

## Review Committee – 6 July 2021

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **6 July 2021** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr S A Wilson  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs J E McPherson

Cllr R P Constable	Cllr G W Myers
Cllr R R Dray	Cllr Mrs C A Pavelin
Cllr Mrs E P Gadsdon	Cllr Mrs L Shaw
Cllr J N Gooding	Cllr P J Shaw
Cllr B T Hazlewood	Cllr M G Wilkinson
Cllr Mrs C M Mason	

### **VISITING MEMBERS**

Cllrs Mrs J R Gooding, Mrs C E Roe, S P Smith, D J Sperring and S E Wootton.

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs I A Foster, J E Newport and M G Wilkinson.

### **SUBSTITUTES**

Cllr Mrs C A Weston – for Cllr I A Foster

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

A Hutchings	- Acting Managing Director
N Lucas	- Assistant Director, Resources
S Worthington	- Principal Democratic & Corporate Services Officer
L Morris	- Democratic Services Officer

### **103 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **104 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REVIEW 2020/21**

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director, Resources providing a summary of the Council's Treasury Management activity for the 202/21 financial year.

The Assistant Director confirmed, in response to a Member question on paragraph 4.2 of the report as to whether the investments of £6 million with Handelsbanken and £2 million with Prime Money Market Fund were on demand, that the amount placed with both were instant access.

Responding to a supplementary Member question requesting details of the interest rates and the lengths of term for the investments with Santander and

Lloyds the Assistant Director advised that the report provided a snapshot of the position at financial year end. Interest rates earned on a particular investment may vary during the year. It would be possible to provide details of these particular investments at the 31 March 2021 position; however, that would not necessarily represent the position in terms of investments throughout the course of the year.

The Member emphasised that the report indicated that these particular investments were at a fixed interest rate and it should therefore logically follow that the interest rate would be fixed for those investments. Although the interest rate was usually flexible in the case of on demand money, with fixed rate investment the interest rate and term of investment was generally known. The Assistant Director stated that although the rate would be fixed for those particular investments at any individual time, nevertheless investment rates could vary throughout the year.

In response to a Member question relating to risk and what factors informed decisions around which institutions to invest with, the Assistant Director confirmed that risk appetite was determined by the Council via the Treasury Management Strategy agreed in February. This was informed by 'colour-coded' advice provided by the Council's Treasury Management advisers. The Council only invested in banks and money markets that were very low risk. She further confirmed, in response to a further question on these advisers, that the Council had appointed Link Asset Services by means of a procurement exercise via a framework agreement.

The Assistant Director advised, in response to a question around comparison of the Council's investment performance compared to other local authorities, that Link provided the Council with detailed benchmarking data on investment performance; the Council's investment rates were generally above average for the level of risk the Council was prepared to take. Responding to a supplementary question about the nature of the contractual arrangement with Link Asset Services, the Assistant Director confirmed that the treasury management advice service was procured by means of a procurement framework relatively recently, although she would need to check when this had been. . The market was limited for this service with a very small number of companies providing this expertise but the Council would consider all options before re-procuring

The Portfolio Holder for Financial Services drew attention to the Assistant Director's delegated authority in respect of decisions around borrowing, investment and financing, detailed in paragraph 2.2 of the report. He also highlighted that the Council's treasury management-related income in 2020/21, as set out in paragraph 1.4 of the report, was disappointing; however, it had been difficult to project this during the pandemic and the Council's performance was consistently above average. He also drew particular attention to the speed with which grants were distributed to businesses needing them, details of which were set out in paragraph 4.3 of the report. He emphasised that the annual cost of the service provided by Link was modest.

### Resolved

That the contents of the report be recommended to Council. (ADR)

(13 Members voted in favour of the Motion, 0 against and 0 abstained.)

### 105 COVID-19 LESSONS LEARNED AND UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Acting Managing Director setting out lessons learned and updates regarding the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response to a Member request for more details of the continuing officer support from the Community Hub set up early on in the pandemic, reference in paragraph 3.2 of the report, the Acting Managing Director advised that the Hub was a partnership between the Council and a number of voluntary sector organisations. As we moved through the first phase of the pandemic and the second lockdown period, the ownership of the Hub moved from the Council to the community support and they took over and began to run it in terms of mobilising support and the volunteer network, continuing to work in partnership with the Council and reporting to the Health and Wellbeing Board. The ongoing work remained exemplar and the County Council was looking to support that work. The bonds built by the volunteers and those being supported amongst the clinically vulnerable remained strong and informal networks continued to provide help, support, shopping and prescriptions and general befriending. These networks remained strong, particularly the church network.

The Acting Managing Director advised, in response to a question whether the rise in the number of approaches to the Council's Housing Options team, referenced in paragraph 3.4 of the report, was directly related to COVID-19, e.g., to residents being furloughed, that she would provide details of this to Members outside the meeting. However, displacements were certainly created during lockdown periods as a result of domestic violence and other strained family situations where people presented as homeless.

Responding to a Member question about Environmental Health assisting in ensuring that local outbreaks of COVID-19 were dealt with in a timely fashion, as detailed in paragraph 3.9 of the report, the Acting Managing Director advised that the issue for the Council's Environmental Health team as part of the second tier response to the County Council's first tier track and trace was to follow up local contacts across the district as information was given to the Council. Information relating to an average turn around time would be provided to Members outside the meeting. The team, in terms of providing timely fashion was to contact trace and provide that information back to the County Council so that the NHS Test and Trace team could reach out and make contact with them and isolation periods could begin. There were occasions when information wasn't provided to the Council as quickly as it might otherwise have been but the team then capitalised on that and tried to make up for lost time by getting

out there as quickly as possible. The Environmental Health team was part of a 24-hour, 7 days a week rota, along with District colleagues from across the county so the response was fairly uniform. Some local authorities had more available officers than others and a number of the Council's Environmental Health team were clinically vulnerable and were shielding so the Council was part of a joint effort across the county. The dependency on the Environmental Health colleagues second tier Councils will continue; the Prime Minister made direct reference to continuing track and trace regardless of how the situation is after 19 July. That team met weekly with the Director of Public Health and information was provided and cascaded to that team in relation to local outbreaks and how to manage them. The Environmental Health team already had a good working relationship with businesses and during the peak of the pandemic they were working with businesses consistently to ensure that those that were able to operate could operate safely and those that were prohibited from opening remained closed. As things had moved on during the pandemic, in conjunction with colleagues in Licensing, the Environmental Health team had continued to take a proactive approach to working with businesses to help them reopen safely and to give confidence to shoppers and residents to continue to use those services. Equally the team had not shied away from bringing enforcement action when required to do so, although this had been the exception rather than the rule, and the continuing approach was one of building on those working relationships.

In response to a Member query about the take up by staff of the Employee Assistance Programme and as to whether this was confidential, the Acting Managing Director confirmed that the Employee Assistance Programme had been in place for several years. It was taken up by staff, included free counselling services and was completely confidential. The Council had a mental health first aider who had been providing support; however, the Council was a small authority and the first aider was another member of staff and the issue of confidentiality was a potential barrier to accessing the support of the mental health first aider. The Council was therefore seeking to work with another authority to buddy up with someone from outside the organisation so that there was someone entirely independent with whom officers might speak, if they wished to do so.

The Acting Managing Director confirmed, in response to a Member request for detailed information of what current support was being provided by the Community Hub to residents so that any potential gaps might be identified, that she would feed this back to Members outside the meeting.

In response to a Member question as to when the final quarterly figures for the tables in paragraph 3.4 of the report on number of approaches to the Council's Housing Options service and numbers of claims for housing benefit/council tax support would be available, the Acting Managing Director advised that the Assistant Director, People and Communities would be asked to provide a copy of her quarterly update to the Committee outside of this meeting, as that would include the requested information.

Responding to a Member question relating to paragraph 3.13 of the report as to what level of demand there had been for Reception face to face services to customers, the Acting Managing Director confirmed that demand had been steady and consistent, but not overwhelmed. Following the easing of restrictions on 19 July, Reception would be re-opened with a Receptionist on duty and there would be more monitoring undertaken to ascertain how many residents were coming on site.

A Member remarked that she had received telephone calls from residents asking if she was able to assist with volunteers to help with shopping, etc and it as possible that the Community Hub might be losing some of its volunteers. The Acting Managing Director observed that it was inevitable that numbers of volunteers might decrease as people returned to the workplace. She would feed back any further information on this to Members.

In response to a Member question relating to likely future working patterns for Council staff, the Acting Managing Director advised that information from staff surveys highlighted that the agile working policy had been predominantly successful and that officers liked the flexibility of being able to manage their workload and location. There was, however, equally a demand for coming onto site, not just for seeing clients, but also for undertaking peer support work and working collaboratively as part of a team. It was clear that social isolation was equally as destructive as the risk of COVID-19 in a larger environment. She anticipated to see a gradual drifting back to the South Street offices as confidence increased and as teams became used to working together again, and that would be very positive. In terms of managing the work/life balance the agile working policy, with a new flexi time policy that was also being introduced, was meeting most officers' requirements. It was important to guard against an extra hours culture where it was difficult for officers to separate their working environment from being at home; when staff were working from home all the time that was difficult to manage. Working in a hybrid manner going forward appeared to be the conclusion of the staff survey. There were some teams, for example, Revenues and Benefits and Planning teams, where working collaboratively with colleagues actually created a better product, provided better peer support, allowed people to bounce ideas from one another, ensuring that an internal quality control took place, which was difficult to achieve when working in isolation. There were some officers who continued to work from the site as they had done throughout the pandemic, e.g., the Licensing Team continued to see taxi drivers and other applicants on site in a COVID secure way, although they were one of the first in the county to pioneer digital ways of working. The creativity and innovation that the pandemic had caused meant that the best elements could be cherry picked going forward. The mandate that staff would no longer need to work from home would be positively received.

### **Resolved**

That the report be noted (AMD).

### 106 KEY DECISIONS DOCUMENT

Members considered and noted the contents of the Key Decisions Document.

### 107 WORK PLAN

The Chairman of the Management of Public Open Spaces Working Group provided an update to the Committee on the work of the Working Group. In January 2020 the Working Group requested four separate pieces of information. Delays in the provision of the information and the subsequent pandemic led to a delay in setting up a further meeting. Towards the end of last year some of the outstanding information was provided, including a report that had been commissioned by officers and was informative and helpful. However, the Group had not yet received details of the costs of that report. The Working Group reconvened after the Elections, without officer administration and was working well and moving forward relatively quickly. Thanks were extended to all Members of the Working Group, including Cllrs P J Shaw, M Hoy, D J Sperring, and S A Wilson for their constructive input. The Working Group would be compiling a report for consideration by this Committee and subsequent recommendation to Full Council and it was anticipated that this would be ready for the September 2021 meeting. A recommendation from the Working Group was: 'That the problem of the historic sites be addressed by a separate Working Group with a suggestion that this be done on a site by site basis and that consideration be given to the Birds Estate first, as there are known issues.'

The Chairman of the Working Group advised that the complexity of two competing ideologies had caused difficulty and had led to the recommendation, and it was requested that this be added to the Committee's work plan.

The Committee Chairman said that the Group was working well and flexibly and was Member-led. There was, however, officer input, but this way of working impacted less on officer capacity and meant that work could progress at pace.

In response to a Member question as to whether an officer made notes of these meetings, it was confirmed that notes were made by the Working Group Chairman, circulated and agreed, with any requested amendments made as necessary. Any Member of the Group could, however, take notes if they wished to do so. It was noted, in response to a Member suggestion that a copy of those notes should be forwarded to officers so an office copy could be kept.

The Chairman of the Committee advised that he was anticipating that more such Working Groups would be set up during the course of the year. He was liaising with relevant Assistant Directors in respect of the following potential areas of work: Section 106 works from the initial outline of what the Section 106 agreement would provide in the development to the actual implementation; the process around how assets were released to third parties from the Council to, e.g., Parish/Town Councils, charities or community groups.

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He confirmed that he was waiting for the relevant Assistant Directors to respond to him on these potential subjects so that work could be scoped and so that Members could be asked if they would be interested in participating in such Working Groups.

The meeting closed at 8.18 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....

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