

Scrutiny Committee

Venue:	Microsoft Teams - Remote
Date:	Thursday, 25 March 2021
Time:	5.00 pm
Present remotely via Teams:	Councillors W Nichols (Vice-Chair), A Lee, N Reader, M Topping (from agenda item 5), R Sweeting, K Ellis and J McCartney
Officers present remotely via Teams:	Suzan Harrington – Director of Corporate Services, June Rothwell – Head of Operational Services, Stuart Robinson - Head of Business Development and Improvement, Phil Hiscott – Property Management Team Leader, Peter Williams – Head of Finance, and Dawn Drury – Democratic Services Officer

42 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor S Shaw-Wright.

43 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

44 MINUTES

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2021.

RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 25 February 2021 for signing by the Chair.

45 CHAIR'S ADDRESS TO THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There was no Chairs address to the Committee.

46 HOUSING REPAIRS DELAYS - PRESENTATION

The Committee received a detailed presentation from the Head of Operational Services and the Property Services Manager, which explained the process involved in the repair and maintenance of the housing stock within the District, the Council's day to day repairs policy which followed government guidance, the Covid risk assessments undertaken, along with an overview of the current data on the backlog of housing repairs.

The Committee was informed that the Council were responsible for responsive day to day repairs, bringing void properties back up to standard, and a housing improvement programme. It was explained that there were three categories of repairs, emergency repairs which were required to prevent a serious risk to health and safety, these would be carried out within 24 hours; urgent repairs, those that required attention but were no risk to health and safety, these would be carried out within 5 days; and finally, non-urgent repairs which would have little effect on the property and would be carried out within 25 days.

The Head of Operational Services further explained that the area of most concern was the day-to-day repairs, as a backlog had arisen due to the Covid pandemic. During the first lockdown in March 2020 only emergency repairs had been undertaken; urgent and routine repairs were put on hold, and void works continued but under strict 'social distancing' guidelines. Members heard that from July until the second lockdown in November 2020 the number of outstanding repairs had been reduced, however following the implementation of further lockdowns, non-urgent repairs were once again suspended.

Members noted that of the 15,754 repairs raised since April 2020, 1,383 day to day repairs were outstanding: these related to 924 properties.

The Committee raised concerns again around housing repairs, which it was felt were not being undertaken in a timely manner.

Members had a number of queries about the housing repair delays, in relation to what percentage of the housing repair team were Council trades staff as opposed to private sub-contractors, it was confirmed that there was a mix of both Council staff and contractors, which depended on the nature of the job, and the volume and scale of the work involved. It was further confirmed that the Council repairs team were mainly joiners and plumbers and consisted of 20 staff, however some members of the team were shielding or on amended duties due to medical conditions.

In terms of the urgent and non-urgent repairs it was queried if the Council would use a mixture of Council staff and contractors to complete the work, Members heard that, yes, a mix of staff would be used as once the property had been inspected the repair required could require more substantial work than when first reported by the tenant.

Members acknowledged that during the first lockdown repair work ceased while risk assessments were adapted, and having come out of lockdown, repair work re-commenced, and the number of repairs reduced significantly.

It was queried why with the implementation of further lockdowns the non-urgent repairs were once again suspended. The Head of Operational Services explained that this was to ensure that both tenants and Council employees were protected, as if an employee had attended a property and had been asymptomatic with Covid-19, they could have spread the disease unknowingly.

The Property Services Manager took Members through the housing capital improvement programme and explained that during the first lockdown all planned works had been suspended as the Council's external contractors had put their respective workforces on furlough. Members noted that following lockdown most contractors started to operate again in August 2020, however 45% of tenants, once contacted, declined to have contractors attend the properties due to Covid.

Members raised concerns regarding the training of the Council staff who logged the repair calls received from tenants and stated that communication was critical, and that the correct questions were asked to ensure that the repair was put into the correct category of repair.

A question was raised regarding the required risk assessments, officers confirmed that the Council had to be a model of best practice.

Officers informed the Committee that capacity within the repairs team had also been impacted, with three staff vacancies and other staff members being shielded, therefore repairs were being prioritised on a basis of urgency. It was confirmed that since the report had been written progress had been made in terms of a new structure for the service and recruitment had commenced.

Members heard that as the Council sought to recover from the national lockdowns resulting from Covid-19, Property Services were seeking to recruit to five staff vacancies, there would be increased overtime provision for current staff, along with additional temporary staff to work solely on the backlog of non-urgent repairs which had built up while works had been suspended.

Queries were raised with regard to the 45% of tenants who had refused to have work done and what numbers of people this equated to, if the work was classed as capital work and if so, were they separate to repairs. It was explained that the capital work and repairs all linked together, as quite often when the team attended the property a temporary repair was made which was then followed up with a replacement.

The Chair requested that the figures be amended to show how long the

1383 repairs had been on the books; and the capital fund for major projects figures be separated from the general repair's figures. Concerns were raised that some repair works would not have been internal, such as painting, repairs to fencing, double-glazed windows, along with adaptations and referrals for joint working with North Yorkshire County Council.

Members requested further information around the proportion of repairs that were met within the Council targets, comparisons to previous periods, and what was the total housing stock with the Selby District. In terms of improvements, did an improvement affect the amount of rent payable by the tenant, and it was also queried why the Council did not employ their own gas fitters. Officers confirmed that they would look into the questions, make the data clearer, and circulate a response to the Members after the meeting.

The Chair stressed that Members wished to see the delay in housing repairs improve in a timely fashion and recognised that Councillors and officers must work together to highlight any issues, and to support tenants within the District.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the presentation and information around delays to housing repairs in the Selby District.**
- ii) To ask officers to revisit the figures in the report and separate out the Capital Improvement Programme figures from the repair figures.**
- iii) To ask officers to provide figures showing, of the 1383 repairs outstanding, how long they had been logged.**
- iv) To ask officers to provide further information around the proportion of repairs that were met within the Council targets, comparisons to previous periods, and figures for the total housing stock within the Selby District.**

Councillor R Sweeting left the meeting at this point and did not return.

47 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORTS QUARTER 2 AND QUARTER 3 2020-21

The Committee received the two reports of the Head of Business Development and Improvement which asked Members to consider and comment on the performance information contained in the reports.

Members noted that the quarterly corporate performance reports provided a progress update on delivery of the Council's Plan 2020-2030 as measured by a combination of: progress against priority projects/high

level actions; and performance against KPIs. The first report covered Quarter 2 (July to September), and the second report covered Quarter 3 (October to December).

The Committee's attention was drawn to appendix C of the Quarter 3 report which provided an update on the newly agreed Council Delivery Plan, this reported the first Quarter after the Plan had been agreed.

The Officer gave an overview of the Quarter 3 report, and Members noted that 56% of KPIs reported were showing improvement over the longer term, and 68% of KPIs reported were on target.

RESOLVED:

To note the Corporate Performance Reports for Quarter 2 (July to September), and Quarter 3 (October to December).

48 FINANCIAL RESULTS AND BUDGET EXCEPTIONS REPORT TO 31 DECEMBER 2020

The Committee received the report from the Head of Finance which asked Members to consider the content of the report and make any comments on the Council's financial results and budget exceptions.

Members noted that a return was completed each month for the Government detailing the latest forecasts of the impacts of Covid-19 to include additional costs, delayed savings and income losses. The latest return estimated losses as a result of Covid-19 of £2,963k in 2020-21 split between the General Fund (£2.485m), and HRA (£478k). To date the Council had received £1,168k emergency Covid-19 funding from the Government, of which £350k had been allocated to the HRA; and a further tranche of Covid-19 emergency funding was expected.

The Committee were informed that at the end of Quarter 3, the forecast full year revenue outturn showed a £197k deficit in the General Fund, and a HRA surplus of £3,938k for transfer to the Major Repairs Reserve.

Members noted that as a consequence of Covid-19, a revised budget was approved at Full Council on 22 September 2020, and the Quarter 3 outturn forecasts were reported against the revised budget.

Officers explained that the streetscene service was reporting an overspend for the year of £83k. This was primarily due to the costs associated with increased levels of waste and recycling as a result of increased levels of people working from home, and the new bin system. This had resulted in a £216k increase in disposal charges.

Members noted that recycling income had also increased with higher volumes, but recycling income per tonne for card and paper continued to reduce, therefore the income had increased by less than the cost at

£133k. In addition, car parking footfall had fallen more than expected with a 33% reduction in October and 51% in November following reintroduction of charging £44k.

In terms of the HRA, Members heard that the latest forecast showed a £3,938k surplus was expected by the year end, which was £596k higher than the budget.

It was noted that the significantly reduced General Fund and HRA savings plans were on target to deliver as per the approved revised budget; and the capital programme showed forecast slippage of £1,135k, which was expected to be spent in 2021-22.

Members acknowledged that the value of the current Programme for Growth projects had increased following Council approval of new projects on the 22 September 2020, with £14,433k currently allocated to the programme from 2020-21 onwards; of which £9,861k was project costs, £4,133k resourcing costs and after allocation of £35k towards the new Bawtry Road roundabout, £403k was available for allocation to projects.

RESOLVED:

To note the Council's financial results and budget exceptions in Quarter 3 in 2020-21.

49 TREASURY MANAGEMENT - QUARTERLY UPDATE Q3 2020/21

The Committee received the report of the Head of Finance which asked Members to consider the content of the report and make any comments on the Council's treasury management in Quarter 3 of 2020-21.

Members noted that on average the Council's investments totalled £74.8m up to the end of the third quarter, at an average rate of 0.57% and earned interest of £321k (£232k allocated to the General Fund; £89k allocated to the HRA) which was £85k above the year to date budget. The expected fall in cash balances and falling rate of return had been slower than initially expected when budgets were revised in Q1 based on forecast returns in the region of £260k, a budget reduction of £225k. Latest estimates predicted returns of £331k, a surplus of £71k against the revised budget. The Bank Rate of 0.10% was expected to remain in place for at least the next two years, and a Brexit trade deal was yet to be agreed. The position would be kept under review.

Officers explained that in addition to investments held in the pool, the Council had £4.58m invested in property funds as at 31 December 2020. The funds achieved 3.60% revenue return at Quarter 2 and 2.17% capital loss as at the end of December 2020. This resulted in revenue income of £83.4k to the end of Quarter 2 and an 'unrealised' capital loss at the end of Quarter 3 of £101.5k. These funds were long term investments, and changes in capital values were realised when the units in the funds were sold.

Members considered and noted the report.

RESOLVED:

To note the Treasury Management Quarterly update for Quarter 3 2020-21.

50 WORK PROGRAMME 2020-21 AND PLANNING FOR 2021-22

Members agreed the work programme as presented and requested that the item on housing repairs be brought back before the Committee at a date to be agreed in the future.

RESOLVED:

To note the 2020-21 work programme.

The meeting closed at 6.30 pm.