

MINUTE
of
CABINET

Minute of virtual meeting held at 10.00am on 21 October 2021.

Present:

Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)
Councillor Danny Devlin

Councillor Alan Lafferty
Councillor Colm Merrick

Councillor Buchanan, Leader, in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Andy Cahill, Director of Environment; Margaret McCrossan, Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer); Phil Daws, Head of Environment (Strategic Services); Colin Hutton, Senior Communications Officer; Sharon McIntyre, Committee Services Officer and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

Apologies:

Councillors Caroline Bamforth and Betty Cunningham.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1780. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING (OUTTURN)

1781. The Cabinet considered a report by the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) detailing the projected revenue budget out-turn for 2021/22 and providing details of the expected year-end variances together with summary cost information for each of the undernoted services as at 31 August 2021 and subsequent assessment of pressures arising from COVID-19.

- (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) Corporate and Community Services Department – Community Resources;
- (viii) Corporate and Community Services Department – Support;
- (ix) Other Expenditure and Income;
- (x) Joint Boards;
- (xi) Contingency – Welfare;

- (xii) Health and Social Care Partnership; and
- (xiii) Housing Revenue Account.

The report advised that on the basis of the latest information, and taking account of forecast Council Tax collection, a year end overspend of £0.175m or 0.1% of the annual budget was forecast on General Fund services. The reasons for departmental variances were set out in the report but the position reflected £1.464m of COVID pressures, offset by £1.289m of operational Council underspends.

The report noted that all of the pandemic pressures currently forecast could be covered by the COVID grant funding awarded to the Council to date, resulting in a net forecast underspend of £1.289m (0.5%). Any such operational underspend at this year-end would assist the Council in meeting future years' budget challenges.

However, the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) advised that the latest forecast could be subject to significant change, for example if COVID pressures increased again or if the current year pay award was settled at a higher level than anticipated. Given the tight nature of the Council's finances in the current economic climate, the Cabinet would continue to actively monitor and receive regular reports on the financial performance throughout the course of the year and all reports would include updated outturn forecasts.

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

Members discussed the current financial position with regard to previous years, and having heard from the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer), the Cabinet:-

- (a) noted the continued financial pressures on operational services arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and that it is expected to cover these from accumulated COVID grant funding.
- (b) noted the forecast underlying General Fund operational underspend of £1,289k.
- (c) approved service virements and operational adjustments as set out in the notes to the tables on pages 14 to 30 and noted the reported probable outturn position;
- (d) noted all departments continue to closely monitor and manage their budgets and ensure that spending up to operational budget levels does not take place.

HOUSING SERVICES ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT 2020/21 (SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING CHARTER)

1782. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment seeking approval for the Annual Assurance Statement (AAS) 2021. The AAS outlined the Housing Services' compliance with the Scottish Housing Regulator's (SHR) Regulatory Framework, the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) and the Council's statutory obligations. It also took into account the Council's engagement plan with the SHR. It was explained that the AAS was an annual requirement for all Register Social Landlords (RSLs) by the SHR. The AAS required a self-evaluation to be undertaken by each landlord looking at performance and the quality of services provided and should be accompanied by an appropriate action plan, where any areas of non-compliance with standards were identified.

Commenting on the report, the Head of Environment (Strategic Services) explained that the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) required each landlord to provide the SHR with details of performance against 37 performance indicators and information for 32 contextual indicators. This was known as the “Annual Return on the Charter” (ARC).

The SHR used the information to produce a summary landlord report for every social landlord in Scotland and this information was published on the regulator’s website. Furthermore, the regulator also produced an engagement plan for each landlord, which outlined the areas of scrutiny they would focus on based on the previous year’s reported performance.

The Head of Environment (Strategic Services) advised that the performance report against the SSHC demonstrated that Housing Services was performing well in comparison to last year and the average for the housing sector in Scotland.

The report highlighted areas of good performance in repairs, maintenance, estates and tenancies sustained. A number of improvement areas had been identified and an Assurance Statement which addressed the areas required for improvement was also appended to the report, it being noted that in terms of improving performance the Council would focus on void management and rent collection and arrears management.

Members discussed the issue of rent arrears experienced by individuals as an effect of Universal Credit and that this issue had previously been highlighted to the UK Government. In response to questioning from Members, the Head of Environment (Strategic Services) outlined the process for the handling of antisocial behaviour cases.

The Cabinet: -

- (a) noted the performance report against SSHC indicators and measures and how the Housing Service compared against both 2019-20 performance and the average for the housing sector;
- (b) noted the proposed Action Plan to further strengthen compliance against the Regulatory Framework and SSHC; and
- (c) approved the AAS 2021 which has been prepared taking into account the outcomes of Housing Services self-evaluation of performance.

STRATEGIC HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN 2022-2027 - REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT

1783. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment, seeking approval for the proposed Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2022/23–2026/27 and for its submission to Scottish Government. A copy of the Strategic Housing Investment Programme (SHIP) was appended to the report.

The report explained that the Scottish Government required councils to supplement their Local Housing Strategy with an annual review of the SHIP setting out their affordable housing priorities for the next 5 years. The current Resource Planning Assumptions (RPA) for 2021-26 for East Renfrewshire was £37.497m. Proposed details of the subsidies both the Council and Registered Social Landlords (RSL) received for each property to be built was outlined in the report, it being noted that a disparity still remained between councils and RSL.

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The proposed SHIP detailed the approach to prioritising projects, which focused on the delivery of social rented homes (including Council New Build); proposals for affordable housing to meet a range of needs, including smaller and family homes, and those suitable for the elderly and disabled; and developments with the greatest certainty over timing and deliverability.

The proposed SHIP could deliver 522 units of new affordable housing primarily focused on new provision and social housing. A number of affordable properties for sale are also expected, but will largely be delivered outwith the SHIP through developer contributions (and without subsidy). Approximately 10% of the new units programmed are expected to be suitable for particular needs.

Furthermore it was noted, to help meet the need and demand for affordable housing, the SHIP required to be weighted to building in the Eastwood area. However the availability of land in this area meant that this was not always possible and developments in Lavern Valley would be considered. It was also noted that private ownership of a number of sites meant that development timescales could not always be controlled by the Council.

Having heard from the Head of Environment (Strategic Services), the Cabinet approved the East Renfrewshire Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2022/23–2026/27 for submission to Scottish Government.

CHAIR