the Panel would need to take a named vote on whether to continue the meeting.

The Panel discussed whether both the month 5 revenue monitoring report and the update on the budget 2024/25 progress should be considered.

Councillor Price suggested that the Panel just considered the budget 2024/25 progress update.

A named vote was taken.

To continue the meeting and consider the Budget 24/25 update (Motion)	
Councillor Chris Moriarty	For
Councillor Mark Howard	Abstain
Councillor David Buckley	For
Councillor Maureen Hunt	Against
Councillor Helen Price	For
Councillor Gary Reeves	Against
Councillor Julian Sharpe	For
Councillor Julian Tisi	Abstain
Councillor Mark Wilson	For
Carried	

AGREED: That the meeting would continue and the Panel would consider the budget 2024/25 update on progress.

Budget 2024/25 Progress

Elizabeth Griffiths said that the financial position of the council was well documented and all political groups had been briefed on the situation. The Spending Control Board had considered decisions which were a choice on a weekly basis to ensure that spending was being done appropriately. The finance team had sat down with each service area to check and challenge figures and assumptions to understand where a difference could be made. The relevant Cabinet Member, along with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance had also attended budget challenge sessions.

Councillor Price felt that there were lessons to learn from last year's process. Corporate had considered the whole budget but had referred relevant parts to People and Place but this had been disjointed. When Councillor Price first became a Councillor, there was an appendix which was a risk analysis and there were figures against each risk. This had not been produced in recent years but Councillor Price suggested that this would be a useful addition. Councillor Price believed that last year officers in adult social care made assumptions on figures that were very accurate but Cabinet had decided to lower these figures. If this were to happen this year, Councillor Price asked that this was made clear to improve transparency. Councillor Price continued that she had questions on the robustness of assumptions but some answers were not convincing last year and did not provide assurance. She said that any questions and answers were published on the website.

Elizabeth Griffiths said that the assessment of risk was important and the council was focused on the mitigation of that risk and ensuring that the budget which was being proposed was achievable.

Stephen Evans believed it was right for all three Overview and Scrutiny Panels to be involved in budget scrutiny but that work was not being duplicated as a result.

Mark Beeley outlined the budget scrutiny process. The full budget would be considered by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 19th December. Before this, two offline meetings would be held with the People Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel to decide on a list of questions, comments and potential recommendations. This would be published in the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel agenda and the Chairs of both Panels would be invited to present at the meeting.

Councillor Price asked if this process could be shared with all Councillors.

ACTION – Article on the budget scrutiny process to be shared as part of the Councillor newsletter.

Councillor Buckley raised concern that the budget process was focused on cost savings and not on income increases. He suggested an income panel could be set up to investigate opportunities to increase income generation.

Elizabeth Griffiths reassured Councillor Buckley that officers were looking at transformation and income generation as part of the process.

Councillor Howard said that the process sounded positive and that it seemed the culture of the organisation was that things could be done. He raised the point of communication and that any changes should be communicated to Parish Councils as soon as possible.

Stephen Evans said that Parish Councils would be engaged with, a meeting had been organised with the Parish Councils, the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council for December. He added that it was a disgrace that the government did not confirm the local government settlement until just before Christmas. This meant that Cabinet had to set a draft budget before this settlement was received.

Councillor J Tisi agreed with the point made by Councillor Price, that all of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels had a role to play in the budget scrutiny process. He asked how the Panel could help assist officers with the budget setting process.

Elizabeth Griffiths hoped that the Panel would be able to consider the budget papers with an open mind.

Councillor Wilson welcomed the process of setting the budget and the role that scrutiny would play. He asked if financial clarity could be given on the decisions that would be made so that resident expectations could be managed.

Councillor Hunt left the meeting.

Councillor Reeves noted that the process was becoming more robust. Clear communication with the public was important to ensure that they were aware of the situation and why certain financial decisions had been taken. The budget papers also needed to consider the narrative around the quality of the service rather than just the financial information.

Councillor Sharpe said that the budget process had been effective in previous years.

Councillor Price responded that the budget was a highly complex issue and hoped that things could be learnt from last year's process.

2023/24 Month 5 Revenue Monitoring Report

This item was not considered.

Work Programme

This item was not considered.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 10.35 pm

Chair.....

Date.....