

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET 30 JULY 2024 FROM THE CORPORATE PERFORMANCE PANEL MEETING HELD ON 17 JULY 2024

CP23: 2023-2024 FULL YEAR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

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The Corporate Performance Officer presented the report which provided an update on progress against the Council's Corporate Strategy and key performance indicators. Information was provided on those targets that had met, exceeded, not met or were monitor only.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Performance Officer for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor Spikings asked what would be put in place to meet new Government build targets and speed up planning processes. The Assistant Director for Development explained that work was being carried out to reduce the reliance on extension of times and putting pressure on agents to submit information in a timely manner to avoid delays. He explained that progress was being made against the relevant targets, but Major Applications were difficult as there were complex requirements to consider such as Biodiversity Net Gain. The Assistant Director confirmed that three new Graduate Planners had also been appointed.

Councillor Osborne referred to the targets relating to the percentage of council tax collected and stated that it was marked as green, although it had not met target. The Corporate Performance Officer stated that this was because it was marginally over the percentage required.

The Chair, Councillor Blunt referred to work being carried out to speed up planning processes and he asked if a review of consultation periods would be carried out along with a review of the Planning Sifting process, both of which could delay planning applications and it was explained by the Assistant Director that the Planning Scheme of Delegation would be reviewed, but it was unlikely that consultations would change. A review of internal processes could be carried out.

The Chair, Councillor Blunt referred to the Car Parking Strategy target which was marked as amber. He felt that this should be marked as red. The Executive Director stated that work was moving forward with production of the Strategy and delays had occurred so that the Strategy could align with other strategies such as West Norfolk Economic Strategy.

In response to a question from the Chair, Councillor Blunt, The Executive Director explained that work on Downham Market Public Toilets had now gone out to tender and work was moving forward.

Councillor Spikings referred to the targets relating to established permanent posts and sickness absence and commented that these should include long term sickness absences and temporary posts. The Corporate Performance Officer agreed to include this information in the next period's report.

Councillor Collingham referred to the spend on Bed and Breakfast Accommodation which had increased and the Assistant Director, Regeneration, Housing and Place explained that spend had now plateaued and acknowledged that there had been an increase in the need to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation for temporary accommodation due to the rates of homelessness in the Borough. He explained that a Homelessness Review had been carried out and had been presented to the previous Environment and Community Panel Meeting. A new Strategy would be launched in October.

Councillor Jones referred to the indicators referring to fly tipping and asked if information could be provided on the number of incidents, to give context to the percentages included in the report. It was confirmed that this information would be circulated to the Panel for information and included in future reports.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Beales thanked the Panel for their comments. He referred to the Car Parking Strategy and explained that it was important that this strategy aligned with others and was not taken through in isolation.

Councillor Kemp addressed the Panel under Standing Order 34. She stated that better dentistry was required in the Borough and what provision would be available in the new Health Hub at NORA. The Executive Director explained that the site was not owned or operated by the Council, so the Council could not dictate what services would be provided, however the Council did continue to work with partners as appropriate.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Performance Panel supported the recommendations to Cabinet, as set out below:

That Cabinet reviews the Performance Management Report and comments on the delivery against the Corporate Strategy.

CP24: PRODUCTIVITY PLAN

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The Monitoring Officer presented the report which sought approval of the Council's Productivity Plan, which had been drafted in response to a request from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The Monitoring Officer thanked the Corporate Governance Manager for preparing the Plan.

It was noted that the plan was prescriptive and was in essence a checklist requirement from DLUHC.

The Chair thanked the Monitoring Officer for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor Collingham felt that the information contained in the plan would be more meaningful in a table format. The Executive Director explained that it was a prescriptive layout from DLUHC with pre-set questions.

The Chair, Councillor Blunt asked how the document would be used and it was explained that it would be submitted to DLUHC, but was also a useful document which could help to inform the way forward of the organisation. It was noted that all Local Authorities had been asked to complete the Plan.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Morley stated that the Council had recently had a visit from representatives from DLUHC so that they could understand the Council's future plans and build relationships.

The Vice Chair, Councillor Osborne referred to section 5.5 of the plan relating to localised decisions and in response to a question, the Financial Services Manager stated that this referred to the increase in council tax restrictions and how Government were being lobbied to make it a local decision to address budget gaps.

Councillor Kemp addressed the Panel under Standing Order 34 and made reference to Purfleet Pantry, which she stated had been of great benefit to residents.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Beales stated that although this was an exercise that the Council was required to complete it also served as a useful document to highlight challenges, policy issues and inform future plans.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Performance Panel support the recommendations to Cabinet, as summarised below.

That Cabinet approves the Productivity Plan attached at Appendix B for submission to DLUHC.

CP29: CABINET REPORT – REVENUE OUTTURN 2023-2024

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The Financial Services Manager presented the Cabinet report which set out the revenue outturn for 2023/2024.

Members were directed to the revised report which had been published in advance of the meeting.

The Chair thanked the Financial Services Manager for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

In response to a question from Councillor Jones, it was confirmed that because there had been advance payments to the Pension Fund there would be a reduction in payments required in forthcoming years and savings could be used to replenish reserves.

In response to a question from the Chair it was confirmed that the last audited budget was from the 2019/2020 financial year. The Financial Services Manager explained that outstanding Audits between 2020/2021 to 2022/2023 inclusive would be treated as one Audit before the Parliamentary Election it was intended that Legislation would be put in place to enable Local Authorities to get caught up. This was still expected to be the case. It was hoped that the 23/24 Audit would take place this autumn.

The Chair, Councillor Blunt asked what contingencies were in place and the Financial Services Manager explained that the Accounts were being published and the quality of working papers to support the accounts had been improved which should make it easier for the Auditors and result in less queries.

Councillor Kemp addressed the Panel under Standing Order 34 and stated that there had been an underspend in Housing Repairs and noted that there was a backlog and vacant posts. The Assistant Director, Central Services explained that some posts were Fixed Term Contracts and externally funded. She agreed to provide further information to the Panel.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Morley stated that the budget was challenging and previous decisions had impacted the budget. He explained that work on reducing budgets had been carried out and overall the organisation had done well, however further work was required.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Performance Panel supported the recommendations to Cabinet, as set out below.

It is recommended that Cabinet approves:

1. The draft revenue outturn position for 2023/2024 (section 2)
2. Review and agree the new transfers to reserves as listed at Appendix 2.
3. Review and agree the amendments to the Earmarked Reserves Policy (Section 4).

CP30: CABINET REPORT – CAPITAL OUTTURN – 2023-2024

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The Financial Services Manager presented the report which provided detail of the outturn of the 2023/2024 capital programme and outlined amendments and rephrasing to the spending on schemes.

The Chair thanked the Financial Services Manager for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

The Chair, Councillor Blunt acknowledged that forecasting was difficult and asked how it was monitored. The Financial Services Manager explained that rephrasing and reprofiling was carried out and regular contact was made with Project Managers so that an informed approach to future forecasts ensured everything was on track.

The Executive Director explained that timing was critical to ensure that the organisation was not impacted by reduced cashflow, however there were external factors that could affect the progress of projects.

The Chair commented that it was important that post project appraisals were carried out and it was explained by the Executive Director that internal appraisals were carried out and these were also presented to the Member Major Projects Board.

Councillor Kemp addressed the Panel under Standing Order 34 and referred to the CCTV upgrade and how it was important that adequate equipment was in place to tackle antisocial behaviour.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Morley reminded the Panel that Members could attend meetings of the Member Major Projects Board when post project reviews were being considered.

Councillor Morley also explained that narrative was important to provide justification on under or overspend and this would be included going forward as required.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Beales encouraged Members to attend future meetings of the Member Major Projects Board and acknowledged that there was work to be done to improve forecasting and reduce silo working.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Performance Panel supports the recommendations to Cabinet, as summarised below.

That Cabinet:

1. Note the outturn of the capital programme for 2023/2024 of £36,446,601 including Exempt Schemes.
2. Note the financing arrangements for the 2023/2024 capital programme.