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Scrutiny Committee - 5 March 2019

Present: Councillor S Coles (Chairman)

Councillors F Smith-Roberts, N Cavill, E Gaines, A Gunner, R Henley, R Lees and L Lisgo

Officers: Shirlene Adam, Brendan Cleere, Catrin Mathias, Marcus Prouse, Clare Rendell and Andrew Stark

Also Present: Councillors P Berry, C Booth, D Durdan, H Farbahi, R Habgood, J Horsley, I Morrell and F Smith

(The meeting commenced at 6.20 pm)

48. **Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Councillors J Blatchford and T Hall.

49. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.**

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15 January 2019, were taken as read and signed.

50. **Declarations of Interest.**

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Member or Clerk of County, Parish or Town Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr E Gaines	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Henley	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted

51. **Financial Monitoring 2018/19 as at 31 December 2018**

Considered report previously circulated, which provided an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Council for the financial year 2018-19 (as at 31 December 2018). This was expected to be the last progress report to Taunton Deane Borough Council's (TDBC) Scrutiny and Executive this year.

The current revenue forecast outturn for the financial year 2018-19 was as follows:-

- The General Fund Revenue Outturn was forecast a net underspend of £124,000.
- The Housing Revenue Account was forecast an underspend of £356,000.

The current capital forecast position for 2018-19 was as follows:-

- The General Fund capital account was forecast a spend of £9,594,000 against a total Programme budget of £76,082,000 with £49,892,000 forecast to be spent in future years (£16,611,000 spent in previous years).
- The Housing Revenue Account capital account was forecast a spend of £9,086,000 against a budget of £17,686,000 with £8,610,000 forecast to be spent in future years.

The General Fund reserves forecast balance as at 31 March 2019 was projected to be £2,088,000. The balance remained above the recommended minimum reserves level approved in the Council's Budget Strategy.

The Housing Revenue Account Reserve forecast balance as at 31 March 2019 was £2,428,000, which was above the recommended minimum level set within the Council's Budget Strategy and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Members thanked the officer for the final report for TDBC Scrutiny Committee and agreed that it was a moment to celebrate.
- Concern was raised on the figure used for car parks in the summary of significant forecast variance. Further concern was raised that the loss of revenue could be due to equipment malfunction and customers being allowed to exit the car parks for free.
The figures were based on the previous financial year. The delay in the introduction of the 'pay by foot' scheme had created a shortfall.
- Concern was raised that Members had requested the figures for B&B expenditure months ago and had only now received them. Further concern was raised on the figures and the use of agency staff within the housing department.
The Interim Finance Manager advised that the Housing Department acknowledged the problems faced by the homelessness section and had contracts with the B&B's in the area but they were aware that they needed to apply for grants and produce new strategies to help reduce homelessness in the area.
- Members highlighted that there was a national problem with homelessness and requested the figures on how many were being housed in B&B's within the Taunton area and wanted reassurance that TDBC were not housing customers in hotels miles away in other counties.
The Interim Finance Manager was not aware of any TDBC customers being housed in B&B's outside the area.
- Further reassurance was requested by Members that TDBC were not housing customers from outside the area in B&B's in Taunton.
The Interim Finance Manager would distribute the figures to the Committee.
- Concern was raised on the recruitment within the Asset Management Department and queried what would happen in the new structure.

The department had used agency staff to assist during the transition phase and hoped that the new job roles would be recruited to within the new structure.

- Members suggested that potential income from recycling had not been utilised. Plastics were a commodity and could produce additional income. *The Interim Finance Manager highlighted that recycling had shown an additional income. However, it was hoped that in the New Council, the contract could include an increase in plastic recycling, but new vehicles would be required. The Household Waste Recycling Centres had been accepting different types of plastic for a while. The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services highlighted that Somerset was ahead of the curve on recycling figures but agreed we still had a way to go.*
- Concerns were raised on both the Deane Helpline and the DLO Trading Account and that there were overspends on both. *The Deane Helpline needed to be manned 24 hours a day and had some staff off on long term sick which had been covered by agency staff. The DLO Trading Account overspend was mainly due to the damage to the poly tunnels during the period of bad weather in 2018.*

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee noted the Council's forecast financial performance for 2018-19 financial year as at 31 December 2018.

52. **Spotlight Review into Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour in Taunton Town Centre (Report of the Chairman of the Task and Finish Cllr Ian Morrell)**

Considered the report, that set out the findings of the Task and Finish Group charged to review crime and anti-social behaviour in Taunton's town centre and adjacent urban areas.

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Concern was raised on the delay in the report being distributed to the Committee. Further concern was raised that they had not been given enough time to read the report thoroughly enough to be able to debate the subject matter.
- Members suggested that the report be deferred and be taken to the Shadow Scrutiny Committee to allow time to read the documents.
- The Governance and Democracy Specialist advised the Committee that extra time could possibly allow for officer involvement in the report.
- The Chair of the Task and Finish Group understood their concerns and advised the Committee that the report had been included in the agenda because it was the last Scrutiny meeting for TDBC.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee recommended:-

- 1) To defer the consideration of the report and requested that it be considered at Shadow Scrutiny on 14 March 2019 if possible;
- 2) That the report be further defined with the input of the rest of the Task and Finish Group and Scrutiny Officer, along with other standard reporting conventions such as an Equalities Impact Assessment to be completed if possible; and

- 3) To invite other officers to provide initial feedback on the report if possible in the timescales.

53. **Update on Preventative Measures for Unauthorised Encampments / Incursions on Open Spaces**

Considered the update presented to the Committee on Tackling Unauthorised Encampments.

The Executive Director presented information on the background and activity over the past two years, which included:-

- Number of issues over the last two years;
- Cost of clean-up;
- Actions taken, which included legal notices, bollards being installed, along with other works to prevent vehicular access; and
- Works planned, which included landscaping works along with the above mentioned actions taken.

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Members queried whether bollards were the best answer to prevent vehicular access and suggested that a large boulder could be used instead.
The local residents had made the same suggestion but it was decided that it was not the best fit because access was still required to maintain the area.
- Concern was raised on the timescales used for the works to be completed in.
The Executive Director advised that they hoped the works would be completed by Easter 2019 and that they were working with residents to ensure that.
- Members highlighted the alternative access route used at Blackbrook that had caused issues previously.
The Executive Director would go back and discuss with officers to find a solution.
- Members requested assurance that the solutions used were the best fit for the area and to make it as difficult as possible to access the sites.
- Concern was raised about the lack of communication with the residents and Members requested that needed to be improved.
- Members queried how much the scheme had cost and where the money had come from.
The scheme had cost approximately £15,000 - £20,000 and it had come from the open spaces budget.
- Members requested an update on other sites that had previously been used.
The Executive Director would give an update at future meetings.
- Concern was raised that the legal procedures and the development of the strategy could cause displacement.
- Members queried whether there was still an out of hours contact they could use to report unauthorised encampments.

Yes, the out of hours contact was still in place and was manned by the Deane Helpline. There was extra staff support provided over the bank holidays, but officers were aware that there were still delays in legal support due to the offices being closed over weekend periods.

- Members acknowledged it was a good start and appreciated the work the officers had done on the scheme.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee noted the update report.

(The Meeting ended at 8.20 pm)

