

## **THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday, 6 September 2023**

Attendance:

Councillors  
Brook (Chairperson)

Horrill  
Pett  
Reach

Scott  
Williams

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Laming

Deputy Members:

Councillor Morris (as deputy for Councillor Laming)

Other members in attendance:

Councillors Cutler, Learney, Tod and Westwood

[Video recording of this meeting](#)

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1. **APOLOGIES AND DEPUTY MEMBERS**

Apologies for the meeting were noted as above.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Scott declared a non-pecuniary interest regarding agenda item 6, Housing Revenue Account 2022/2023 as he was a Council housing tenant.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

No announcements were made.

4. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE 3 JULY 2023**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 July 2023. be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

David Chafe on behalf of Tenants and Council Together (TACT), Councillor Wallace and Councillor Lee addressed the committee, and their contributions were captured within the following agenda items.

## 6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) OUTTURN 2022/2023

Councillor Westwood introduced the report, ref CAB3417 which set out the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Outturn 2022/23, ([available here](#)). The introduction included the following points.

1. In 2022/2023, the HRA Outturn indicated an overspend of £1.304 million and an adverse variance of £0.698 million, including a one-off accrual to be reversed in 2023/24.
2. There was a request to carry forward £18,000 of unspent set-up funding for the Housing Company into 2023/2024.
3. The 2022/2023 Capital program saw a carry forward of £14.44 million, with reprofiling for the capital program in 2023/2024 onwards.
4. Notable variances included:
  - a) An employee underspend of £108,000.
  - b) Premises overspend of £2 million, encompassing the mentioned accrual and a repair and maintenance overspend of £0.486 million.
  - c) An overspend of £0.109 million on electricity costs.
  - d) A net favourable variance of £0.622 million in net interest and depreciation due to lower interest payments, reduced capital spend, and a higher depreciation charge.
  - e) Strong performance in void management and arrears, generating additional income of £0.2 million.
5. Capital program overspends, and underspends consisted of:
  - a) An overspend of 2% on the Major Works budget, driven by fire prevention and roofing works.
  - b) Underspend in estate improvement works amounting to £0.187 million.
  - c) Sheltered schemes, including power door installation and fire safety work, resulting in a £0.24 million underspend.
  - d) An underspend of £0.328 million on climate emergency works due to contractor difficulties.
  - e) An underspend of £0.207 million on procuring a sewage treatment vehicle.
  - f) An underspend of £13.03 million in the new homes program, detailed in section 11 of the report.

The committee was recommended to comment on the proposals within the attached report, ref CAB3417 which was to be considered by the cabinet at its meeting on 13 September 2023.

Councillor Lee addressed the committee and raised the following points:

1. In reference to section 1.2 and the capital program for retrofit works, he asked:
  - a) When was the £15.7 million budget allocated?
  - b) How much of this budget had been expended by the end of 2022/2023?
  - c) How many homes had undergone upgrades by the end of 2022/2023?
  - d) Had a new energy staff role been established, and if so, was it funded from the £15.7 million budget?

2. Regarding the revised Capital program budget for 2023/2024, he asked:
  - a) Whether funding had been earmarked to address overheating, considering the vulnerability of over one-third of homes to overheating due to climate change.
  - b) What measures were in place for existing homes considering recent building regulations that tackle overheating in new homes?
  - c) He drew attention to recent reports titled "It's Getting Hot in Here" and the UK Green Building Council's statement, "The UK isn't built for this heat."
3. Regarding the challenges in recruiting and retaining housing staff, he requested information on the steps taken to mitigate this issue.
4. Regarding section 11.3 B, he sought more detailed information about the costs associated with the property at Tower Street.

David Chafe on behalf of Tenants and Council Together (TACT) advised that TACT were meeting shortly to discuss this report and were present this evening to observe the committee's debate.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. The housing company's status, formation, role, and future operational stages.
2. Explanations regarding the reported overspend on new build developments.
3. Further details regarding the accrual mentioned in section 11.2 of the report.
4. Sought information on depreciation and adjustment periods and their frequencies.
5. Regarding the property on Tower Street and the £205,000 cost associated with it.
6. The plans to address the underspend on fire safety provisions.
7. How the council was managing potential disrepair compensation payments.
8. The funding allocated for overheating mitigation measures and whether it was part of current plans.
9. The impact of resourcing, staffing, and technical challenges on the capital program.
10. The expected number of new homes to be delivered in the revised budget for 2023/24.

These points were responded to by Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing, Simon Hendey, Strategic Director, Gilly Knight, Corporate Head of Housing, Liz Keys, Corporate Head of Finance accordingly and were noted by Councillor Westwood.

RESOLVED:

1. Officers to review and respond to the matters raised in point number 10 above.
2. Officers to consider the concerns raised in point number 8 above regarding overheating works.
3. Officers to arrange a meeting with Councillor Horrill to discuss the accrual in section 11.2 of the report.
4. The Cabinet Member and officers to take note of the committee's comments.

7. **GENERAL FUND OUTTURN 2022/2023**

Councillor Cutler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and Liz Keys, Corporate Head of Finance; introduced the report, ref CAB3416 which provided details of the General Fund Outturn 2022/2023, ([available here](#)).

The introduction covered the following key points:

1. Despite economic pressures, including inflation, the outcome revealed a surplus of just under £1 million.
2. This surplus was primarily attributed to challenges in accurately forecasting business rates, contributing £688,000, and a significant increase in interest received on retained funds.
3. The report provided a detailed breakdown of variances, encompassing both underspending and overspending across various services, with specific attention to variances in one-off budgets.
4. Additional details for both the revenue fund and the capital fund could be found in the appendices.
5. An overspend on services was primarily driven by higher-than-expected paid inflation and contract inflation, factors beyond the council's control.
6. Income exceeded budget expectations, especially in the case of business rates.
7. Extra income was generated from investments due to higher interest rates and larger cash balances than initially anticipated.

The committee was recommended to comment on the proposals within the attached report, ref CAB3416 which was to be considered by the cabinet at its meeting on 13 September 2023.

Councillor Lee addressed the committee, highlighting the following key points:

1. He commended the well-written report.
2. He inquired about the Winchester Town account, questioning why it only covered part of the neighbourhood service offices' costs while Parishes and Market towns in the district bore the full expenses of support offices in their areas.
3. Additionally, he sought clarification on the methodology used to calculate the proportionate contribution.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. The competitiveness of the council in terms of staff remuneration.
2. Progress updates on major regeneration projects and the local plan.
3. Clarification on whether the increase in full-time equivalent staff indicated staff positions being filled or an increased staffing requirement.
4. Concerns about the overspending on agency staff and the need for a strategic review of staffing scales.
5. Delays in implementing bike storage and related measures and their expected completion in 2023/24.
6. Questions regarding variances in the homelessness budget and the necessity for transparency in future spending proposals.
7. Requesting clarification on additional Park and Ride funding from Hampshire County Council.
8. Determining whether the favourable income variance was a one-off windfall or a permanent increase.
9. The council's intentions for closing the gap between Guildhall costs and income.
10. Concerns about historic assets and a request for updates on progress.
11. Specific local issues, including the Bishops Waltham footpath and cycle link, the Goods Shed at Barfield Close, and the status of 59 Colebrook Street.
12. The number of currently vacant Winchester City Council-owned properties that were not generating revenue.

These points were responded to by Councillor Cutler, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, Councillor Tod, Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management, Simon Hendey, Strategic Director, Dawn Adey, Strategic Director, and Liz Keys, Corporate Head of Finance, accordingly and were noted by Councillor Cutler.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That officers respond to Councillor Williams regarding the Bishops Waltham footpath/cycle path.
2. That the Cabinet Member and officers note the comments of the committee

8. **Q1 2023/24 FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

Councillor Caroline Horrill, Chairperson of the Performance Panel introduced the report, reference CAB3415 which set out the Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring report, ([available here](#)).

Councillor Horrill provided an overview of the following matters:

1. The meeting was productive, with the presence of key officers to address questions and concerns.
2. Page 77 of the agenda pack, containing the recommendations to the Scrutiny committee, should reference that the Performance Panel met on the 21 August 2023, not the 22 May 2023.
3. She referred to the notes of the Panel's meeting starting on page 179, specifically highlighting item 43 (summary of points to be addressed) and item 44 (feedback for scrutiny committee) on page 184. She raised each of the items listed under item 44 with the committee.
4. Under item 43 (summary of points to be addressed), two items from the notes had been omitted: items 35 and 38.
5. Emphasised the importance of resolving outstanding issues from the report to prevent them from carrying over into the future.

Councillor Wallace addressed the committee and raised the following points:

1. That there were significant improvements in the performance monitoring reports for this quarter compared to last year, particularly in the layout and content of appendices one to three.
2. That in Appendix 4, activities related to Transport, Domestic Energy, and Land Use had undergone review by Council Policy Committees, but when would activities under the Commercial Energy heading be presented to a Policy committee?
3. That in Appendix 4, regarding the Carbon Programme, could Members receive a briefing on the HCC carbon assessment tool that would be utilised in future council processes and reports, as mentioned on page 142?

The committee was recommended to:

1. Note that the Performance Panel met on 21 August 2023 to scrutinise the attached report, CAB3415 and its associated appendices.
2. Note that a verbal update was provided at the Scrutiny committee.
3. Raise with the Leader or relevant Cabinet member any issues arising from the information in this report, ref CAB3415, which was being presented to Cabinet on 13 September 2023 and consider whether there were any items of significance to resolve or to be drawn to the attention of Cabinet.

The committee discussed the report and the points raised by Councillor Horrill and the following additional points were made.

1. Fly tipping reporting and clearance times did not align with a councillor's real-world experience, and whether further investigation could be carried out to address this.
2. Concerning hydrogenated vegetable oil and hydrogen as diesel alternatives, whether a comprehensive carbon appraisal to address potential environmental concerns was being considered.

RESOLVED:

The committee:

1. Noted that the performance panel had met on 21 August 2023 (not 22 May 2023, as inaccurately stated on page 79 of the report) to scrutinise report CAB3415 and its associated appendices.
2. Noted the draft minutes of the panel's meeting and the verbal update provided by the Chairperson, including the summary of points to be addressed and feedback for the scrutiny committee on page 184.
3. Requested that the cabinet:
  - a. Review the fly tip reporting app to ensure the "submit" button is prominent and distinct from the "save" button.
  - b. Consider the introduction of a key performance indicator that measured the time taken to remove fly tips "end to end."

9. **SCRUTINY REQUEST - UPDATE ON PUBLIC CONVENIENCE STRATEGY.**

The chairperson advised that she had invited Councillor Learney, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Andy Hickman, Head of Programme: Place to the meeting to update the committee on the improvements to public conveniences.

Councillor Learney informed the committee that this initiative had been prompted by feedback from residents regarding the condition of public toilets. It was clear that addressing this issue required a comprehensive and proactive approach, leading to the formation of a public toilet task force. The team had conducted several assessments, including commissioning a report from the British Toilet Association and carrying out condition surveys, to gauge the extent of necessary improvements and establish priorities. Consequently, a Public Toilet Improvement Strategy had been developed, which proposed a substantial programme of upgrades and renovations.

Andy Hickman, Head of Head of Programme: Place provided a presentation which discussed the following areas:

1. City Council public toilet locations.
2. Previous toilet works.
3. Costs and Contributions.
4. Usage and cleaning.
5. Issues with the public toilets.
6. Public Toilet Improvement Strategy.

7. Key issues.
8. Next steps.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the presentation. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. Regarding formal complaints versus informal resident comments, further clarification on the nature of these complaints was requested.
2. Whether Parish Councils handled additional complaints, and how did it affect the overall complaint count?
3. Further explanation on how the usage figures were determined?
4. Had the reduced public access to the Guildhall impacted usage, and how did the facility upgrades relate to concerns about cleanliness and frequency?
5. Were there specific recommendations from the British Toilets Association regarding refurbishment timeframes?
6. Was there a projected timetable for toilet refurbishments after discussions with Parish and Town Councils to inform residents?

These points were responded to by Councillor Learney, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Andy Hickman Head of Head of Programme: Place accordingly and were noted by Councillor Learney.

#### RESOLVED

That the committee noted the presentation, and the Cabinet Member and officers note the comments of the committee raised.

#### 10. **TO NOTE THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022/23**

##### RESOLVED:

That the latest version of the work programme (which can be found here <https://democracy.winchester.gov.uk/mgPlansHome.aspx?bcr=1> ) be noted.

#### 11. **TO NOTE THE LATEST FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

##### RESOLVED

1. That the September 2023 Forward Plan of Key Decisions be noted.
2. The Chairperson agreed to discuss with the Chief Executive options for providing the committee with a forward plan, which would enable them to identify future issues for review.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.30 pm

Chairperson