

FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting held via Confero and in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Almada Street, Hamilton on 28 June 2023

Chair:

Councillor Lesley McDonald

Councillors Present:

Councillor Alex Allison, Councillor Walter Brogan (Depute), Councillor Mathew Buchanan, Councillor Andy Carmichael, Councillor Maureen Chalmers, Councillor Margaret Cooper, Councillor Andrea Cowan, Councillor Maureen Devlin, Councillor Colin Dewar, Councillor Mary Donnelly, Councillor Grant Ferguson, Councillor Gladys Ferguson-Miller, Councillor Celine Handibode (Depute), Councillor Graeme Horne, Councillor Martin Hose, Councillor Richard Lockhart (*substitute for Councillor Richard Nelson*), Councillor Katy Loudon, Councillor Elaine McDougall, Councillor Carol Nugent (*substitute for Councillor Hugh Macdonald*), Councillor Mo Razzaq, Councillor Graham Scott

Councillors' Apologies:

Councillor Joe Fagan (ex officio), Councillor Hugh Macdonald, Councillor Catherine McClymont, Councillor Mark McGeever, Councillor Richard Nelson, Councillor John Ross

Attending:

Finance and Corporate Resources

P Manning, Executive Director; C Fergusson, Head of Finance (Transactions); T Little, Head of Communications and Strategy; C Lyon, Administration Officer; G McCann, Head of Administration and Legal Services; K McLeod, Administration Assistant; M Milne, Head of Personnel Services; J Taylor, Head of Finance (Strategy); L Wyllie, Administration Assistant

Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, welcomed Michelle Milne, Head of Personnel Services to her first meeting of the Finance and Corporate Resources Committee.

1 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Corporate Resources Committee held on 3 May 2023 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

The Committee decided: that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

3 Minutes of Grievance and Disputes Panel

The minutes of the meeting of the Grievance and Disputes Panel held on 10 May 2023 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

The Committee decided: that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

4 Minutes of Recruitment Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Recruitment Committee held on 25 May 2023 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

The Committee decided: that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

5 Revenue Budget Monitoring 2022/2023 - Finance and Corporate Resources

A report dated 5 June 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted comparing the actual expenditure for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 against budgeted expenditure for 2022/2023 for Finance and Corporate Resources.

As at 31 March 2023, there was an underspend of £0.978 million before transfers to reserves, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, and a breakeven position after transfers to reserves.

On 21 June 2023, the Executive Committee had approved transfers to reserves of £0.978 million to meet future commitments.

Virements were proposed to realign budgets and those movements were detailed in the appendices to the report.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the final outturn position as at 31 March 2023 of an underspend of £0.978 million before transfers to reserves, and a breakeven position after transfers to reserves, as detailed in Appendix A of the report, be noted; and
- (2) that the proposed budget virements, as detailed in the appendices to the report, be approved.

[Reference: Minutes of 3 May 2023 (Paragraph 6) and Minutes of the Executive Committee of 21 June 2023 (Paragraph 3)]

6 Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/2024 - Finance and Corporate Resources

A report dated 5 June 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted comparing actual expenditure for the period 1 April to 19 May 2023 against budgeted expenditure for 2023/2024 for Finance and Corporate Resources.

As at 19 May 2023, there was a breakeven position against the phased budget, detailed in Appendix A to the report.

The forecast to 31 March 2023 was a breakeven position.

A virement was proposed to realign budgets and those movements were detailed in Appendix F to the report.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the breakeven position, as detailed in Appendix A of the report, be noted;
- (2) that the forecast to 31 March 2024 of breakeven be noted; and
- (3) that the budget virement, as detailed in Appendix F to the report, be approved.

7 Capital Budget Monitoring 2022/2023 - Finance and Corporate Resources

A report dated 7 June 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted advising of progress on Finance and Corporate Resources' capital programme for 2022/2023 and summarising the expenditure at 31 March 2023.

The budget for 2022/2023 was £3.695 million. Total expenditure to 31 March 2023 was £4.977 million.

The final outturn position of £4.977 million was an additional spend of £1.282 million in comparison to the programme of £3.695 million. This was mainly due to the timing of spend on the Oracle Upgrade (£2.249 million) project, of which funding for the overall spend on this project had already been identified into next financial year.

The additional in-year spend on Oracle was partially offset by a number of project underspends, mainly due to the timing of project spend required in financial year 2023/2024 instead of 2022/2023.

Any underspend on those projects, along with the funding, would carry forward into next financial year as required.

Accounting regulations meant that adjustments were required to report spend correctly as either capital or revenue for the purpose of the Annual Accounts. £0.015 million of revenue funding required to be recorded as capital. This transfer meant that, for the purpose of publishing the Annual Accounts only, there was a capital spend of £4.992 million.

The Committee decided: that the Finance and Corporate Resources' capital programme of £3.695 million, and expenditure for the year of £4.977 million, be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 3 May 2023 (Paragraph 5)]

8 Capital Budget Monitoring 2023/2024 - Finance and Corporate Resources

A report dated 7 June 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted advising of progress on Finance and Corporate Resources' capital programme for 2023/2024 and summarising the expenditure position at 19 May 2023.

The Finance and Corporate Resources' capital programme for 2023/2024 was £5.333 million. Anticipated spend to date was £0.104 million and spend to 19 May 2023 totalled £0.104 million. This represented a breakeven position.

The Committee decided: that the Finance and Corporate Resources' capital programme of £5.333 million, and expenditure to date of £0.104 million, be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of South Lanarkshire Council (Special) of 22 February 2023 (Paragraph 4) and Minutes of the Executive Committee of 21 June 2023 (Paragraph 6)]

9 Finance and Corporate Resources – Workforce Monitoring – March and April 2023

A report dated 25 May 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on the following employee information for Finance and Corporate Resources for the period March and April 2023:-

- ◆ attendance statistics
- ◆ occupational health statistics
- ◆ accident/incident statistics
- ◆ disciplinary hearings, grievances and Dignity at Work cases
- ◆ analysis of leavers and exit interviews
- ◆ staffing watch as at 11 March 2023

The Head of Personnel Services advised that, in relation to recruitment and equal opportunities, there were a number of questions and suggestions raised at Executive Committee and, that as part of her first meeting of the Equal Opportunities Forum, it was her intention to gather a summary of all activities and actions that had been carried out to date regarding recruitment, learning, development, particularly around veterans and ethnic minority groups, and other areas. She would also incorporate the activity from the Council's mainstreaming equalities report into that. She anticipated being able to bring a summary update to this Committee following the first Equal Opportunities Forum after the summer recess.

Following a question from a member, the Head of Personnel Services agreed to provide a breakdown on medical referrals to members of the Committee.

Officers responded to members' questions on various aspects of the report.

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 3 May 2023 (Paragraph 7)]

10 Council-wide Workforce Monitoring - March and April 2023

A report dated 25 May 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on the following Council-wide employee information for the period March and April 2023:-

- ◆ attendance statistics
- ◆ occupational health statistics
- ◆ accident/incident statistics
- ◆ disciplinary hearings, grievances and Dignity at Work cases
- ◆ analysis of leavers and exit interviews
- ◆ staffing watch as at 11 March 2023

Following a question from a member regarding a report that was anticipated to come to this Committee on veterans recruitment, the Head of Administration and Legal Services advised that the Council was now working to the new Armed Forces Covenant which had been enshrined in law. Consultation had been undertaken with the Council's Veterans' Champion, Personnel Services and other bodies to allow input to the process on how to improve. She advised that this process was still ongoing and would inform any report that was brought back to this Committee.

Officers responded to members' questions on various aspects of the report.

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 3 May 2023 (Paragraph 8)]

11 Revenue Collection and Approval of Write-Offs

A report dated 9 June 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on:-

- ◆ collection performance for the financial year 2023/2024 to 31 May 2023 on revenue income which comprised Council Tax, non-domestic rates, sundry debts and arrears
- ◆ performance in the Business Rates Incentivisation Scheme (BRIS)
- ◆ the write-off of irrecoverable Council Tax, non-domestic rates, BID levy, sundry debt and Housing Rent and associated charges

Details were provided on current collection targets. The Council was ahead of target but behind comparable performance from 2022/2023 in respect of Council Tax. In respect of non-domestic rates, the Council was ahead of target and of comparable performance from 2022/2023. Sundry debt was behind target and behind comparable performance from 2022/2023.

In terms of arrears collection targets, the Council was ahead of target but behind comparable performance from 2022/2023 in respect of Council Tax and non-domestic rates. In respect of sundry debt, the Council was equal to target but behind comparable performance in 2023/2024.

As previously advised to Committee, the BRIS scheme had been suspended for 2020/2021, 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 due to the impact of COVID-19. It had been confirmed in March 2023 that BRIS would not be reinstated for 2022/2023. Further guidance and information was awaited from the Scottish Government with regards to reinstatement in 2023/2024, however, performance against the BRIS target continued to be closely monitored.

It was proposed that the following debts be written off:-

- ◆ irrecoverable Council Tax accounts from 1993/1994 to 2023/2024 (including bulk write-off for 1995/1996) to the value of £1,817,155.33 relating primarily to prescribed debt, sequestrations and estates of the deceased
- ◆ irrecoverable non-domestic rates from 2021/2022 to 2023/2024 to the value of £192,204.87 relating primarily to debtors in liquidation, those who had ceased trading or had been sequestrated
- ◆ Business Improvement District (BID) levies totalling £737.92 administered by the Council on behalf of Hamilton, Carluke and Lanark BID companies
- ◆ sundry debts to a value of £77,092.25
- ◆ former tenant rent arrears totalling £273,604.85 (including bulk write-off for 2014/2015), factoring arrears of £471.27 and Housing Benefit overpayments totalling £24,453.50

Officers responded to members' questions on various aspects of the report.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the Council's performance in the collection of revenues be noted;
- (2) that the current position in respect of the Business Rates Incentivisation Scheme be noted; and
- (3) that the write-off of the following irrecoverable debts be approved:-
 - ◆ Council Tax debt from 1993/1994 to 2023/2024 to the value of £1,817,155.33
 - ◆ Non Domestic Rates from 2021/2022 to 2023/2024 totalling £192,204.87
 - ◆ BID levies totalling £737.92

- ◆ sundry debts to a value of £77,092.25
- ◆ house rent and associated charges totalling £298,529.62

[Reference: Minutes of 3 May 2023 (Paragraph 9)]

12 Scottish Government Consultation on Council Tax for Second and Empty Homes, and Thresholds for Non-Domestic Rates

A report dated 14 June 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on the Scottish Government's consultation on council tax for second homes and empty homes, and thresholds for non-domestic rates.

The Scottish Government published Scotland's first national population strategy in March 2021, which dealt with dimensions of economy, infrastructure, public services and housing. At the same time, it also published its Housing to 2040 Strategy which included prioritising homes for living in, and not for accumulating wealth.

The Scottish Government was also due to publish a Remote, Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan that had a range of work strands to support councils and other partners to help deliver against their population and housing agenda. An important aspect of that plan was the focus on ensuring local areas could make the best use of their existing housing stock, and the 2040 Strategy committed to providing councils with the tools and powers to support them to do this. This included managing the number of long-term empty homes, short-term lets and second homes.

There were currently 1,688 long-term empty properties in South Lanarkshire, 176 second homes and 105 self-catering type properties.

The Scottish Government's aim was to prioritise housing for permanent accommodation, whether in the rented sector or home ownership, whilst finding a balance of appropriate accommodation available for communities reliant on the seasonal tourist economy and seasonal workers.

The Scottish Government and COSLA were holding a joint public consultation on views on giving local authorities the power to increase council tax on second homes and empty homes as well as considering whether the current non-domestic rates thresholds for self-catering accommodation remained appropriate. The consultation was published on 17 April 2023 and would run until 11 July 2023.

The consultation contained 25 questions, structured around 3 key areas. Views were sought from Community and Enterprise Resources, Finance and Corporate Resources and Housing and Technical Resources. A summary of the consultation considerations and the response to each of the 3 key areas were detailed in the report and the full proposed response was detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

Officers responded to members' questions on various aspects of the report.

Following discussion, it was agreed that additional information could be added in a covering letter or in the comments fields to reflect discussion at Committee.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the summary of the consultation considerations and proposals be noted; and
- (2) that the proposed South Lanarkshire Council response, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, with additional information added in a covering letter or in the comments field to reflect discussion, be approved for submission to the Scottish Government by 11 July 2023.

13 Notification of Contracts Awarded – 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023

A report dated 15 May 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on contracts awarded by Finance and Corporate Resources during the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.

In terms of Standing Order Nos 21.8 and 22.5 of the Standing Orders on Contracts, Resources were required to notify the relevant Committee of contracts awarded. Details of the contracts awarded by Finance and Corporate Resources were provided in the appendix to the report.

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 16 November 2022 (Paragraph 14)]

14 Safety at Sports Grounds – Re-issue of General Safety Certificate for Hamilton Park

A report dated 31 May 2023 by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) was submitted on action taken, in terms of Standing Order No 37(c) in view of the timescales involved, by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources), in consultation with the Chair and an ex officio member, to re-issue the reviewed General Safety Certificate for the Grandstand at Hamilton Park, Bothwell Road, Hamilton.

The revised format of the General Safety Certificate for the Grandstand at Hamilton Park had been approved by this Committee on 13 February 2016. The certificate was required to be reviewed and re-issued annually.

The Committee decided: that the action taken, in terms of Standing Order No 37(c), by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources), in consultation with the Chair and an ex officio member, to re-issue the reviewed General Safety Certificate for the Grandstand at Hamilton Park, Bothwell Road, Hamilton, be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of South Lanarkshire Council of 18 May 2022 (Paragraph 23)]

15 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.