

BUDGET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in the Virtual Meeting and Live Stream on Thursday, 30 July 2020 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Jen Wilson in the Chair

Councillors Rose Bowler (Vice-Chair), Derek Adams, Jane Bryson, Dexter Bullock, Tracey Cannon, Jim Clifton, Tricia Clough, Paul Cooper, David Dixon, Maxine Dixon, David Downes, Ray Heffer, Natalie Hoy, Andrew Joesbury, Tom Kirkham, Tom Munro, Evonne Parkin, Graham Parkin and Rita Turner.

Also in attendance at the meeting was Councillor Clive Moesby (Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources).

Officers:- Theresa Fletcher (Head of Finance and Resources & Section 151 Officer), Joanne Wilson (Scrutiny and Elections Officer), Donna Cairns (Senior Governance Officer) and Tom Scott (Governance Officer).

BUD1-20/21 AGENDA ORDER

The Chair, with the consent of the meeting, changed the order of the agenda to consider the items in the order set out in these minutes.

BUD2-20/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Allan Bailey, Anne Clarke, Chris Kane, Peter Roberts, Dan Salt, Janet Tait, Ross Walker and James Watson.

BUD3-20/21 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

BUD4-20/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

BUD5-20/21 MINUTES - 30TH JANUARY 2020

Moved by Councillor Jen Wilson and seconded by Councillor Natalie Hoy.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Budget Scrutiny Committee held on 30th January 2020 be approved as a correct record.

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BUD6-20/21 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 1 - APRIL TO JUNE 2020

The Section 151 Officer presented a report to update Budget Scrutiny Committee on the financial position of the Council following the first quarter's budget monitoring exercise for the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), Capital Programme and Treasury Management activity.

Members had no questions relating to the content of the report.

The Section 151 Officer gave Members an update on how the Council's financial position had been changed in light of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. She explained how information was being provided from the Council to the Government on a regular basis, such as:

- 1) Weekly updates on grants paid and reliefs allocated to businesses
- 2) Monthly updates on a return of expenditure and income losses, reserve levels, reliefs through Council Tax, and levels of cash being received for Business Rates and Council Tax
- 3) Monthly updates on a return on the assurance checks done on grants the Council has paid out to prevent fraud and ensure they meet Government guidelines

The Section 151 Officer explained that the return of expenditure and income for the current month was being prepared, and the figures within it for the whole of the pandemic so far were:

- 1) Expenditure – approximately £200,000 extra to what was budgeted (spent on ICT equipment for officers to work from home, PPE and staff overtime to get grants paid out)
- 2) Income lost – approximately £390,000 (primarily leisure facilities not being allowed to open)
- 3) Delays in income – approximately £162,000 (Planning, land charges and MOTs)
- 4) Total possible loss for the year – £1.5m

The Section 151 Officer explained that the Government had given three grants to the Council in an effort to mitigate these losses, and a future scheme was planned by the Government to address missed income from fees and charges. The scheme would involve the Council covering 5% of the losses, then the Government and the Council covering the other 95% by the Government paying 75p in every £1.

Members were also given an update on Business Rates and Council Tax by the Section 151 Officer. The Council was being asked by the Government to provide figures on cash received from both areas monthly, and the Council's latest projections for both until the end of the financial year would be £3.350m lost in Business Rates and £1.702m lost in Council Tax. The Government were setting up a scheme to allow the Council to put off these collection fund deficits for three years.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources added to this by explaining that the

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previous financial year had put the Council in a strong position to deal with the pandemic.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions or make comments on the information provided by the Section 151 Officer.

Councillor Natalie Hoy believed the Council had been very good at releasing money to businesses in the midst of the pandemic.

Councillor David Dixon asked if any estimates had been made on how much could be lost in Business Rates over the possible three year period offered by the Government. The Section 151 Officer explained that it was very difficult to make a projection at this moment in time because the recovery of business rates payments had only just started.

The Chair thanked the Section 151 Officer for the report and the update, and brought attention to the two recommendations in the report to note the monitoring position as detailed in the report, and to note the position on the HRA, Capital Programme and Treasury Management at the end of the first quarter.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Jen Wilson and seconded by Councillor Ray Heffer.

RESOLVED that the Budget Scrutiny Committee:

(i) Notes the monitoring position of the General Fund at the end of the first quarter as detailed on Appendix 1 (A net favourable variance of £0.223m against the profiled budget) and the key issues highlighted within this report.

(ii) Notes the position on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the Capital Programme and Treasury Management at the end of the first quarter (Appendices 3, 4, 5 and 6).
(Section 151 Officer)

BUD7-20/21 ANNUAL CORPORATE DEBT MONITORING PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019/20

The Section 151 Officer presented a report to update Budget Scrutiny Committee on the corporate debt position at 31st March 2020.

The Section 151 Officer summarised the important parts of the report:

1) Paragraph 1.2 gave the main sources of income for the General Fund (Business Rates and Council Tax) and HRA (dwelling rents).

2) Table 1 showed the amounts billed for 2019/20 and 2018/19 for comparison. The Council billed £3.1m more in 2019/20 than 2018/19.

3) Table 2 showed the level of arrears for this income at 31st March 2020 and 31st March 2019. The Council had £412,000 more outstanding arrears at 31st March 2020, but had raised more income.

4) Table 3 showed the amount of the provisions already made in preparation for debts not

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being paid.

5) Paragraph 1.12 showed the Council increased the provisions in 2019/20 in anticipation of the financial effect of Coronavirus on businesses and residents.

6) Table 4 showed the summary of the other three tables, resulting in £3.1m more income for 2019/20, the level of arrears at 31st March 2020 being £412,000 higher and the level of provisions being £369,000 higher than last year.

The Section 151 Officer explained that from the beginning of the pandemic to 30th June 2020, the Council suspended all recovery action on debts, so the performance figures for collection, reported for Quarter 1 2020/2021 would be below targets. She added that a soft recovery had happened from 1st July 2020 where the Council had started to send out reminders for outstanding amounts.

The Section 151 Officer advised that it could take three years before arrears returned to the level they were at before the pandemic.

Members had no questions relating to the content of the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources suggested that Members read the 2019/20 Outturn report that had been circulated to them, because he felt it included aspects linked to the report in question.

The recommendation in the report to note it was moved by Councillor Ray Heffer and seconded by Councillor Natalie Hoy.

RESOLVED that the Budget Scrutiny Committee notes the report concerning the Council's Corporate Debt as at 31 March 2020.

(Section 151 Officer)

BUD8-20/21 BUDGET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

Committee considered their Work Programme for 2019/20.

The Scrutiny & Elections Officer explained that following advice from the Centre for Public Scrutiny and CIPFA, a session would be given to Members at the meeting on 26th November 2020 to give them guidance on financial scrutiny.

She also explained that a future agenda item not yet assigned to a meeting date would concentrate on the grants the Council gives to the voluntary sector.

Members had no questions relating to the content of the report.

The recommendation in the report to note it was moved by Councillor Ray Heffer and seconded by Councillor Jen Wilson.

RESOLVED that the Budget Scrutiny Committee notes the report for the Work Programme 2019/20.

(Scrutiny & Elections Officer)

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BUD9-20/21 UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

Customer Service & Transformation Scrutiny Committee:

The Chair of Customer Service & Transformation Scrutiny Committee reported that since the pandemic started, the Committee had held one informal virtual meeting and would hold a formal virtual meeting on 3rd August 2020.

Both ongoing reviews of the Committee were nearing completion, which were:

- 1) Re-letting Council properties
- 2) New Bolsover New Beginnings

Post-Scrutiny monitoring reviews of two past reviews were also nearing completion, which were:

- 1) Operational review of Standards Committee
- 2) Delivery of Environmental Health and Licensing

Healthy Safe Clean & Green Communities Scrutiny Committee:

The Chair of Healthy Safe Clean & Green Communities Scrutiny Committee reported that since the pandemic started, the Committee had held one informal virtual meeting and would hold a formal virtual meeting on 8th September 2020.

In March 2020, the Committee completed its annual review of the Bolsover Community Safety Partnership. Areas noted for improvement were:

- 1) Engagement of the probation service by Derbyshire CCG
- 2) Workloads for domestic violence were increasing in volume

The review for children in care and care leavers was still in progress but had been delayed by the pandemic.

Members were also encouraged to read the report from Environmental Health that went to Executive in June, which gave a detailed update on activity for the service.

Growth Scrutiny Committee:

The Chair of Growth Scrutiny Committee reported that since the pandemic started, the Committee had held two formal virtual meetings and would hold another on 9th September 2020.

One of the formal meetings already held considered a call-in submitted regarding a Delegated Decision to sell a piece of land in Glapwell. The Committee resolved at the end of the meeting that due to concerns with the decision-making process, the decision should be put back for further review and reconsideration. The Committee were awaiting the outcome of this process.

The review from 2019/20 (Current and Future External Funding) was at the final report stage, and another small review of the private rented sector would begin soon.

At recent meetings, Members had considered initial proposals for the new Housing

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Strategy and Empty Property Strategy and also received an update from Economic Development officers in relation to the impact of COVID-19 and the Council's Recovery Plan.

RESOLVED that the updates be noted.

The meeting concluded at 10:42 hours.