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CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING Monday, 28 October 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Michael Holly (Chair); Councillors Bamford, O'Neill, Besford, Boriss, Joinson, Nolan, Wraighte, O'Rourke, Rana and Robinson

OFFICERS: Julie Murphy – Chief Finance Officer, Rosemary Barker (Head of Workforce and Organisational Development), Caroline Wolfenden (Head of Corporate Policy and Performance)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor Mir

118 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declaration of interest received.

119 ITEMS FOR EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was reported that there was one item of business under this item.

120 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes held on the 23rd July 2019 be approved as a correct record.

121 3RD & 4TH QUARTER CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

The Head of Information, Customers and Communities provided Members with a summary of corporate complaints and compliments received during the third and fourth quarters of 2018/19. Members were reminded that part of the Council's performance management process was to ensure the Authority's ambition to continuously improve services was realised.

It was reported that 276 new complaints had been received during the second half of 2018/19 across all services, the majority of the complaints being resolved at stage one, with only 12 escalating to stage two. It was noted that three complaints were dealt with directly at stage two due to the nature of the complaint, and five complaints were dealt with at stage three. A total of 164 compliments were received during the reporting period.

Members were pleased to note there had been a slight reduction in the overall number of complaints received, with the majority of services receiving fewer complaints in the reporting period compared to the previous year.

In response to a question around fly tipping and the cost to the Council, it was noted that a written response would be provided outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

122 LGSCO ANNUAL REVIEW 2018-19

The Head of Information, Customers and Communities provided Members with a report on the Annual Review of complaints made to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) about Rochdale Borough Council in the year ending 31 March 2019.

It was reported that the review showed a relatively small number of complaints received against Rochdale Council by the Ombudsman during 2018/19. In total 48 complaints and enquiries were received which was similar to the previous year. It was noted that the number of decisions made by the LGSCO differed from the number of complaints and enquiries received, as complaints may be received and decided upon in different financial years.

The Committee was informed that of 50 decisions made during 2018/19, only 11 complaints were subject to detailed investigation. 16 complaints were referred back to the Council as they were considered premature under the Council's own complaints procedure, 20 complaints were closed after initial enquiries, and 3 complaints were classified as invalid. Of the 11 complaints that were investigated, 9 were found to be upheld and 2 were not upheld. The LGSCO recommended remedies for 6 of the upheld complaints, all of which were accepted and implemented.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

123 BUDGET UPDATE AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020/21 TO 2024/25

The Chief Finance Officer presented to Members an update on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 to 2024/25. The report also provided an update on the latest budget position for the Council and Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale Clinical Commissioning Group.

Members were reminded that the Council currently had a budget gap and that the assumptions that underpinned the gap had been reviewed in line with the latest available information, including the impact of the Spending Round 2019, impacting on 2020/21 funding, announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 4th September 2019. Members noted that certainty around the funding announced on 4th September would not be gained until the Local Government Finance Settlement 2020/21, expected to be announced in late 2019.

It was reported that the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2019/20 to 2023/24 was approved at Budget Council on the 27th February 2019. It was noted that the MTFS had been reviewed and updated reflecting

current budget assumptions. The MTFs for 2020/21 to 2024/25 would be formally presented for approval at Budget Council on the 26th February 2020.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

124 COLLECTION FUND 2019/20

The Committee received a report from the Chief Finance Officer who updated Members on the Council's Collection Fund outturn position for 2019/2020. The Committee were advised that this report would be submitted to the Council's Cabinet, in November 2019 where the recommendations would be requested to be approved.

It was reported that the Collection Fund Position for 2019/20 was a forecast as a surplus of £1.454m, comprising: £0.763m surplus relating to Business Rates; and £0.691m surplus relating to Council Tax. The Council's share of the forecast 2019/20 Collection Fund outturn surplus was £1.343m.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

125 DISCRETIONARY FEES & CHARGES

The Chief Finance Officer provided Members with a report on the proposed Council Services fees and charges for 2020/21, and details of any fees and charges above the 0% general uplift.

It was noted that the fees and charges in the report had been proposed by each Directorate, taking into account the 0% general uplift in Discretionary Fees and Charges agreed at Cabinet in July 2019. Any uplifts that were not in line with the 0% proposal, were highlighted in the report.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet be requested not to implement charges for new or replacement bins.

126 FINANCE UPDATE REPORT 2019/20

The Chief Finance Officer presented to the Committee a report, which updated Members on the Council's financial position as at the end of July 2019. It was noted that the report had been approved by the Cabinet at its meeting in October 2019.

The report provided Members with details on;

- The forecast Revenue position, which was an overspend of £7.231m.
- An update of the Savings target of £0.135m, as part of the Revenue budget 2019/20.
- An update on the Health & Social Care Pool Budget position.
- Forecast Capital spend of £128.532m after net re-phasing of £5.948m.

Members held a discussion around the pooled budget and how this was/could be scrutinised, with Members agreeing that they wished to receive at its February 2020 meeting a presentation on the pooled budget, challenges it faces and what is being done to tackle the challenges.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That at its February 2020 meeting, Members receive a presentation on the pooled budget, challenges it faces and what is being done to tackle the challenges.

127 SCHOOLS FINAL OUTTURNS AND REPORTABLE SURPLUS BALANCES 2018/19

The Committee considered a report on the final budget outturns and reportable surplus held by local authority-maintained schools. Members were advised that it was a requirement for Councils to review and challenge the level of surpluses held by individual schools.

The Committee was reminded that surplus balances greater than 8% of a school's funding for a consecutive two-year period were subject to challenge and review by the local authority in conjunction with Schools Forum. It was reported that potentially, under Rochdale's Scheme for Financing Schools, any surpluses fitting the defined criteria and not deemed to be used for 'eligible' purposes could be clawed-back with re-distribution to all schools via the fair funding formula.

Members considered the report and note that there were currently 29 schools (25 primary, 1 secondary, 1 nursery and 2 special) with a surplus balance greater than the threshold percentage. Of those 29 schools, 15 were subject to review in accordance with Section 4 of the Scheme for Financing Schools. It was reported that all 15 schools had provided details of the planned spend and a summary was provided to Members.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

128 WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme for the remainder of the municipal year 2019/2020.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

129 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was noted that that the press and public should be excluded from the remaining part of the meeting pursuant to Section 100(A) 4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that discussions may involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the provisions of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

130 SAVINGS PROGRAMME 2020/21 TO 2021/22

The Committee received a report from the Chief Finance Officer on recommendations that would be presented to Cabinet on proposals in order to meet the budget gap for 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Members held a detailed debate on each proposal and agreed a number of suggestions to be presented to Cabinet, Members further agreed to look at a number of business as usual saving proposals and to look at the process involved in reporting these to Members.

RESOLVED

- 1) That Cabinet be asked to reconsider the saving proposals it is considering for consultation on;
 - Reduction in Voluntary Sector Grants to a homelessness charity Brentwood - £3k
 - Proposal to close Milnrow Youth Centre - £3.2k
 - Environmental Management Township Rangers - £17k
- 2) That Cabinet be requested not to implement charges for new or replacement bins.
- 3) That the Chair, Vice-Chair and Senior Governance and Committee Officer look to set up a Task Group, to consider how BAU decisions are taken and how they are reported to Members, looking at some appropriate examples. The Task Group will also consider the Council's Scheme of Delegation (in relation to this matter).