

Notes

of an informal meeting of

Scrutiny Committee

Members

held on Thursday, 22 September 2022 at 7.00 pm
virtual meeting

Open to the public, including the press

In attendance:

Councillors: Nathan Boyd (Chair), Ron Batstone (Vice-Chair), Jerry Avery, Hayleigh Gascoigne, David Grant, Max Thompson, Eric de la Harpe and Ben Mabbett
Officers: Candida Mckelvey, Democratic Services Officer, Simon Hewings, Head of Finance and Richard Spraggett, Strategic Finance Manager
Guests: Councillor Andrew Crawford, Cabinet member for Finance

1. Apologies for absence

None.

2. Urgent business and chair's announcements

No urgent business, but chair did run through procedure for the virtual meeting and reminded committee that specific technical questions on the financial outturn report should be emailed to the finance officers.

3. Declaration of interests

None.

4. Minutes of the last meeting

The notes of the informal meeting on 2nd August were noted.

5. Work schedule and dates for all Vale and Joint scrutiny meetings

Committee noted the work programme. A new date for joint scrutiny would be arranged shortly – it was postponed as it was scheduled on the same day as the State Funeral.

Committee members were reminded to contact the chair if there were any additions or queries to make.

6. Public participation

None

7. Financial Outturn report 2021-22

Committee asked questions of officers and the Cabinet member for Finance. The report covers a period that included a Covid-19 lockdown which had an impact.

- Item 24. Car parking income was down against budget by £216k. A member asked whether this was net gain, or net loss on the car parks overall. Officer responded that car parks lost £186k, and the council received some central government support in the form of general grant funding, so the funds were not recorded against a particular service and therefore does not show in this particular report.
- Item 25: The hire of vehicles pending purchase of our own fleet made up the remaining overspend of £49,000. A member asked how hiring vehicles costs £49K? How many vehicles, what did we use these vehicles for? What caused the delay in purchase? Officer responded that vehicles were for grounds maintenance since the return of the service being in-house. There was a long lead time for purchases and hopefully electric vehicles would be sourced.
- Item 27. The garden waste service overspent by £340,000. A member asked how exactly does the suspension of service during the driver shortage (during Covid) translate into such an overspend? Officer replied that customers were given three months for free as recompense, equalling a loss of income. There was a period of time with no billing. Communicating the details of service suspension was an additional cost.
- Item 33. In addition, the council commissioned external advisors to undertake a review of business rates premises in the district to identify any premises that should be paying business rates but were not on the rating list. A member asked how this worked? It was responded that the councils rely on an inspection service from Capita but there was a limit on what they could achieve. New identification methods will be used through GIS images and advanced technology.
- Table 1 page 10 – on the contingency budget line we made £363k. A member asked what this was? Officer replied it was the grant money referred to earlier, in a general pot. Classified as general grant funding for completeness for this analysis.
- Delayed projects – a member asked were we content delaying for good reasons and whether we can move forward with enough resource. Officer replied that we were optimistic in project completion and also covid contributed to slippage. There were other issues that replace covid, but we need to get better at profiling and preparing for such issues.
- Page 19 – CIL payments to Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) not taken up. A member asked why the payments were not yet taken up – can we encourage? Cabinet member responded that CCG cannot invest in property so this caused an issue. There were new rules with the CCG replacement, known as Independent Care Networks – they can do property schemes soon, and this would get the payments spent. They may be looking for a significant scheme claim rather than a drip feed of funds.
- It was asked when will inflation hit- did it affect the period in this report? Cabinet member responded not in 21-22, also confirmed by Head of Finance.
- Backlog on business rates – this was queried, and officer responded that the new identified businesses will be liable to pay rates and have a positive impact.
- In paragraph 17 – why doesn't it add up? It was responded that officers report variances over 50k. There was a bit of overspend in that pot but minor.
- Recruitment – Cabinet member explained that there was improvement on recruitment this year, we were closer to full complement of staff this year.

Resolved:

After having their questions answered, committee noted the report.

The meeting closed at 7.29 pm

Chair:

Date: