

COUNCIL
29 September 2022

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 1 2022/23

2. We received the quarter 1 information in relation to the capital resource and commitment position of the Council's capital programme. The Council Project Position Statement currently has 48 live projects being managed with an overall projected outturn value of £186.911 million.
3. The majority of the Council's projects are running to time, cost and quality expectations and, following questions by Members, we were reassured that regular monitoring was being undertaken given the current financial pressures and that both fixed cost option contracts and inflation indices were used when estimating contracts to provide an element of security.
4. We were provided with information on those contracts which were showing a variance, together with the reasons for those variances and the action being taken.

Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2021/22

5. We considered the Annual report which was also considered by Cabinet in relation to the number of complaints, compliments and comments which had been received by the Authority during 2021/22.
6. The Council constantly strives to ensure an organisational structure in which complaints and accepted, owned and resolved as quickly as possible and one in which learning from complaints is used to improve services. There is also a statutory requirement for the Council to produce annual reports in respect of representations received under the Adult Social Care, the Children's Social Care and the Public Health Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedures.
7. We were advised that, during 2021/22, 739 complaints had been received, an increase from 628 in 2020/21, 217 compliments had been received, again a decrease from the previous year and that there had been a decrease in the number of comments which had been received from 178 to 127.
8. It is important for the Authority to analyse the complaints to determine whether there are any concerns in any particular areas and we were given some examples of where organisational learning resulting from complaints had been implemented.
9. Although the number of complaints has increased slightly over the last year, the increase is minimal given the pressures the Authority and its services faced during the pandemic and

we had no further comments thereon to make to Cabinet.

Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman

10. We have also considered a report which was considered by Cabinet outlining the outcome of cases which have been determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) during 2021/22, together with the LGSCO's Annual Review Letter 2022, which contains information on the Council's performance in relation to complaints.
11. During the period 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, 16 cases were the subject of decision by the LGSCO and two cases were the subject of decision by the HOS.

Investment Fund Update

12. Scrutiny considered a report, again which was considered by Cabinet in relation to the progress against the agreed investments being funded through the Investment Fund.
13. As Members will be aware, the Investment Fund was established by the Council in November 2016 to use for innovative investment opportunities beyond the traditional Treasury Management Strategy, in order to achieve greater returns given the low returns on investments. The original investment was increased to £50 million in November 2018.
14. We were advised that the £50 million was being used as envisaged to include Joint Venture (JV) vehicles and economic regeneration initiatives, with pre tax returns on the JV's anticipated to be over £6 million. Three of the JV schemes have now been completed and the investment fund fully repaid to the Council.
15. Although the pandemic did have an impact on the schemes construction timescales, they are now all back on track and sales are buoyant.
16. The agreed investment fund has a commitment against it of £33.48 million, leaving a balance of £16.52 million uncommitted. Officers are actively looking at schemes which could be agreed, subject to approval, to utilise the fund to for wider economic benefits.

Work Programme

17. We considered our work programme for the remainder of this Municipal Year and asked for an update on how the current financial pressures may impact on both residents and Council budgets. It is important that, as a Scrutiny Committee, we closely monitor this and consider what the Council can do to support and signpost communities to financial advice and assistance.
18. We have also asked for information to be provided on the administrative processes around the payment of the Government's Council Tax energy rebate which was administered by the Council and the resource implications in administering that scheme at short notice.

Councillor Heather Scott
Chair Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee