

## **NUNEATON AND BEDWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **FINANCE AND PUBLIC SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**8<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

A meeting of the Finance and Public Service Overview and Scrutiny Panel was held on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023 in the Council Chamber, Town Hall Nuneaton. The meeting was livestreamed and recorded for publication on the Council's website.

#### **Present**

Councillors D. Brown (Chair)

Councillors: R. Baxter-Payne, L. Downs, B. Hammersley, J. Kennaugh,  
K. Kondakor, M. Tromans, C. Watkins, and Mrs D. Ross.

Apologies: Councillor S. Harbison

### **PART I – PUBLIC BUSINESS**

#### **FPS01 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Public Service Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022 were submitted for approval. It was noted that it had not been recorded in the minutes that a discussion had taken place about fly tipping, and the fact fly tipping/littering fines were being issued.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair, subject to the discussion about fly tipping and fines being noted.

#### **FPS02 Declarations of Interest**

**RESOLVED** that the declarations of interest are as set out in the Schedule attached to these Minutes.

#### **FPS03 Questions to Cabinet**

Councillor S. Croft (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate) and Councillor S. Markham (Portfolio Holder for Public Services) were in attendance to answer questions from members of the Panel.

#### **Councillor K. Kondakor asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate:**

Thank you for the Cabinet being here. Firstly for Councillor Croft. We haven't got any financial information presented to the panel tonight, and the latest financial information goes right the way back to December. So I wouldn't mind if Councillor Croft could give us an update on the expected year outturn, particularly bearing in mind at the last planning meeting, or it might have been the one before, the Leader of the council mentioned we had a three million pound deficit coming up. So, I think it would be useful to have a clarification of the financial position in terms of the revenue account for the year that's just ended.

To make it easy, the next question I would want to ask then, is where we are with the medium term financial plan, because that has regularly been promised to Members so we can see where we're going forward with all our major projects, and the financial implications of those, thank you.

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate responded:**

Thank you very much Mr Chairman. The figures aren't in this report because the year-end process is still ongoing. We haven't actually finalised the accounts yet. That's partly due to the fact that we've got the new team in place and it's taking a little longer than we'd like, and partly there are some outstanding audit queries on the previous year, and we can't get the opening balances right to finalise the accounts, but that will be coming over the summer. It will end up pretty much in line with run rate from the Q3 figures, so it will be about £900 000 adrift from the budget in year. As I outlined at the budget setting in February effectively, so we've spent £560 000 extra on homeless, £100,000 extra on audit fees, because it took so long, but we'd upped the recycling income and the planning income. The three million pound deficit that Council Wilson was referring to, obviously I wasn't there so I must presume from what Councillor Kondakor says, but that's referring to the deficit we had to close in the budget we've just set, so the budget for 2023-2024, but also the fact that our projections show there is an ongoing deficit, there will have to be savings made in future financial years. So there won't be three million adrift in the year we've just closed, but that is still very much a live issue and we'll be able to do budget monitoring from the q1 for 2023-2024 again, the financial years right, shortly to this OSP once we've got the final outturn finished. In terms of the medium term financial plan that's going to, the final document's, it's going to have to wait until we finalise the account, because we need to get the base position ready, so that we know what we're working from, but I have answered the question.

**Councillor K. Kondakor followed up with:**

Just to follow up on that, thank you for giving me an outturn estimate. I know it's with some uncertainty but how much of that £900,000, because about a million the year before as well, so you've been about two million out in your first two years as an Administration. How much of that systematic error do you expect then to occur in this year, or have those financial miscalculations or misestimates, whatever you've got to call them, being taken out of the system now? So this year you'd expect to be about right.

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate responded:**

Well part of the answer to that is, of course, if we knew that, and if we knew what would change in year, if we knew what would go awry it wouldn't have gone awry in year. But we set it, we've been much more conservative in the most literal sense of the word this year. So for example we've put in the 1.3 million transformation and, I've forgotten the word we used, but contingencies reserve into the budget which gives us much more of a fiscal stabiliser for when, if and when, we have any unforeseen things like the economic troubles we had last year. Nobody foresaw 10% inflation, we haven't had 5% pay rises for a very long time in this country, so we've built in an air buffer effectively to absorb some of those shocks, should they recur. Thank you Mr Chairman.

**Councillor Kondakor asked the Portfolio Holder for Public Services:**

Thank you very much. This is for Councillor Markham. A lot of this refers to areas before you were Portfolio Holder, but obviously a big uncertainty is the

Civic Hall, and I think it was supposed to go out to the bidders around yesterday or today. I don't know if that's happened, but one of the things we've established is there was a lot of, shall I say, political interference with the Consultant's report which has been established in terms of the base level of the Civic Hall. If you remember there was a Consultant's report that forgot the pantomime, and we're now understanding that the previous Portfolio Holder had asked for conversations and various things about that, so I'd ask are we doing a clean sweep, or a reset to what data we've got, to make sure that it is sound in terms of what we're giving to the bidders. Particularly in terms of the work needed to the Civic Hall, because they're bidding blind if they don't know about the boilers and any issues. Thank you.

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Services responded:**

Yes, some of the stuff is still the same, the boilers and stuff, because that that hasn't been altered since the actual estimates have been done. But we have ordered, I think it's happening on Monday, we've asked for somebody else to come in to have a look at the asbestos, so they've got an up-to-date report on the asbestos and they'll also have an up-to-date report on other things that are actually in there that need doing. So everything that they get will be up-to-date when they get their pack.

**Councillor Kondakor then stated:**

Just to follow up on that. So I take it the process hasn't started then yet, because of the extra information you've had to get. Do they know how long they're bidding for, because the other question was it was less than 25 years, but is it their choice how long they bid for?

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Services responded:**

So the bid itself is up to them to negotiate when it comes in. So they will get the pack, the dates will be, it should have started already, so those dates will be extended, because we couldn't do anything because of the time that the actual Cabinet Report was published. So it already put it out by about a week, so until we get to the end of that period, then, what will happen is will just be added on the end it won't be shortened they'll get exactly the same time as that's actually been advertised, so they won't be penalised for that.

**FPS04 Cultural Strategy**

The Museum and Art Gallery Manger submitted a report presented by the Leisure and Health Manager to provide the Panel with a report to share the Cultural Strategy for the Borough.

**Public Speaker: Mr P. Smith**

The Panel discussed and asked questions on the following:

- A breakdown of information/responses by Ward would be useful.
- The location of culture and the spread of culture.
- Staffing of the Museum and opening hours – a review will be taking place at the relevant point.
- How we can put culture into different Wards, and think of staffing as well as just buildings.
- The Cultural Strategy will be the catalyst of how engagement is carried out within Wards.

- The Borough has the benefit of being multicultural, it is important to engage and approach different cultures and ensure all are involved. The Communities and Cultural Teams will be working together on this.
- Redevelopments such as Riversley Park would be a good opportunity to stage events centrally.
- Ensure communications are effective including the advertising and promoting of events, and sharing of information. Consultations need to make it easier for all to get involved, so opportunities are not missed.
- Each person can have a different opinion on culture, the arts and entertainment. It is good to have strategies to bring people together and signpost more effectively to engage more people.
- Locations of where events have taken place were discussed, including the Civic Hall/Bedworth Arts Centre.
- The environment and green spaces are important and are needed to ensure people have places to walk and cycle.
- Recognising significant people within the Borough in addition to George Eliot, and their achievements. Celebrating other celebrities that have come from the Borough.

**RESOLVED** that

- a) The proposed strategy for Culture be noted;
- b) The draft strategy be approved as written; and
- c) IT BE RECOMMENDED TO CABINET that the Cultural Strategy be formally approved and adopted, with the proviso that
  - I. this strategy document be reviewed and updated once the future of Civic Hall is known; and
  - II. that Cabinet be given details of the demographics relating to those who completed the survey (including information about the Wards).

**FPS05 Active for Life Reports Annual Report April 2022 – March 2023**

The Leisure and Health Manager presented a report to provide the Panel with an overview of projects, initiatives and ongoing activities that were delivered by the Sports Development team during the year.

**Public Speaker: Mr P. Smith**

The Panel discussed and asked questions on the following:

- The Council do lots of good things, but better promotion would be beneficial.
- The removal of Bedworth skatepark has left a gap, where young people are now either no longer participating in the activity, or in unsuitable places. It was recognised that removal was due to health and safety issues. There are plans for a replacement.
- Reducing crime by keeping young people engaged and active is important.
- The mountain bike trail is quite niche but could be a tourist attraction and needs promotion.
- The better use of Sports Centres (including Etone) and measured miles to encourage residents to become more active, and better promotion of activities and the work being done by the Borough Council.
- There are some marked out cycle and walking routes through the Borough, but they need better advertising to let people know.

- Employees are offered 'MOT's', and whether walk-in clinics/opportunities could be opened up to the public, and if grants may be available for residents.

**RESOLVED** that the contents of the report be noted.

FPS06 **Integrated Performance Report – End of Year (Fourth Quarter) 2022/23**

The Risk Management and Performance Officer submitted a report to the Panel to provide appropriate performance measures, budget information and risk data for service areas within the scope of the Panel.

**Public Speaker: Mr P. Smith**

A number of questions and comments were raised by the Panel:

- Freedom of Information requests, and the numbers received from residents and Councillors.
- Outstanding Members enquiries – it was felt it would be useful to have the information within the report.
- Data relating to waste and recycling, the performance levels relating to this, and the need to improve recycling levels and meet targets. Warwickshire County Council do have additional information that may be of interest.
- The risk register relating to finances, and ongoing/future projects which may impact this, and how risks are mitigated/graded. A request was made for medium term financial plans and borrowing forecast. The Council is looking at alternative options for borrowing, and the overspend in the budget has been priced in already.

**RESOLVED** that the contents of the report be noted.

FPS07 **Work Programme Suggestion Forms**

**Public Speaker: Mr P. Smith**

- a) A work programme suggestion form was submitted by Councillor C. Watkins - 'Budget and update of cost for the refurbishment of 196-198 Church Road to Temporary Accommodation'.

The Panel discussed the form and a number of points were raised including:

- A request was made to receive the original budget that was set – the Panel were advised that this information was provided to the OSP in October 2023.
- Clarification was requested on the figures and information about the purchase, including confirmation on the purchase price, dates and deadlines.
- Information about the delay in taking people into the property.
- The project is now in its final stage, and is due for handover in June 2023.
- The projected potential overspend on the project is £5000 which is 0.38%.
- Potential loss of savings due to the delays, and any changes within the project.

- Details about what caused the delays and what has been learned from this project.

**RESOLVED** that the Work Programme suggestion form be accepted by this Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the item brought to a future meeting once the project is completed.

- b) A work programme suggestion form was submitted by Councillor C. Watkins – ‘Independent Living Unit (remodelling)’.

The Panel discussed the form and a number of points were raised including:

- A request to get information about the project, including budget, dates and deadlines.
- To look into the ‘difficult to let’ properties which may not be fit for purpose.
- To research possible options such as hiring in a team.
- Budgetary provision for this project was made prior to the current economic climate, and before the introduction of the Housing White Paper by Government.
- There is currently a review, in conjunction with Finance, and ongoing work by Officers relating to this issue.
- Looking at alternative uses for the units and possible lost revenue.

**RESOLVED** that the Work Programme suggestion form be accepted.

- c) A work programme suggestion form was submitted by Councillor C. Watkins – ‘Homeless Hostel Conversion’.

The Panel discussed the form and a number of points were raised including:

- To see what lessons have/could have been learned.
- To identify any issues and what can be done to address any issues.
- The funding was awarded prior to the current economic situation and inflationary increases. The project was paused whilst options were looked at. Work will be re-commencing, and costs will be updated.

**RESOLVED** that a briefing note be requested for review by this Panel following the HRA review.

#### FPS06 **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan showing the key decisions that will be made in the four months commencing 1<sup>st</sup> June 2023, was provided to the Panel for information.

It was suggested that the capital programme does need to come to this Panel in September, at the same time as the quarter one outturn goes to Cabinet.

**RESOLVED** that the Forward Plan be noted.

#### FPS07 **Draft Work Programme 2023/24**

The Draft Work Programme for the Finance and Public Service Overview and Scrutiny Panel was submitted for approval.

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the Work Programme be approved; and
- b) the capital outturn and capital quarter one be added to the work programme for September.

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Chair

## Finance and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Schedule of Declarations of Interests – 2023/2024

	Name of Councillor	Disclosable Pecuniary Interest	Other Personal Interest	Dispensation
	General dispensations granted to all members under s.33 of the Localism Act 2011			Granted to all members of the Council in the areas of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Housing matters</li> <li>- Statutory sick pay under Part XI of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992</li> <li>- An allowance, payment given to members</li> <li>- An indemnity given to members</li> <li>- Any ceremonial honour given to members</li> <li>- Setting council tax or a precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992</li> <li>- Planning and Licensing matters</li> <li>- Allotments</li> <li>- Local Enterprise Partnership</li> </ul>
	R. Baxter-Payne	Manager Brinklow Quarry Ltd, Brinklow; County Councillor - WCC	Spouse: Self-employed childminder  Member of the following Outside Bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West Midlands Combined Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee</li> <li>• Warwickshire Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (substitute)</li> </ul>	
	D. Brown	Employed by H.M Land Registry	Regional Coordinator, Ragdoll Rescue Charity.  Representative on the following Outside Bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhall Education Foundation (Council appointment).</li> </ul>	
	L. Downs	River Bars Limited; Coventry Plus Beyond the Plane Little Caesars Donuts Limited NBBC Council Contract for market pitch	Member on the following Outside Body: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hammersley, Smith and Orton Charity</li> </ul>	
	B. Hammersley	County Councillor – W.C.C.	Member on the following Outside Bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hammersley, Smith and Orton Charity</li> </ul>	



	<b>Name of Councillor</b>	<b>Disclosable Pecuniary Interest</b>	<b>Other Personal Interest</b>	<b>Dispensation</b>
	S. Harbison	Self Employed	Member of Conservative and Unionist Party. Member on the following Outside Bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Astley Charity</li> </ul>	
	J. Kennaugh	County Councillor W.C.C.  Employed by FedEx Express UK Ltd	Member of the W.C.C. Regulatory Committee Member of the Conservative Party Member of UNITE the Union  Member on the following Outside Bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EQUIP</li> </ul>	
	K.A. Kondakor	Electronic and Embedded Software Design Engineer (self-employed)	Unpaid Director of 100% Renewables UK Ltd  Green Party (E&W)	
	M. Tromans	RTC Ltd, Nuneaton; WCC, Warwick  Share in a rental property in Hydes Pastures, Nuneaton	Nuneaton Acorns WI	
	C.M. Watkins	Employee of Nutri Pack	Representative on the following outside bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nuneaton and Bedworth Community Enterprises Ltd. (NABCEL)</li> </ul>	