

Minutes

Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

14th July 2021



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J Coleridge	Yes	S Rehman	Yes
G Courtauld	Yes	B Rose	Yes
Mrs C Dervish	Apologies	P Schwier (Vice-Chairman)	Yes
T Everard	Yes	N Unsworth	Apologies
M Radley (Chairman)	Yes		

The following Cabinet Members were also in attendance at the meeting: K Bowers, G Butland and J McKee.

6 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

7 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd June 2021 were approved as a correct record.

8 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

9 **INTRODUCTION TO THE INVESTMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

INFORMATION: Councillor G Butland, Leader of the Council, was invited to present a report which provided Members of the Committee with an introduction to the Council's Investment and Development Programme. To assist with the Committee's understanding, a power point presentation was also provided, with the slides presented jointly by Councillor Butland and Dominic Collins, Corporate Director (Growth).

During the presentation, it was explained that in order to establish a route to deliver against the anticipated budget gap, the Investment and Development Programme was comprised of four key work streams through which proposals and initiatives would be developed. These work streams were:

- Treasury Management Work Stream – to establish future options for how the Authority should manage its cash investments;

- Commercial and Organisational Impact Work Stream – to take forward proposals on the continued commercialisation of the authorities services and the realisation of any service efficiencies;
- Strategic Investment Work Stream – to establish a forward pipeline of capital build investments;
- Asset Management Work Stream – to establish the future use of existing and potential new property assets.

The full presentation slides were available to view on the Council's YouTube channel at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dW_9Ktv5H4

Further to the presentation, the Chairman expressed his gratitude for the information that had been shared and In response to questions raised by the Committee Members, the following information was provided:-

- In respect of the Council's asset portfolio and rental income stream, it was reported that businesses had continued with their tenancies (over 90% occupancy) despite the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the property market. It was added that the Council had worked proactively with a number of businesses in order to offer them rental deferrals and recovery plans in to help support them and maintain the level of income for the Authority. As such, there were currently no perceived risks to the Authority in terms of rental income, but the situation would continue to be monitored.
- On the subject of interest rate flows, there was a potential impact on the treasury management work stream; however, it was highlighted that any increases in interest rates were likely to be small and would actually be of benefit to the Council's investments. The Council continued to take advice from its treasury management advisors, Arlingclose, on the subject of interest rates which allowed officers to make the necessary assessments as and when needed.
- Members were advised that the rental income amount of £140,000 over the four-year period was in addition to the current contracted elements of increases within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. It was emphasised that the Council had no intention in increasing the amount of rental income to unsustainable levels for businesses as it was a both a landlord and a commercial authority.
- With regard to advertising, it was relayed that the Council continued to engage with and provide as much support to businesses as possible, as it had done both before and after the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic; this included the distribution of Government grant monies received by the Authority, and through the Council's own support programme, such as young entrepreneurships.
- Members were informed that although there were various award schemes already in place at the Council for staff, further consideration was being given towards award schemes for staff based on the success of their commercial ideas.
- Action was being taken in order to increase the staffing capacity of the Council's Legal Team, which included the addition of a full-time equivalent (FTE) and paralegals.
- It was highlighted that any extra costs incurred to the Council as a result of the projects being undertaken as part of the Investment and Development Programme would be factored into the business case process and given due consideration as to their financial viability.

- Although each of the four work streams that would comprise the Investment and Development Programme (Treasury Management; Commercial and Organisational Impact; Strategic Investment, and; Asset Management) had its own specific objectives and deliverables, it was stressed that they would each play an equal role in terms of advancing the Programme and generating income for the Authority.
- It was explained that as part of Government changes to the Public Works Load Board (PWLB), if a Local Authority was to invest in a project solely for the purpose of generating additional income, that particular Authority would be unable to borrow money from the PWLB for any future projects. In light of the new legislation, there was a need for the Council to develop a robust approach to future capital/borrowing. Further clarification as to the exact implications of the change in legislation was to be received from the Council's financial advisors, Arlingclose.

Following the conclusion of the questions, the Chairman expressed his gratitude on behalf of the Committee to the Dominic Collins, Corporate Director, and the Cabinet Members for their attendance at the meeting and the information provided. The Chairman also agreed with the suggestion that the Committee received regular updates going forward as to the progress of the Investment and Development Programme.

DECISION: The Performance Management Scrutiny Committee noted the proposals as set out in the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: To note the proposals as set out in the report.

10

FOURTH QUARTER AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21

INFORMATION: Members gave consideration to a report on the annual performance of the Council and during the Fourth Quarter of the year. Tracey Headford, Business Solutions Manager, was invited to present the report. Prior to the report, Members were reminded that the report had already been reviewed by Cabinet at the meeting on 12th July 2021, and had been positively received with recognition of the difficulties faced by the Council over the past year as a result of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In respect of the Council's projects, Members were informed that as at the end of March 2021, ten projects had been completed, 32 projects were on track and progressing well and ten had an amber status due to the impacts of the pandemic. Some of the key achievements that were highlighted included Section 1 of the Local Plan, the respective draft Climate Change and Cycling strategies, grant distributions to community groups and further grants that were distributed through the Councillor Community Grant Scheme. The projects that had an amber status included the pedestrianisation of the Braintree Town Centre; supporting and monitoring of the Superfast Broadband delivery; the continued support to NHS England for improvements to health facilities across the District; improvements to the District's recreational open spaces, including the provision of all-inclusive play facilities; research and trial of alternative fuel vehicles for some frontline services; improvements to sport facilities and Braintree Sport and Leisure Centre; the provision of a new footpath and resurfacing of the rear of Rivenhall Village Hall to improve accessibility; continuation of 'Livewell Child' initiatives to support families to live healthier lives; initiatives to address social isolation and loneliness across the District; and developing health priorities in various localities within the District in partnership with NHS Primary Care Networks. Many of the 'amber' status projects had been impacted adversely by the unprecedented impacts of the pandemic and were expected to progress as

originally intended in the near future.

With regard to performance indicators, Members were advised that targets had not been set for each performance indicator due to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic. For the targets that remained, it was reported that six performance indicators had met or exceeded target and eight performance indicators had missed their target. Five had missed target by less than 5% and three had missed their target by more than 5%. The areas of underperformance were in relation to recycling rates (>5%); average waiting time for disabled facility grants (>5%); average call answering time in the Customer Service Centre (>5%), %; the kilograms of waste collected (<5%); the percentage of complaints responded to within timescale (<5%); the collection rate for Business rates (<5%); the collection rate for Council Tax (<5%), and; the percentage of invoices paid within 30 days (<5%).

It was noted that the Council had received 152 complaints during the Fourth Quarter, which was higher than had been reported in previous years; of these complaints, 141 had stage 1 status, five were at stage 2 status and a further five were escalated to stage 3. It was also noted that staff sickness levels were notably lower than in previous years.

In response to questions raised by Members, the following actions were agreed:-

- Tracey Headford agreed to report back to the Committee with further information in relation to the 'justified' complaints received by the Council over the course of the year, including which services areas within the organisation these concerned, and whether any particular actions had been implemented in order to help reduce the number of complaints in upcoming years.
- In response to a request from the Chairman for further analysis around the number and ratio of accidents and incidents reported, and how these figures compared with industry benchmarks, if any, Tracey Headford agreed to speak with the Council's Health and Safety team to obtain this information.
- Tracey Headford also agreed to obtain information regarding the Council's process around 'near-miss' accidents and whether any enhancements could be made to improve the safety of employees.
- Further to a query raised in regard to any additional training that could be provided to help improve the health and safety of employees, particularly for those who worked within the Council's Waste team, Tracey Headford agreed to provide Members with feedback on this.

DECISION: Members of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: To inform the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee of the performance of the Council following its presentation and noting at Cabinet on the 12th July 2021.

11 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO COMMERCIALISATION AT BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL – SECOND EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION**

INFORMATION: The Chairman once again welcomed James Sinclair, Commercial Services Manager at the Council, to the meeting, who had produced a short report and

accompanying presentation which addressed some of the questions raised by Members at the previous meeting of the Committee, and provided an update on the commercial activity of the Council going forward. It was noted that hard copies of the presentation had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting.

During the presentation, information was provided that focused on three key areas: return on investment of the team, following a question raised at the previous meeting; case studies which highlighted the two activities supported by the Commercial team (Roundabout Sponsorship and Shared Payroll); and, finally, detail around the planned activities intended to help embed commercialisation within the Council.

The full presentation slides were available to view via the Council's YouTube channel at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dW_9Ktv5H4

Further to the presentation, the following information was provided in response to questions raised by Members:-

- With regard to the Roundabout Sponsorship, Members were advised that the Council was approaching its "limit" in terms of ongoing sponsorships. Alternative options were being considered around local advertising, such as digital advertising boards, further advertising across some of the District's car parks, and other sponsorship opportunities. In future, it was hoped that advertising as a service was one that the District Council could share with other Authorities, as had been achieved with the shared Pay Roll function.
- In respect of the Shared Payroll function and whether it could be expanded further, Members were informed that discussions with other Local Authorities were already underway, as well as with the East of England Local Government Association (LGA) on the possibility of a case study, with Shared Payroll as an example of 'best practice' to help promote the work of the organisation more widely.

The following action was also agreed:-

- The Chairman requested further information around the "List of Traded Services" referred to during the presentation at the previous meeting of the Committee on 23rd June 2021. The Chairman was particularly keen to receive detail on the level of income generated by those services and gross income, the level of commercialisation within the Authority that there was and which services this involved, as well as the benefits. James subsequently agreed to work with officers in the Council's Finance team in order to produce this information ready for presentation at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman thanked James for his presentation and contribution to the meeting.

Members were then invited to submit any ideas that they had in order to further progress the Scrutiny Review directly to the Governance and Members Team outside of the meeting. The Governance and Members Manager, Emma Wisbey, also reminded Members that the purpose of the Scrutiny Review was to examine the topic of 'Commercialisation,' not to make any changes to the current set-up, and that they should refer to the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Review when giving consideration to any future ideas. For the benefit of Members, Governance Officers also agreed to recirculate the TOR to Members, in addition to the Minutes of previous meetings held on the subject. Furthermore, in conjunction with the Chairman, Governance Officers would conduct a

'health check' of sorts in order to ascertain the level of progress made by the Committee thus far against the TOR for the Scrutiny Review.

12 **DECISION PLANNER**

DECISION: The Decision Planner for the period 1st August 2021 to 31st October 2021 was noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.11pm.

Councillor M Radley
(Chairman)