

FINANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2017 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Scholey (Chairman)

Cllr. Eyre (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. C. Barnes, Mrs. Bayley, Esler, Eyre, Kelly and Lake

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Bosley, Pearsall and Pett

1. Appointment of Chairman

Resolved: That Cllr. Scholey be appointed as Chairman of the Advisory Committee for 2017/18.

(Cllr. Scholey in the Chair)

2. Appointment of Vice Chairman

Resolved: That Cllr. Eyre be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Advisory Committee for 2017/18.

3. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance Advisory Committee held on 28 March 2017 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

5. Actions from Previous Meeting

There were none.

6. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Chairman reported that he had attended the Audit Committee and was very pleased with the work carried out on the Annual Internal Audit Plan 2016/17. The Chairman stated that the performance had much improved and that he hoped Members would join him in expressing appreciation for the work carried out.

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The Chairman reported that Bellway homes were proposing to create 300 new homes in Edenbridge. He also advised that the Bradbourne car park had been completed and was open and in use. The Sennocke car park site had now been handed to the developers of the new hotel. He had also met with the local ward member for Badgers Mount to discuss the sale of woodland at the end of the calendar year.

The Council had taken out options on two properties in Croft Lane, Westerham, at 15% below the anticipated gross development value with a view to selling once completed which should be towards the end of the following year.

With regards to Otford Tower, an options report would be forwarded shortly. He had made it clear that the aspiration was for zero ongoing cost options.

7. Referral from Cabinet or the Audit committee

There were none.

8. Revenue and Benefits Service Update

The Head of Revenues and Benefits presented a report that updated Members on: the collection and speed of processing performance; the Partnership's financial position; key highlights from the past year; and the main priorities over the next 12 months.

In response to questions he confirmed that new claims performance against the target of 23 days was much closer since the introduction of Risk Based Verification (RBV) software, with the average speed of processing a new claim for April already down to 24.6 days. He also confirmed that the targets set for speed of processing in 2017/18 were in line with the national averages, 23 days for new claims and 9 days for a change in circumstances, and that there was the potential to improve speed of processing further once the backlog of work had been cleared. In respect of fraud, clarification was provided around the role of the new Fraud & Compliance team and it was emphasised that with the transfer of Housing Benefit investigations to the Department for Work & Pensions, more emphasis was being put into proactively verifying and validating Council Tax and Business Rate discounts, exemptions and reliefs. In view of this, the opportunities to prosecute and publicise high profile fraud cases to demonstrate the Council's stance had become more limited.

The Chief Finance Officer advised that, in respect of the speed of processing indicators, these are measured in calendar days, not working days, and that the 'clock' did not stop when awaiting further information to be sent in from the customer. He also advised that the team had more Freedom of Information requests than any other section but with the imminent publication of relevant data sets for Business Rates on the website, this would hopefully reduce the number of requests received.

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Resolved: That the report be noted.

9. Financial Performance Indicators 2016/17 - to the end of March 2017

The Head of Finance presented a report which gave figures on ten internally set performance indicators covering activities that support information provided in the regular financial monitoring statements. The Head of Finance's report compared figures for the previous financial year with targets for the current financial year. The report also covered how the use of these indicators meant management were able to highlight areas where performance had a financial impact on the authority. The Head of Finance advised that she was hoping to review the targets.

Members commended Officers for their work.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

10. Provisional Outturn 2016/17

The Head of Finance reported the Provisional Financial Outturn figures for 2016/17.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that the report be noted.

11. Work Plan

Members agreed that the Service update on 14 November 2017 should be from Internal Audit. Members also agreed that there should be a Property update on 30 January 2018.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.40 PM

CHAIRMAN