

**EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

HELD: Thursday, 25 January 2024

Start: 7.00 pm

Finish: 8.30 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor: J Fillis (Chairman)

Councillors: T Devine (Vice-Chair) R Bailey
N Hennessy M Parlour
E Pope I Rigby
P Hennessy

In attendance: Councillor D Westley (Virtual)

Officers: Chris Twomey, Corporate Director of Transformation and Resources
Alison Grimes, Performance Improvement Lead (Virtual)
Tom Dickinson, Principal Solicitor
Jonathan Mitchell, Housing Strategy & Development Programme Manager (Virtual)
Peter Quick, Principal Finance Business Partner (Virtual)
Jonas Smith, Principal Finance Business Partner (Virtual)
James Pierce, Head of Finance, Procurement and Commercial Services (Virtual)
Julia Brown (Democratic Services)

50 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor D Westley.

51 **MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE**

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, the Committee noted the termination of Councillor P Burnside and the appointment of Councillor P Hennessey for this meeting only, thereby giving effect to the wishes of the Political Groups.

52 **URGENT BUSINESS, IF ANY, INTRODUCED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There were no items of urgent business.

53 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

54 **DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of Party Whip.

55 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 be received as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

56 PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no items under this heading.

57 MINUTES OF CABINET

Consideration was given to the Minutes of Cabinet held on 21 November 2023 as contained on pages 323 to 330 of the Book of Reports.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of Cabinet held on 21 November 2023 be noted.

58 GRA REVENUE BUDGET REPORT AND MTFS UPDATE 2024/25 TO 2026/27

The Head of Finance, Procurement and Commercial Services introduced the report, as contained on pages 331 to 352 of the Book of Reports, the purpose which was to:

1. To enable the Council to set a balanced Revenue Budget for the forthcoming financial year 2024/25.
2. To present to members the updated Medium-Term Financial Forecast (MTFF) for the following financial years 2025/26 to 2026/27, noting the latest forecast budget gap of £1.348m, comprising:
 - £1.620m in 2025/26
 - (£0.272)m in 2026/27
3. To inform members of the reserves position as at 31 March 2023 and the forecast position to 2026/27.
4. To present to members the Capital Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27.
5. To enable the Council to set the Capital Programme for the three years 2024/25 to 2026/27.

Comments and questions were raised in respect of the following:

- Staff vacancy factor – use of interim staff / agency expenditure / list of vacancies
- Further detail requested on growth in tax basis not being as anticipated
- Some houses registered as business premises / Airbnb, so no longer in Council tax
- Why is there only a £6k reduction in Members Allowances
- TVD showing return in 2026/27 of £500k at Appendix 1, this figure differs from the business plan

The Head of Finance, Procurement and Commercial Services, commented that it would be helpful if questions were presented prior to the meeting if possible. He informed Members that he would provide a response to the above questions following the meeting.

RESOLVED: A. That the report be noted.
B. That the Head of Finance, Procurement and Commercial Services provide a response to Members in relation to the above comments and questions raised at the meeting.

59 HRA BUDGET REPORT 24-25

The Principal Finance Business Partner outlined the report of the Head of Finance, Procurement and Commercial Services as contained on pages 353 to 368 of the Book of Reports, which was to obtain feedback from the Committees listed to enable the Council to set its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget and capital investment programme for the next financial year 2024/25.

The Principal Finance Business Partner responded to comments and questions raised in respect of the following:

- How does the Capital Programmes for kitchens, roof, walls account for inflation? – stock condition / profile over 30 years
- Increase in Loan interest – is this trajectory likely to continue? – Estimate is based on interest paid if we deliver all Capital Programme and HRA for TVD new builds we are investing in. Some Homes England grant to part fund TVD building
- RTB sales increased from 50 to 60, which reflects the average right to buy sales in the medium term
- An increase in tenants monthly direct debit that is more than the expected percentage change - This is because 49 charging weeks will be split between twelve months rather than the usual 48 weeks. This was explained to the Tenant Scrutiny group last time this happened and to Tenant representatives on Landlord Services Committee this time. Operational colleagues intend to advise tenants of this via communications, along with suggestions how they might manage paying for the additional week

RESOLVED: That the report be considered and noted.

60 GRA CAPITAL STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME 2024/25 TO 2026/27

The Finance Manager outlined the report of the Head of Finance, Procurement and Commercial Services as contained on pages 369 to 384 of the Book of Reports, which was to set the framework for capital financing and treasury management operations for the next financial year.

Comments and questions were raised in respect of the following:

- UKSPF – Strong Team with clear plans in place for how this is allocated.

- Wellbeing and Place Services increases significantly into next year. Does this include Leisure Centres? - An element is Skelmersdale Town Centre project, also UKSPF. It doesn't include Leisure Centres.

RESOLVED: That the Capital Strategy and Programme for 2024/25 be noted.

61 DRAFT TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 24-25

The Finance Manager outlined the report of the Head of Finance, Procurement and Commercial Services as contained on pages 385 to 412 of the Book of Reports, which was to set the framework for capital financing and treasury management operations for the next financial year.

Comments and questions were raised in respect of the following:

- PWLB interest rates
- Interest payments for Leisure Centres

RESOLVED: That the report be noted for approval at Council.

62 DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY 2024-2029

The Housing Strategy and Development Programme Manager outlined the report of the Corporate Director of Transformation, Housing and Resources as contained on pages 413 to 490 of the Book of Reports, which was to seek approval for the publication of the Housing Strategy 2024-2029 and associated Action Plan.

He explained that whilst it is not a statutory requirement, the Council has developed a new Housing Strategy to encompass the period from 2024 to 2029. The benefit of doing this is that it helps the Council understand the housing challenges in the Borough, enabling delivery priorities to be set and develop Action Plan responses for each priority. The overall aspiration of the Strategy and Action Plan is to help improve the housing offer and housing circumstances of our residents.

He also informed Members that due to the timing of 'Purdah', that the Consultation would now take place over 6 weeks instead of 12 weeks from 12th February 2024 to 25th March 2024.

Comments and questions were raised in respect of the following:

- Very good document presented well but will affect a lot of people.
- Need to build 790 homes a year to reach 35%
- Does it move us far enough forward to deliver affordable homes.
- Need to be mindful of the need to develop a range of housing options for our ageing population
- The Map (page 431) is based on Ward boundaries prior to Elections - Members were informed that this will be addressed.
- Link to local plan – residential development – need detail / explanation.
- Foster inclusive and healthy communities

- Pleased to see reference to the Armed Forces Act and Covenant included

Members thanked the Housing Strategy and Development Programme Manager for all his work on this.

RESOLVED:

- A. That the Housing Strategy 2024-2029 and associated Action Plan be considered and noted and that the following agreed comments of the Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee be passed to Cabinet for their consideration.
1. That a MS Teams Briefing be arranged for all Councillors in respect of the Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029, either prior to or as a part of the consultation.
 2. That the delegation in paragraph 3.3 is reconsidered and the report be brought back to the appropriate Committee following the outcome of the consultation, for further consideration and the delegation at 3.3 can then be proposed.

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QUARTER 2 COUNCIL PERFORMANCE DELIVERY

The Performance Improvement Lead outlined the report of the Corporate Director of Transformation, Resources and Housing as contained on pages 491 to 504 of the Book of Reports which was to present performance monitoring data for the quarter ended 30 September 2023.

Comments and questions were raised in respect of the following:

- When are targets reviewed and changed – These are revised annually and approved through committee and are currently quite operational rather than strategic against our priorities. There will be a review of performance information and targets brought to next Committee.
- WL132-c19 FTE working days lost due to sickness absence – data missing due to issues with transfer to new HR system - LCC is aware of the impact of this and are in the process of addressing the issue. A new HR system is being procured.
- R1 - % Council Tax collected (current year) - significantly down in Q2. What were figures like prior to Covid and have we deteriorated since then.? Are we worse than prior to Covid? What action is being taken to get the revenue in?
- Do we sign post our residents to West Lancashire Debt Advice?
- Wellbeing and Leisure Service / Wrap up West Lancashire – great work

The Performance Improvement Lead informed the Committee, that a response to questions would be sought from the Revenues and Benefits Service area and provided to Members following the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Council's performance for its key performance indicators for the quarter ended 30 September 2023 be noted.

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Chairman