

Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Minutes

28 March 2023

Present:

Chair: Councillor Yogesh Teli

Councillors: Govind Bharadia Nitesh Hirani
Graham Henson

Apologies received: Natasha Proctor Samir Sumaria

Absent: Councillor Kandy Dolor

17. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member:

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Samir Sumaria

Councillor Govind Bharadia

18. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that there were none.

19. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2022, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

20. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

21. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received.

22. References from Council and Other Committees/Panels

RESOLVED: To note that there were none.

Resolved Items

23. Final Revenue Budget 2023/24 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 to 2025/26

Members received the Final Revenue Budget 2023/24 and Final Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 to 2025/26 Report that were presented to Cabinet on 16 February 2023.

The Director of Finance and Assurance (S151 Officer) informed Members that the report set out the final revenue budget for 2023/24 and final Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2023/24 to 2025/26. In December 2022, Cabinet approved the draft versions of the revenue budget and MTFS for general consultation. Cabinet had been asked to note the adjustments.

After all adjustments, the MTFS showed a balanced budget position for 2023/24 and 2024/25, and an estimated budget gap of £6.321m to £13.143m for 2025/26. This was due largely to the uncertainty of the Social Care Grant. As the budget was approved annually, the latter two years of the MTFS, especially year 3, would be subject to review and adjustment before being finally approved.

The final MTFS was based on the Local Government Indicative Financial Settlement received on 19 December 2022. The final settlement was received on 7 February 2023. Any impact on the budget and MTFS would be managed through the Contingency for Unforeseen Items. The Council held a contingency for unforeseen items (£1.248m) which was intended to support uncertainties. The Council would still be required to review the budget on a yearly basis.

In the discussion that ensued, Members made comments and asked the following questions:

- Given the estimated budget gap, was there a “Plan B” to deliver services if the gap was not bridged?
- What pressure was the Place Directorate under to achieve its target of issuing 50 000 traffic and parking violations, such as penalty charge notices (PCNs) or fixed penalty notice (FPNs), and would current staffing levels of enforcement officers be adequate?

- Was there statistical data on PCNs and FPNs to demonstrate the trend over the years, and to determine whether residents' mind-sets had changed in relation to following traffic regulations?
- Was there pressure on enforcement officers to issue more fines, and were they required to meet "targets"?
- What effect would the budget gap have on Adult Services, and what would be "Plan B" if funding was inadequate?
- The budget saving on waste collection showed possible changes to day and routes collection, would this affect service delivery?

In response, the Director of Finance and Assurance (S151 Officer) advised as follows:

- Citing page 21 of the Report, which showed the legal requirement of achieving a balanced budget, it was acknowledged that meeting some of the savings would be challenging. However, not all savings would start on 1 April 2023, as some would begin mid-year (June 2023).
- Some savings had a risk element to them. However, with better enforcement and use of technology, it was envisaged that the target of set by the Place Directorate for more PCNs and FPNs would be met.
- Furthermore, PCNs were not just for raising monies but also to help change the mindset of the drivers, as there were many people breaking the law, especially in Harrow.
- There was statistical data to show trends in the issuance of traffic and parking fines over the years. This showed they were having some effect. If there was a risk that the target may not be achieved, and it would be reviewed. Enforcement officers were not required to meet specific targets of issuing fines.
- It was expected that the saving target for Adult Services would be met, and this would begin mid-year.
- During the national lockdown arising from the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19), more waste collection trucks were deployed as residents were at home, which led to more disposal of waste. However, the current situation meant the extra trucks could be withdrawn, as well as the additional routes.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.30 pm, closed at 7.42 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Yogesh Teli
Chair