

Runnymede Borough Council

Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee

Thursday, 28 March 2024 at 8.25 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors J Furey (Chair), T Gates, E Gill (In place of L Gillham), A King, S Lewis and S Whyte (In place of T Burton).

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors N Prescott (Vice-Chair), A Balkan and M Singh.
In attendance: Councillors S Jenkins and M Smith.

26 Notification of Changes to Committee Membership

Cllr S. Whyte substituted for Cllr T. Burton and Cllr E. Gill substituted for Cllr L. Gillham.

27 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2024 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

28 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr A. Balkan and Cllr M. Singh.

29 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

30 Treasury Management Report - Q3 2023/24

An update was provided on the Council's treasury management activity and performance during the first nine months of 2023/24.

During the period £15.5m in borrowing had been repaid, the current economic uncertainty and high interest rates had meant that new loans had not yet been taken out to replace them which had a knock on effect on the level of investment, with around £65.5m in investments held by the Council.

It was clarified to a councillor around the liquidity risks that a buffer of around £5m was maintained in short-term investment should there be any adverse change in the markets, which would be available to be called on immediately if required. It was confirmed that the existence of that buffer had been a consistent policy over a number of years.

It was noted that investment in local authorities had significantly reduced across the market during the time period, and officers advised that was largely down to several authorities either issuing a section 114 notice or encountering financial difficulty. Investments in that area had therefore been modest and within the investment grade, which was above single A-minus entities.

It was confirmed that the investment in property management data had been largely consistent, however the data would be available more dynamically in future based on MSCI data and broken down into quarters to provide a better insight into performance.

31 Progress Towards Savings

Following Council approval of the process to identify reduced spend and increase income streams, several workstreams had been established to ensure a robust mechanism was in place to deliver budget reductions and support the Council's financial sustainability.

Those workstreams focussed on a service review programme, along with savings, efficiencies and income generation. The service review programme had been progressing well and regularly reported into the Service Review, Communications and Transformation Member Working Party. An establishment review had commenced to ensure that the establishment list matched what was being put into the overall budget to ensure they were aligned.

The coming year's budget featured a contribution from reserves in order to allow sufficient time for the work to take effect.

Modest use had so far been made of the Service Transformation reserve, with £125,000 allocated to support the response to the non-statutory best value notice.

In response to a query about the initial review around Safer Runnymede, it was confirmed that as part of both the establishment review and service review capacity and resources were under review to ensure both were sufficient to meet the increased demand of a number of new contracts.

The review around trade waste had so far primarily been around making sure the Council were making the best use of their resources and what additional work would be required in order to ensure that rounds were fully utilised. The recent implementation of the Bartec software would provide more intelligence on routes and any flexibility around collection days.

The focus of the next set of service reviews was likely to focus on resident access to direct services and understanding how people approached the Council in order to streamline the process, and looking at public buildings, community halls and spaces to generate income and understand the future use of buildings and which needs to be retained, particularly in the context of the decarbonisation plan as part of the climate change strategy.

It was agreed that the next update would focus on savings initiatives and how they would be delivered. The committee agreed for updates on progress towards savings to be quarterly.

32 **Committee Work Programme**

32a **Grounds Maintenance**

The Committee noted the information that had been provided across the previous meetings and were content to close this particular workstream. However, it was asked that figures around complaints are presented to the meeting on an annual basis, ideally during summer on the basis that the majority of any complaints from residents were likely to be received during spring/early summer.

32b **Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)**

The Committee noted the information received across the previous meetings and thanked officers for what had been provided.

It was acknowledged that the planning element of HMOs would be considered as part of the wider work on the local plan which would be presented to a future planning committee.

The following motion was proposed and seconded, and it was resolved that:

Following the conclusion of its work programme, Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended that the following points be included as part of Environment and Sustainability's review of licensing options for HMOs:

- 1) To consider the introduction of an Additional Licencing Scheme to include non-licensable HMOs.**
- 2) To explore the introduction of new HMO Licence conditions on the following themes which would apply to existing and additionally licensed HMOs:**
 - a. Bins and waste management**
 - b. Garden Maintenance**
 - c. ASB and nuisance behaviour**
- 3) To review HMO licensing fees.**

(The meeting ended at 9.25 pm.)

Chair