

# Minutes

of a meeting of the

## Scrutiny Committee

held on Wednesday, 14 October 2020 at 7.00 pm

Virtual meeting



Watch the meeting here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NW65L7Q7YXs>

### Open to the public, including the press

#### Present:

Members: Councillors Nathan Boyd (Chair), Jerry Avery, Ron Batstone, Samantha Bowring, Cheryl Briggs, Hayleigh Gascoigne, David Grant, Robert Maddison and Max Thompson

Officers: Candida Mckelvey, Simon Hewings, Adrianna Partridge and Richard Spraggett

Also present: Cabinet member Councillor Andrew Crawford

#### Sc.71 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

#### Sc.72 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2020 were not ready for sign off yet and the committee agreed to review them at the next meeting.

#### Sc.73 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

#### Sc.74 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

None.

#### Sc.75 Public participation

None.

## Sc.76 Financial outturn 2019-20

Cabinet member for finance and corporate assets, Councillor Andrew Crawford, introduced the report.

Officers Simon Hewings, Interim Head of finance, and Richard Spraggett, Finance business partner, were present to answer questions.

This report outlines the revenue and capital outturn for 2019-20.

On revenue, there is an underspend of £1.5 million on net service expenditure. Half of this underspend is for one-off schemes which have been carried over to 2020-21. Details are in the report.

Capital: underspend of £3.5 million, details and significant variances are detailed in the report.

Chair welcomed the committee to ask questions. The discussions are outlined below:

- Item 12: variance due to empty commercial properties. This was queried and finance officers will prepare a written response.
- Planning fees – they were below target due to a market slowdown. Finance officers will provide a written response. Officers did add that there was some uncertainty and a slow down due to leaving the EU.
- Page five – officers clarified the contingency figure. This figure is broken down in table three.
- Table three – £1.6 million for grants and contributions – finance officers explained that this figure is for housing benefit payment and housing subsidy – see table two.
- Page eight, table four – the last two years variance is around £700,000, it was asked if officers could add some previous year's values to see the trends? Officers responded that they've tended to see that the number was bigger previously. In recent years, officers have worked to tackle excess budgets and reduce the variance. Written answer to follow.
- Housing benefits and rent allowances – table two, page five – it was asked what a rent allowance overpayment is? Officer responded that if a recipient of the benefit doesn't notify of a change in circumstances, the council is entitled to claim back the overpayment and we will get a government subsidy for part of that overpayment. It is a difficult debt to collect. Universal credit is lowering this – there are no new customers and this also impacts rent allowance income. There was a Department for Work and Pensions issue regarding getting information. There is now more real-time reporting, so there are less overpayments.
- When is the audit taking place? What variance is being expected? Officers replied that the audit is expected at the end of 2020 or early 2021. There is not normally an issue with revenue outturn. These are not the biggest numbers in the accounts. Unlikely to see a significant change. If there is a material change (unlikely) it may come back to scrutiny then, if requested.
- Page nine – slippage: These are capital items, and these are listed in appendix four. There is not that many of them – Faringdon Leisure pitch is one – there were technical issues and this project will move into 2020-21. Affordable housing is the largest – this has gone to Council and the budget will be used but waiting to be attached to projects. Some of the affordable housing is linked to Growth Deal, its being dealt with. Optimism is being replaced with realistic profiles, and especially this year where there have been unexpected events and we can still expect slippage for this year because of that.
- It was confirmed that capital cannot be transferred to revenue, this is because of government regulations. There are strict rules on what counts as revenue.

Chair thanked officers and Cabinet member for bringing the report to scrutiny.

## **Sc.77 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings**

The office accommodation item has been moved into the new year. A34 diversion routing has been requested as a report in January 2021. Budget will be in February 2021.

Some have asked for a report on Oxfordshire growth deal, and the district council role in that. Chair will follow up with scrutiny lead officer.

At a later date we may see a confidential item for GLL.

Public consultations item – this is to be confirmed. We need to define what is wanted for the report and considering timescales, this will be in the new year. Chair will email the committee to gather feedback.

Meeting closed at 19:32pm.