

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday 14 July 2021

Present:- Councillor Clark (in the Chair); Councillors Barley, Baker-Rogers, Baum-Dixon, Browne, Burnett, A Carter, Cooksey, R. Elliott, Pitchley and Yasseen.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Hoddinott and Wyatt.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 16 JUNE 2021

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 16 June 2021 be approved as a true record.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or press.

18. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items that required the exclusion of public or press.

19. FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2020/21

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 19 July 2021 that detailed the Council's Financial Outturn for 2020/21. The Leader of the Council, the Assistant Director - Financial Services and the Head of Corporate Finance attended the meeting to present the report.

The report detailed the final revenue and capital outturn position for 2020/21 and also provided information on the Council's reserve balances as at the end of the financial year.

The report stated that the Council had had a final underspend against its approved budget of £6.1m, following mitigating actions taken to manage the significant financial impacts of Covid-19. The report also noted the late receipt of £2m of Government support towards the ongoing costs associated with Operation Stovewood. It was noted that significant uncertainty remained around the financial consequences of the pandemic, potential restrictions, further in-year pressures on the Council's budget and on future Government funding support. As such a prudent use of the

underspend was being proposed in order to address these ongoing risks during the financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23.

A summary of the outturn position for each directorate was also included in the report along with an accompanying narrative on any budget variances. The report also provided information on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Council's Capital Programme.

In introducing the report, the Leader noted the significant financial impact of the pandemic on the Council in many areas such as increased spending on PPE, increased costs related to waste disposal as people spent more time at home, the reduction in income to the Council and how activity focussed on the pandemic had delayed the delivery of previously agreed savings. The Leader also noted that while the pandemic had been financially challenging for the Council that due to strong budget management before and during the pandemic that the Council was in a relatively strong financial situation.

Members sought assurance regarding the underspend on the activity linked to the HRA. The Leader assured members that the work that had been delayed due to the pandemic that had created the underspend was being reprofiled and that all planned spending from the HRA would be delivered.

Members asked for further information on the apparently large figures in the outturn position of the Central Services budget. The Leader advised that Central Services was used as a budget area for the processing and recording of many things including corporate charges and Government grants, and as such the reported figures for this budget area would appear to be a large figure.

Members asked whether the Council's response to the pandemic had highlighted any opportunities regarding how services were delivered that could enable future savings to be made. The Leader noted that the decision to redeploy staff during the pandemic had been an effective use of resources and advised that learning from the pandemic on how services could most effectively be delivered would be highlighted by individual services as part of the annual budget setting process.

Members asked with regard to the policy during the pandemic of paying care providers set payments that would have resulted in providers being paid for more hours than they had delivered to service users, whether there were any plans to recoup any overpaid money from the care providers. The Leader noted that the revised approach to payments to care providers during the pandemic had resulted in overpayments being made. The Leader advised however that it had been essential to support care providers who would have experienced increased costs during the pandemic so as to ensure that they were able to continue to deliver services, and as such there were no plans to recoup any overpayments.

Members asked for further information on the Central Services budget. The Assistant Director - Financial Services advised that work was continuing to reduce the number of individual budgets held in the Central Services area and that further information could be provided as required on the different budgets that were included under the Central Services budget heading.

Members noted with approval that while the pandemic had been financially challenging for the Council that due to strong budget management before and during the pandemic that the Council was in a relatively strong financial situation. Members also noted how effective the redeployment of staff had been with regard to both service delivery and efficient budget management and control.

Members asked if there were any current predictions on when the Council would return to a more normal way of operation and budget management. The Leader noted his thanks to all staff who had worked throughout the pandemic and in different roles that had ensured residents had been able to access the services and support that they needed. The Leader advised that there was however still much uncertainty with regards to the ongoing impact of the pandemic, and as such he was unable to predict when the Council would finally return to a more normal way of operation and budget management. The Head of Corporate Finance advised that there were still many financial unknowns in many areas related to the pandemic that made future budget planning uncertain, and as such it was important that the Council maintained adequate reserves as a mitigation against the ongoing uncertainty.

Members noted the ongoing impact of austerity and the impact that Government cuts had had on council services. Members noted their concern on how the cuts to services had negatively impacted on accessibility to services and the subsequent impact on equalities. Members asked whether the Equality Impact Assessments that were included in all decision-making reports could be refocussed to incorporate accessibility issues. The Leader noted the positive step that having Equality Impact Assessments had been but noted their limitations in being focused on specific reports that made incorporating broader issues like accessibility more difficult.

The Chair thanked the Leader, the Assistant Director - Financial Services and the Head of Corporate Finance for attending the meeting and answering member questions.

Resolved: -

That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

20. MAY 2021/22 FINANCIAL MONITORING

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 19 July 2021 that detailed the Council's financial position as at the end of May 2021 based on actual cost and income figures for the first two months of 2021/22. It was noted that the report was the first of a series of financial monitoring reports for the current financial year. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety and Finance, the Assistant Director - Financial Services and the Head of Corporate Finance attended the meeting to present the report.

The report stated that as of May 2021 the Council was expecting to deliver the overall outturn within budget for the financial year 2021/22. It was noted that while the Directorates had a current forecast year end overspend of £5.9m on General Fund expenditure that this should be mitigated by the Government's provision of COVID-19 emergency support grants and Sales, Fees and Charges Income Compensation.

The report provided a detailed narrative for the budget position of each directorate. The report also provided information on the delivery of previously agreed savings, the position of the Housing Revenue Account, the Covid-19 Local Support Scheme, and the delivery of the Capital Programme.

Members sought further assurance regarding activity around the delivery of previously agreed savings. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety and Finance assured members that activity was continuing to be conducted across directorates to monitor the activity around, and to ensure the delivery of the required savings.

Members asked for further information on the reduction in the amount spent on older people's placements. The Cabinet Member advised that the reduction had been due to fewer older people going into care homes and more older people being supported to stay in their own homes for longer.

Members asked for further information on the projected £0.8million overspend that was currently being projected with relation to Central Services. The Assistant Director - Financial Services noted that this figure was currently being projected due to uncertainties around the delivery of some of the required savings identified being delivered in the current financial year. The Assistant Director advised however that this overspend would most likely be mitigated by increased savings linked to Treasury Management activity that had not yet been factored into the projections.

Members asked how confident officers were on the assumptions that had been used in the current financial projections. The Assistant Director advised that the assumptions that had been used were based on officer's best professional judgment on the current available information, and that

as the year went on the projections would be firmed up as more confirmed figures and financial information became available.

Members asked for further information surrounding the upgrade, reopening and use of neighbourhood centres. The Leader, who was in attendance at the meeting advised that neighbourhood centres would be reopening imminently and assured members that the financial forecasts had factored in their temporary closure and the corresponding adjustment of tenant's rents. The Leader advised the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion was currently looking at how the neighbourhood centres could be most effectively utilised in the future.

Members sought assurance about the programme to upgrade council housing across the Borough that had been severely impacted and delayed due to the pandemic. The Leader noted the enormity of the programme of works and assured members that work was ongoing to get the programme of improvements back on track.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety and Finance, the Assistant Director - Financial Services and the Head of Corporate Finance for attending the meeting and answering member questions.

Resolved: -

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That a report be presented at a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board that details how the changes that have been made to how the Council operates and provides services as a result of the pandemic have informed budget management procedures, and whether these changes to how the Council operates have highlighted any new opportunities where future budget savings could potentially be made.
3. That further information on the budget processes and on the assumptions used to determine staffing budgets across all directorates be circulated to members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

21. LOCAL PLAN: ADOPTION OF HERITAGE AT RISK STRATEGY AND REGISTER

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 19 July 2021 that sought approval for the adoption of the draft Heritage at Risk Strategy and Heritage at Risk Register. The Strategic Director - Regeneration and Environment and the Planning Policy Manager attended the meeting to present the report.

In introducing the report the Strategic Director - Regeneration and Environment noted that the Heritage at Risk Strategy set out the actions that the Council would take to reduce the number of heritage assets at risk and to achieve the repair and restoration of assets that would otherwise be lost. The report stated that wherever possible the Council would work with the owners of heritage assets; however, the strategy also identified actions which could be taken where this could not be achieved.

The Strategic Director noted that the Heritage at Risk Register, that identified assets that were at risk of further deterioration and loss, would be kept updated and formed the basis for identifying and prioritising where actions and resources for the protection of heritage assets should be targeted. The Strategic Director noted the consultation that had been carried out in the preparation of the documents and advised that following Cabinet approval there would be a further six-week consultation period with key partners and stakeholders.

The Planning Policy Manager noted that proposed strategy and risk register would play an important role in the protection of the Borough's heritage assets, and as such their production, that had been an aspiration for some time was a good news story for the Borough. The Planning Policy Manager advised that there was national register of heritage assets that was managed by Historic England but noted that that register only listed Grade 1 and Grade 1* assets, whereas the proposed Heritage at Risk Register was far more comprehensive in its coverage.

Members asked for further information on the selection criteria that had been used and whether the register would be a "living" document that could have further assets added at a later date. The Planning Policy Manager provided details on the selection criteria that had been used, noting that the criteria had been set by Historic England. The Planning Policy Manager confirmed further sites could be added to the register in future if they met the selection criteria. It was also noted that the "risk" status of assets would be updated as the individual situation regarding each site changed over time.

Members welcomed as a positive development in the protection of the Borough's heritage that the draft Heritage at Risk Strategy and Heritage at Risk Register would provide. Members noted the scope and limitations of what could be included on the Heritage at Risk Register and asked what if there were any further plans to recognise and protect a wider range of heritage assets, in particular those assets of importance to BAME communities and their heritage. The Planning Policy Manager advised that work was in progress on developing a local list of heritage assets that would have locally set criteria for an asset's inclusion. The Planning Policy Manager that consultation on this local register would be wide and inclusive.

Members asked whether the outcome regarding the loss of Bramley Old Hall would have been different if the proposed strategy and register had

been in place at the time. The Planning Policy Manager advised that the outcome, with the building being demolished would have been the same as Bramley Old Hall had neither been listed or located in a conservation area. The Planning Policy Manager advised that Bramley Old Hall may have been included on a local list if one had existed at the time and that this could have given the site more protection when the application for the means of demolition had been submitted to the Council.

Members sought assurance that ongoing discussions were being carried out regarding sites on the register in order to secure their future. The Planning Policy Manager assured members that numerous conversations were continuing with owners of assets on the register, including the owner of the Guest and Chrimes site.

The Chair noted that some of the assets listed in the register had the incorrect wards noted as their location. The Planning Policy Manager noted that the document had been prepared prior to the new Borough wards coming into force in May 2021 and advised that work would be carried out to update this information.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Director - Regeneration and Environment and the Planning Policy Manager for attending the meeting and answering member questions.

Resolved: -

That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

22. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered its Work Programme.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme be approved.

23. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions 1 July – 31 September 2021.

Resolved: - That the Forward Plan be noted.

24. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

25. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

26. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held at 11am on Wednesday 28 July 2021 at Rotherham Town Hall.