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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present: Councillor Patmore (Chair), Jobson (Vice Chair), Cannan, Carr, Hay, Pragnell and Webb

Officers: Jane Hartnell, Coral Harding, Kit Wheeler, Simon Jones

114. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Cllr. Roberts, Cllr. Arthur, Cllr. Foster, Cllr Turner and Cllr. Collins who is substituted by Cllr Carr

115. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

116. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th July 2022 be approved as a true record

117. FINANCIAL MONITORING QUARTERLY REPORTS FOR 2022/23- QUARTER 1

The Chief Finance Officer reported to the committee. The format and style of the report is to be refreshed and this may come by quarter two.

The Senior Finance Officer reported the position of expenditure. The current revenue position forecasts an overspend of £1.475million at year end. Without reducing this overspend or finding offsetting funds this will lead to a draw on the council reserves. Homelessness expenditure is still our greatest cause for concern. The capital programme budget is forecasts to be on budget. A graph at paragraph 37 highlights the growth in the numbers of clients in temporary accommodation. If it wasn't for the forecast £1.65million overspent on homelessness, we'd be reporting an underspend position.

Capitals forecasting to be on budget at the end of the year but as usual with capital expenditure on large projects, there is the potential for some slippage between years due to unforeseen delays

Questions were asked by the committee:

Excluding the overspend on homelessness the council would be in an underspend position, does this underspend included the planned use of reserves?

The Senior Finance Officer answered yes, the planned reserve transfers are built into the forecast outturn position. This includes carry forwards which are unspent budget

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from last year where the service didn't get around to doing the work that it had intended to do.

The Chair asked regarding the reserves being higher than previously forecast. Previously they were forecast as £5.5million but were now standing at in excess of £9million?

The Senior Finance Officer answered that at the time the forecast was believed to be correct. The accounts for 20-21 and 21-22 have not been audited yet. There was greater income from the Government than had been forecast and lower expenditure from services, in part due to delays caused by Covid-19. The council does not have an additional £3million. Many costs have gone up in all areas of council work.

Will underspends from vacancies not impact on services?

The Managing Director answered there is a recruitment freeze. This is to make as much in year savings as possible and reduce the need for redundancies. It was acknowledged that a recruitment freeze is a blunt instrument and key posts would still need to be recruited to.

Parks and gardens have an overspend on procurement?

The Managing Director answered that the overspent money had been agreed to be spent on consultants to review specification for the Grounds Maintenance Contract. The council has to give notice by 5th November. The Chief Finance Officer explained that going forward every proposal will go through a whole costing exercise.

Why is a Employability and reporting coach considered essential?

The Managing director explained the post considered an exception to the recruitment fee since it's fully paid for externally.

Why is there a overspend on Muriel Matters House and decorative lighting?

The Senior Finance Officer explained there is a overspend this year due to an expenditure that was budgeted for last year that didn't happen. This additional expenditure is offset by budget that was carried forward from the previous year.

What does RTP stand for on the report?

The Chief Finance Officer explained it means Raising The Profile, going forward abbreviations will be removed from the report.

Why is Chart CLLD showing a large expenditure to date?

The Senior Finance Officer explains this is a current expenditure that would be offset by the receipt of a grant before the year end. There is no forecast year end overspend.

How is temporary accommodation expenditure forecast?

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The Chief Finance Officer explained that trends are looked at and Housing Officer expertise is used.

Are the mechanisms in place to react to deal with the Housing crisis?

The Council Leader explained a task force has been made with managers from across the council. Since May there has also been weekly meetings of a Senior Management team to look at the Councils overall finances.

Is there an estimate of how much Battle Road works will cost?

The Chief Finance Officer answered that there is not an estimate at this stage and that legal staff are also reviewing the situation.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

To accept the contents of the report, and the actions within the conclusion and management action section.

Reasons:

To assist the council in understanding the financial position and particularly areas of over and under spend. This assists in identifying areas for review in the revised 2022/23 budget and the production of the 2023/24 budget.

118. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (2022/23)

The Chair asked the committee to update him with questions regard disposal of Council assets by the end of the month.

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Officer reported the membership of each working group.

Finance – Cllr Patmore(Lead), Cllr Cannan, Cllr Hay, Cllr Pragnell

Equalities – Cllr Arthur(Lead), Cllr Foster

Living Environment – Cllr Jobson(Lead), Cllr Foster, Cllr Roberts

Follow Up – Cllr Patmore(Lead)

As the lead of the Living Environment working group the Vice Chair asked if any further meetings have happened with Southern Water. The Managing Director answered that a letter has been sent to Southern water to the new Chief Executive. The Leader of the council explained that there is more meeting than previous years but there are not frequent enough updates from Southern Water and a real need for constant updates.

It was asked if the council had been made aware that London Road being closed for 3 weeks. The Managing director explained that road closures are dealt with by East

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Sussex County Council their responsibility to update to their customers and residents. There are limited powers when its emergency utilities work.

The Chair announced there will be Meet the Leader meeting on Monday 17th October and gave thanks to Cllr Barnett for being available.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the committee note the progress of the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for the 2022/23 municipal year and follow up actions.

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Reason

It is the responsibility of members serving on the Overview and Scrutiny committee to set their own work programme for each municipal year and complete the associated actions by the end of year.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 6.50 pm)