

BUDGET PANEL

26 FEBRUARY 2014

Present: Councillor J Dhindsa (Chair)
Councillor S Rackett (Vice-Chair)
Councillors S Counter, G Derbyshire, S Greenslade (For minute numbers 43 to 45), S Johnson, R Martins and P Taylor

Officers: Shared Director of Finance
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Johnson replaced Councillor Aron.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Turmaine.

41 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)

There were no disclosures of interest.

42 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2014 were submitted and signed.

43 FINANCE DIGEST 2013/14: PERIOD 9 (DECEMBER 2013)

The Panel received a report of the Senior Accountant, which included the latest edition of the Finance Digest.

Councillor Johnson noted the cumulative underspend of £1 million reported in the Digest and how this may change before the end of the year. He asked if the Shared Director of Finance was able to advise how this compared with other local authorities in the immediate area.

The Shared Director of Finance responded that she did not have the exact details for other authorities but was aware that many were struggling. She was able to report that Three Rivers District Council was currently reporting an overspend of between £300,000 and £400,000.

Councillor Martins referred to the outstanding debts and asked about those which were not within the 3 month category.

The Shared Director of Finance said that the remaining 15.51% of debt was more than 3 months old. Debts that were less than 3 months old were generally seen as more collectable than those which were over 3 months old, but they still continued to be monitored and further action taken as necessary.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

44 **ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT**

The Panel received a copy of Budget Panel's contribution to the 2012/13 Annual Scrutiny Report. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed Members that she would shortly be preparing the contribution for the 2013/14 annual report and asked Members if they had any views about the format or content.

The Chair felt that the report clearly summed up the Panel work over the year and a similar approach for the new year would be suitable.

RESOLVED –

that the Panel's views on the format of the 2013/14 Annual Report be noted.

45 **WORK PROGRAMME 2013/2014**

The Panel received the final version of its work programme for 2013/14 which also incorporated the dates for the new Municipal Year. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer asked Members if they had any suggestions for the new year to forward them to her or to the Shared Director of Finance and they would be able to start preparations for the first meeting.

Councillor Counter asked whether the Panel would receive further updates about the collection of business rates for 2013/14.

The Shared Director of Finance confirmed that the Panel would receive a report at its first meeting. She advised that it was highly probable that the Council would meet the safety net threshold for the collection of 2013/14 business rates. She added that the Council would be liable to cover any refunds from previous years, even though the original charge had been forwarded to central government. These amounts had been taken into account when forecasting this year's overall position. It was also projected that the Council would be below the baseline position for next year, and this had been included in the Budget.

In response to a question from Councillor Greenslade about the progress of the Revenues and Benefits service, the Shared Director of Finance reported that the service was progressing well.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer added that Overview and Scrutiny Committee was continuing to monitor the service's performance through the quarterly reports. An update report was being presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following week.

RESOLVED –

that the Work Programme for 2013/14 and the dates for 2014/15 be noted.

The Chair noted that this was the last meeting of the Municipal Year. He wished good luck to all those who were seeking re-election in the forthcoming elections in May.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.10 pm