

Notes

OF AN INFORMAL MEETING OF



Listening Learning Leading

Scrutiny Committee Members

**HELD ON MONDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 6.00 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING**

Attendance:

Councillors: Ian White (Chair), Mocky Khan, Anna Badcock, Stefan Gawrysiak, Alexandrine Kantor, David Turner, Jo Robb and David Bartholomew

Cabinet Member: Councillor Leigh Rawlins - Finance

Officers: Simon Hewings (Head of Finance) Candida Mckelvey (Democratic Services Officer), Adrianna Partridge (Deputy Chief Executive, Transformation and Operations), Richard Spraggett (Strategic Finance Manager)

63 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor George Levy.

64 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None.

65 Declaration of interests

None.

66 Minutes

The notes of the informal meeting on 26 July 2022 were reviewed. A committee member had expressed that for the item on planning enforcement triage update, the tone of the minute did not express the dissent on the matter. Any amends to notes can be sent for consideration of the chair.

67 Work schedule and dates for all South and Joint scrutiny meetings

A query was raised as to why financial first quarter outturn report does not go to scrutiny committee. Chair will consider this.

A member questioned the number of formal and informal meetings and asked if a finance report should be at an informal meeting.

68 Public participation

None.

69 Financial outturn report 2021-22

Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which looked back on the outturn for the year 2021-22. The recommendation to committee was to note the overall outturn position of the council as well as the outturn of individual service areas. Cabinet Member would consider any comments raised. This was still a period affected by Covid so where some projects were not progressed as a result, this was reflected in the report.

Committee asked questions, the main points were as follows:

- Paragraphs 25 and 26: regarding business rates review, a member asked about why these premises were not identified before. What had been learnt, and why had Capita not picked up on these? Will businesses, particularly small ones, be able to manage with the new charges. Cabinet Member explained that new technology was identified by consultants to detect activity in areas that weren't being billed – mapping, drones, GIS. Head of Finance added that the Capita contract included billing businesses, but there was no requirement for businesses moving into a new property to inform the council and therefore the council needed to seek out the businesses. The inspection regime was in the Capita contract, but the new inspection service goes beyond that contract to enable investigation of new businesses. This would supplement the Capita service to bring in more business rates.
- A member was pleased to see legitimate investigation of business rate fees coming forward but did raise a point on potential invasiveness of investigation.
- Table 3 – clarification asked for on this table, and the net underspend of £6.3 million. Net variances were queried. Head of Finance drew attention to the contingency figure which was put in, considering the impact of Covid-19.
- Paragraph 23 – overspend on appeals work. Why was appeals work not budgeted for? Cabinet member explained that the variation was considerable and historically not done, but in future this could be looked into. Head of Finance added that it was factored into the contingency budget. Would not want to set a too high budget for this as this would have negative impacts.
- It was confirmed that reimbursement for covid related tasks from central government had occurred and there was a reasonable outturn despite some uncertainty at times.
- Paragraph 21: underspend on Capita contract – Head of Finance explained that it was a complex contract, reflecting differences in the partner council's service needs. Various services are now back in-house, leading to an exercise in reconciliation from these changes and rebalancing of the costs by the end of the contract. There was an in-year saving for SODC.
- Paragraph 14 –planning performance and recruitment – has this changed for this year? Cabinet member reminded that for this report, it was difficult to recruit during covid and there was a lower application rate.

Resolved:

At the end of questions, chair summarised that the committee recommend that the Cabinet Member considers adding an estimate figure for costs of appeals, based on an average over the term of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

The meeting closed at 18.45

Chair

Date

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