

## **SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

Minutes of a meeting held at the Council Offices, Narborough

**WEDNESDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2023**

### **Present:-**

Cllr. Nick Brown (Chairman - Scrutiny Commissioner)  
Cllr. Roy Denney (Vice-Chairman - Scrutiny Commissioner)

Cllr. Luke Cousin  
Cllr. Janet Forey

Cllr. Antony Moseley  
Cllr. Tracey Shepherd

Cllr. Neil Wright

### **Officers present:-**

Julia Smith	- Chief Executive
Nick Brown	- Finance Group Manager
Katie Brooman	- Elections and Governance Manager
Sandeep Tiensa	- Senior Democratic Services & Scrutiny Officer
Nicole Cramp	- Democratic & Scrutiny Services Officer
Isaac Thomas	- Democracy Support Officer

### **Apologies:-**

Cllr. Susan Findlay and Cllr. Matt Tomeo

#### **147. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS**

No disclosures were received.

#### **148. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023, as circulated, were approved and signed as a correct record.

**149. QUARTER 2 BUDGET REVIEW 2023-24**

Considered - report of the Accountancy Services Manager, presented by the Finance Group Manager.

The Chairman, Cllr. Nick Brown queried the profiled budget for car park income and asked why this figure was reduced.

The Finance Group Manager explained that the forecast budget was reduced to a more realistic level to reflect the reduction of footfall that was experienced since the pandemic.

The Chairman, Cllr. Nick Brown highlighted the risk of planning appeals and asked whether there was a need to review the budget to reflect the current risk.

The Finance Group Manager responded that Planning Appeals are not generally included in the budget due to their unpredictability. However, given the likelihood of an appeal forthcoming against the decision made at a recent Planning Committee, this would be accounted for in the Quarter 3 Budget.

The Vice-Chair, Cllr. Roy Denney asked for general feedback on the performance of Fosse Park given the current climate and reduced footfall mentioned in the report.

The Chief Executive responded that Fosse Park was one of the best performing retail centres in the country during the pandemic and that while the shopping park has not reached pre-Covid levels of growth, it has experienced more growth than several equivalent developments. The Chief Executive stated that Fosse Park continues to attract high numbers of visitors due to the diversity of the site, particularly the nature and leisure offer at Everards Meadows.

Cllr. Luke Cousin asked why there was a shortfall in both Planning and Building Control fee income. Cllr. Cousin asked whether this downturn was related to residents having less disposable income.

The Finance Group Manager responded that the downward trend in Planning fee income began during the pandemic as the Council received fewer large fee applications. The Finance Group Manager explained that the decision by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to permit an increase in Planning Fees would help to bring the Council back towards its target, although the income provided would likely remain short of the budgeted target. Regarding the decline in Building Control fee income, the Finance Group Manager stated that he believed this was caused by the general economic situation with fewer residents being able to afford extensions. The Finance Group Manager also pointed out that the Building Control deficit would be shared with BDC's partners.

Cllr. Luke Cousin asked whether the Council was pricing correctly in terms of Planning and Building Control fees?

The Finance Group Manager responded that the extent to which BDC can increase fees and charges is impacted by market forces. The Finance Group Manager explained that the Council would seek an inflationary increase of fees and charges.

The Chairman, Cllr. Nick Brown asked for the Chief Executive's comments on the recruitment and retention of staff.

The Chief Executive explained that vacancies are dealt with on an individual basis and reflect each department's specific demand for staff and ability to deal with staff shortages. The Chief Executive discussed the impact of two senior staff members, the Executive Director and the Business Partnership & Health Improvement Group Manager, due to be leaving BDC in the near future. The Chief Executive advised Members that both would be replaced on a permanent basis, with an interim replacement being sought for the Executive Director. The Chief Executive also informed Members of the difficulties competing with the private sector, particularly in terms of IT recruitment, and the difficulties recruiting temporary staff to departments such as Finance.

#### **150. QUARTER 2 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023-24**

Considered - report of the Accountancy Services Manager, presented by the Finance Group Manager.

Members questioned the Finance Group Manager on the following:

- The impact of additional borrowing costs through interest rate rises.
- The impact of building costs, given the increase in labour and material costs across the sector.
- The affordability of schemes and strategies, e.g. the Green agenda and the Parks & Open Spaces Strategy.
- How the Council's reserves are performing in the investment market and whether there are better investment opportunities. The Finance Group Manager provided an overview of investment opportunities and discussed the restrictions of the Prudential Code.

**151. MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING REPORT 2023-24**

Considered - report of the Finance Group Manager.

Members questioned the Finance Group Manager on the following:

- Potential returns on the Property Fund and the timeline for this.
- The effects of inflation on the Council's costs.
- How does the Council budget for inflationary increases.

**152. CORPORATE PLAN UPDATE**

Considered – presentation by the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive provided an overview of the Corporate Plan process and updated Members on the feedback received during the consultation phase, which included consultations with the public, BDC staff, the Parishes and the Youth Council.

Key areas of feedback included:

- Members of the public really value the work that the Council does and appreciate the Council's transparency.
- Members of the public placed more importance on helping the vulnerable, and less on tourism and business.
- Members of the public understand the position of local authorities in terms of finance and delivery.
- BDC staff had a particular impact on the values section of the plan.
- The Full Council workshop provided an insight into our Member Development needs.
- The Youth Council asked that a Youth version of the plan be created for them.

Cllr. Luke Cousin asked whether a broad demographic was consulted in the public consultations and whether any demographic groups were unrepresented.

The Chief Executive explained that focus groups were used during the public consultations to reflect the needs of our communities. These focus groups were formed from an Equalities and Diversity perspective, representing a mix of ethnic backgrounds and locations across the District and giving voice to specific groups of residents such as those with disabilities. The Chief Executive discussed the challenges of engaging with vulnerable residents, such as our homeless residents. However, the Chief Executive explained that the needs of vulnerable residents were also reflected in the Corporate Plan through consultation with members of staff who engage with them on a regular basis.

**153. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24**

Members accepted the items on the Scrutiny Work Programme 2023-24 and no additional actions were proposed.

**154. CONSIDERATION OF FORWARD PLAN ITEMS**

No items were raised for further information or examination.

**155. FURTHER ACTIONS FOR SCRUTINY ARISING FROM MEETING**

There were no further actions arising from the meeting.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 6.54 P.M.**