

MINUTE
of
CABINET

Minute of meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 2 November 2023.

Present:

Councillor Owen O'Donnell (Leader)	Councillor Danny Devlin
Councillor Andrew Anderson (Vice Chair)	Councillor Katie Pragnell

Councillor O'Donnell, Leader, in the Chair

Attending:

Steven Quinn, Chief Executive; Caitriona McAuley, Director of Environment; Louise Pringle, Director of Business Operations and Partnerships; Lesley Bairden, Head of Finance and Resources (Chief Financial Officer), East Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)(*); Phil Daws, Head of Environment (Strategic Services); Julie Breslin, Strategy and Partnership Manager; Paul Parsons, Principal Accountant; John Burke, Committee Services Officer; and Jennifer Graham, Committee Services Officer.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

652. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

ESTIMATED REVENUE BUDGET OUT-TURN 2023/24

653. The Cabinet considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) detailing the estimated projected revenue budget out-turn for 2023/24 and providing details of the expected year-end variances together with summary cost information for each of the undernoted services as at 31 August 2023 and subsequent assessment of pressures arising.

- (i) Education Department;
- (ii) Contribution to Integration Joint Board;
- (iii) Environment Department;
- (iv) Environment Department – Support;
- (v) Chief Executive's Office;
- (vi) Chief Executive's Office – Support;
- (vii) Business Operations and Partnerships Department;
- (viii) Business Operations and Partnerships Department – Support;
- (ix) Other Expenditure and Income;
- (x) Joint Boards;
- (xi) Corporate Contingency;
- (xii) Health and Social Care Partnership; and
- (xiii) Housing Revenue Account.

The Chief Accountant advised that on the basis of the information, and taking account of forecast Council Tax collection, a year end operational underspend of £3,037k was forecast on General Fund services. The reasons for departmental variances were set out in the report. She outlined that any such operational underspend at this year-end would assist the Council in meeting future years' budget challenges.

It was noted that the above figures reflected that £6,396k of forecast COVID-related pressures would be covered by drawing on the Council's COVID grant resources and as a result did not impact on the operational budget position.

It was noted that the forecast outturn position could still be subject to significant change, for example if COVID pressures increased again. Conversely, it was hoped that management action to avoid any non-essential expenditure could increase the underspend at year end.

In addition, the report sought approval for a number of service virements and operational budget adjustments, details of which were outlined.

Following a brief discussion, where the improved position in the Council's finances was welcomed by Cabinet members, the Cabinet agreed:-

- (a) to note the forecast underlying General Fund operational underspend of £3,037k together with the HRA operational out-turn in line with budget;
- (b) to note the continued financial pressures on operational services arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and that it was expected to cover those from the COVID grant reserve; and
- (c) to approve service virements and operational adjustments as set out in the notes to the tables in the appendices to the report and note the reported probable out-turn position

COVID RESERVE – REVIEW & FINAL PROPOSALS

654. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships on the progress of humanitarian projects that were allocated COVID reserve funding for 2023/2024 and seeking approval for the allocation of the remaining non-recurring COVID recovery reserves.

In speaking to the report, the Strategy and Partnership Manager provided details of a number of the programmes and outcomes achieved by the spending carried out so far, full details of which were provided in Annex 1 of the report.

As there had been an underspend of £244,000 from initial funding allocations, an an additional £1.3m of funding unallocated from the wider COVID grant reserve, proposals to a value of £1.54m were outlined in annex 2 of the report. The Strategy and Partnership Manager gave examples of those projects for Cabinet.

It was highlighted that £687,000 had been earmarked toward Health and Social Care Partnership contingency and support, to assist with the direct and indirect health harms caused by COVID. It was proposed that any uncommitted underspend remaining in the COVID reserves would be allocated to HSCP to assist in-year budget pressures and COVID related impact.

There followed a brief discussion where specific areas of support were discussed. In particular, Councillor Devlin sought clarity around the use of funding to support areas of youth disorder and families in short-stay accommodation. The Head of Environment (Strategic Services) agreed to liaise with the Councillor on the cases he raised.

Thereafter, the Cabinet:-

- (a) noted the progress made toward delivering proposals from the COVID Reserves for humanitarian projects in 2023/2024 set out in Annex 1 to the report;
- (b) approved the final allocation of circa £1.54m of COVID reserves from previous years' Scottish Government funding to support pandemic recovery and renewal as detailed in Annex 2 to the report;
- (c) agreed that any uncommitted underspend remaining in the COVID reserves at year-end 2023/24 be allocated to the Health and Social Care Partnership to assist in-year budget pressures and COVID related impact in the event that HSCP was unable to bring spend back into target;
- (d) delegated to the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships and Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer), in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to exercise flexibility in the terms of the proposals, to ensure most effective use of funding within the spirit of COVID recovery, capacity building and provision of support to the most vulnerable residents; and
- (e) noted that the Head of Environment (Strategic Services) would liaise with Councillor Devlin in terms of his concerns around transport provision to people in homeless accommodation.

HRA LAND SALE LOCATED AT SPRINGFIELD ROAD, BARRHEAD

655. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment on a proposal to vary an existing contract with Ironside Farrar consultants acting for the Council in relation to the sale of land at Springfield Road, Barrhead.

The Council had agreed to the disposal of the land at its meeting on 28 June 2023 (Page 573, Item 520 refers), and Ironside Farrar had been appointed to progress the disposal on behalf of the Council for a fee of £115,250.

The work to progress the disposal had led to additional elements of work, in addition to the original scope, being required. This had been offset against an amount of planned expenditure which had not been spent on consultation with planning case officers, other council departments and statutory consultees, which had been deemed unnecessary.

Additional advice was also required to review the developer's site investigation scope and proposals, which would require additional costs of £9,875 to be considered. Together with the other additional sums required, this brought the commitment to Ironside Farrar to £128,000. In line with Standing Order 14 of the Council's Contract Standing Orders, any variation in contracts for goods and services above £50,000 over 10% of the initial value, would be referred to the Chief Officer – Legal and Procurement for consideration and, if sanctioned by them, must be reported to Cabinet for approval prior to the variation being instructed.

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As the Chief Officer- Legal and Procurement had sanctioned the variation, it was now being remitted to Cabinet for a final decision.

The report noted that the sum of the £12,750 total variation would be met from the Housing Revenue Account.

Thereafter, the Cabinet approved the request to vary the existing contract with Ironside Farrar in relation to the sale of land at Springfield Road, Barrhead.

CHAIR