

# RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD VIRTUAL MEETING

23 JUNE 2020

## PUBLIC MINUTES

Present: Councillors: K Wild, T Diccico, M Gough, M Parker, W Qais, M Allen, P Davies and M Brain

Guest: Councillor Bob Sleight OBE: Cabinet Portfolio Holder - Resources

Officers: Paul Johnson: Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources  
Sam Gilbert: Assistant Director Finance and Property Services  
Paul Rogers: Democratic Services

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting commenced at 6:00 p.m.

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No declarations of pecuniary or conflicts of interest were submitted.

### 3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were submitted.

### 4. MINUTES

#### RESOLVED:

The Minutes arising from the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 26 May 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

### 5. CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR RESOURCES: PRIORITIES FOR THE 2020/21 MUNICIPAL YEAR

The Cabinet Member for Resources gave a verbal report outlining his portfolio priorities for the 2020/21 municipal year, as well as highlighting significant matters to be addressed during that period.

The Cabinet Member for Resources informed the Scrutiny Board that the full year budget deficit attributable to the resources and actions allocated to combat the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in the borough exceeded £18M. Members were advised that the Council would be taking actions in 2020/21 to mitigate these costs. Full Cabinet had agreed to the continuation of the Budget Strategy Group during this period and to update the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2023/24. All related pandemic expenditure incurred to the end of 2020 would continue to be monitored and reported. The Business Rates Pilot was anticipated continuing into 2021/22. All Cabinet Portfolio Holders would continue working towards recovery from the pandemic for their respective services and functions.

In respect of the boroughs town centres and properties, the Council's Property Investment Board continued to convene. Three major projects were on-going, albeit at different developmental stages:

- West Gate Development
- East Gate Development
- Mell Square Re-development

All three schemes were reported to be progressing well. A report on the Westgate development was scheduled for submission to Full Cabinet in autumn 2020.

The Cabinet Member informed the meeting that through the Remuneration Committee he would ensure that the Council's employment practices continued to reflect all relevant legislation and that proactive management of sickness and absence across the workforce would continue.

With regard to health and safety practice, a new action plan outlining health and safety arrangements across the Council was in place and would be monitored moving forward.

The Council's procurement practice had been revised to ensure that suppliers to the Council were now paid immediately, rather than adhering to their former terms of payment.

The Council's Debt Recovery Services were suspended up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020. The Council Tax Support Scheme had been increased to £150 per claimant and would be reviewed to ensure continuing affordability. Discretionary Rate Relief for small organisations located in the borough continued to be applied.

A comprehensive Council Digital Strategy was in place, but it was recognised that the strategy required a refresh to take account of the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, both for the Council as an organisation and for the boroughs residents and businesses. The Liquid Logic IT system was scheduled for full implementation in the Adult Social Care and Children's Services by the end of 2020/21 and was on course to be delivered to budget.

The Councils Oracle Cloud system continued to effectively manage payment of the Council's employees and suppliers.

Regular reporting arrangements would continue to be delivered for the Council's corporate landlord arrangements.

Having received the presentation from the Cabinet Member for Resources, Members of the Scrutiny Board asked a number of further questions, which in summary included the following:

In respect of the Council's Digital Strategy and office accommodation requirements, with the majority of the Council's employees continuing to deliver many Council services through home working arrangements (in response to the Covid-19 pandemic), was consideration being given towards the potential for reducing the numbers of office based staff in the future as a permanent arrangement. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Resources advised Members that future office accommodation needs were being reviewed in light of the current home working arrangements having no detrimental impact on productivity, reported improved sickness absence figures and reduced carbon emissions from reduced employee commuting. All these considerations were being taken into account through the production of a new ways of working strategy for the Council.

In response to a Member querying how the impacts and risks to the Council arising from Covid -19 would be mitigated, the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Resources advised that all identified risks arising were captured and reported to Cabinet through a Risk Register, which incorporated the financial risks and pressures arising for the Council from the current pandemic. A number of mitigating actions to address the £18M deficit had been identified to date, which would also be reflected through the MTFs regularly reported to Cabinet.

In respect of the current £18M deficit figure, a Member of the Scrutiny Board queried whether the Council had sufficient reserves to ensure that the current financial position did not develop into a fiscal crisis. The Cabinet Member for Resources advised that the Council held a budget reserve and business rates windfall reserve and both would be used to manage the present position. In the opinion of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Resources, the Council was not in the position of having to consider issuing a Section 114 Notice and that the Council would recover its position over the next three year budget period rather than all in one year. It was essential, however, that the Council continued to lobby central Government to secure further funding and Section 31 funding to address the £18M of costs that the Council had experienced to date arising from the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Referencing the Digital Strategy, a Member of the Scrutiny Board questioned whether the Council had taken account of those residents who were not digitally enabled and that any such residents would not effectively be excluded from access to services by design. Members were informed that data collection was still on-going from the Adult Social Care and Children's Services areas, which would contribute to the Digital Strategy. The Council had recognised that access via digital services would not be the preferred option for all residents and that alternative customer channels to access Council services would be made available.

Having considered the Cabinet Member for Resources verbal report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

**RESOLVED:**

- i. To note the financial pressures arising for the Council from the Covid-19 pandemic, and the mitigating actions being taken by the Cabinet Member for Resources, and Council generally, in response.

**6. RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21**

Having considered the draft Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2020/21, Members of the Scrutiny Board queried whether there would be future opportunity for the Scrutiny Board to receive future reports addressing the Council's fiscal position, financial pressures and mitigating actions arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and that additional reports could be added to the Work Programme through the 2020/21 municipal year.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Resources clarified that a detailed 'Update report on the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy' was scheduled for the Scrutiny Board meeting on 14 September 2020. Furthermore, capacity had been built into the Work Programme through provision of a spare Scrutiny Board scheduled for 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

**RESOLVED:**

- i. To Agree the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board Work Programme for the 2020/21 municipal year; and,
- ii. To Agree that the 'Implementing an Asset Masterplan Update report' scheduled for the Scrutiny Board meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020 includes a section addressing:
  - a. The revised employee working arrangements arising from the Covid-19 pandemic (i.e. flexible working arrangements, working from home, implications for potential estate/workforce modelling going forward);
  - b. Impact on the Council's workforce in respect of sickness absence reporting; and,
  - c. That the views of the Head of Human Resources and Head of ICT be incorporated when addressing a. and b. detailed above.

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting closed at 6:37 p.m.