



Minutes of the meeting of the BUDGET AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2021 at 19:00 hrs

**Present:** Councillors Brown (Chair), Clarke, Ferrans, P Geary, Hume, Rankine, Verma and Wardle

**Apologies:** Councillor Fuller

**Officers** S Richardson (Director Finance and Resources) A Rulton (Head of Finance), D Proctor (Waste Services Client Manager), P Snell (Strategic Landscape and Countryside Manager), A Wearing (Strategic Lead – Transport), S Chappell (Senior Finance Manager), E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

**BR13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest

**BR14 UPDATE ON 2021/22 BUDGET ITEMS**

As part of its work on the 2021/22 draft budget proposals during January 2021, the Committee agreed that it would carry out in-year follow-up scrutiny on a number of items to assess progress and whether the anticipated savings were being achieved.

The Committee received written reports on the following items:

- Demographic growth formula and landscaping funding – *Strategic Landscape and Countryside Manager*;
- Update on whether the booking system at the Household Waste Recycling Centres was delivering both savings and service improvements – (*Waste Services Client Manager*);
- Demand Responsive Travel Service – *Strategic Lead: Transport*.

The Committee also received a PowerPoint presentation from the Head of Finance, which covered the following items:

- Update on Annex W (2020/21) and Annex R (2021/22) items;
- Update on the proposed savings on the use of external legal services;
- Update on Social Care Pressures:
  - P009-N (Learning Disability – Covid-19);

- P010-N (Internal Day Care Income – Covid-19); and
- P011-N (Care Home Market Sustainability – Covid-19)

The Committee then discussed the reports with officer colleagues as follows:

#### Landscape Adoption and Demographic Growth

- a) For larger tariff areas the works were undertaken by the developer as “works in kind” to the layout agreed in the plans, with a maintenance sum then being passed to the Council;
- b) With small, infill sites the Council would request developers to enhance existing open spaces. Capital funding would be used for the upgrade with the provision of a future maintenance sum;
- c) Commuted capital sums for landscape maintenance were invested and then drawn down over a ten-year period into the revenue stream. This was then accounted for as income under the relevant budget heading. The Head of Finance advised the Committee that she would be able to provide the current figures for landscape funding.

#### Background and Update on the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) Booking System

- a) Since the HWRCs had reopened following the easing of Covi-19 restrictions, throughput in terms of domestic tonnage deposited had dropped, although figures indicated that there had been no comparative increase in kerbside collections, other than green bin waste;
- b) However, trade waste tonnage had increased significantly, and it was possible that the booking system was weeding out unscrupulous contractors who, in the past, had used the domestic waste disposal facility at the HWRCs in order to avoid paying for using the trade waste facility. It was possible that the booking system was also weeding out those who did not live in Milton Keynes, but in the past for reasons of convenience / cost, had used the Milton Keynes HWRCs;
- c) The booking system was evening out the known spikes in activity which regularly occurred at Christmas, Easter and the other bank holidays, making workforce planning easier;
- d) The booking system had also smoothed out the occurrence of health and safety incidents at the HWRCs. However, as these were generally driver to driver incidents, there was usually no cost to the Council;

- e) There was little evidence that the booking system had led to any significant increase in the incidence of fly-tipping in Milton Keynes and work was currently being done to develop a separate fly-tipping strategy to manage the problem effectively.

#### Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)

- a) The DRT was currently undergoing a full, including financial viability, 6 months review, the results of which would be reported to the Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee in January 2022;
- b) So far, the contractor had made no request for additional funding, but had undertaken additional work when asked to do so by the Council;
- c) DRT drivers were paid for the period they worked and not per trip. They could also take more than one fare at time, and divert to pick additional fares if it was on route;
- d) The Council's backstop position if the current contract failed would have to be to go out to tender again;
- e) The Strategic Lead: Transport was satisfied that the contractor had done all the necessary modelling to ensure that the contract was financially viable for them;
- f) More vehicles, including more electric vehicles were due on stream although there was currently a national shortage of qualified drivers and delays in the supply chain of electric vehicles;
- g) Service provision had been front-loaded to accommodate morning journeys to school / commuter journeys;
- h) Providing a public transport service was not a statutory duty and the Council was trying to do its best within its current budget;
- i) The contract was currently fixed term for three years, plus the option to add up to 2 additional years at the same cost;
- j) Over 100,000 trips had now been completed and ride sharing was increasing. The service was particularly popular with young people as it increased their freedom of movement across the city;
- k) Pick up points were usually 400m from a passenger's point of origin, and sometimes as little as 200m away. A door-to-door service was available to anyone who registered as disabled with the service;

- l) Ticket pricing would also form part of the 6-month review, with the option of a 10-trip ticket being explored to give commuters and other regular users a discount;
- m) Generally, public transport was back to 60% of its pre-Covid capacity, although the expectation was that it will only recover to a maximum of 80% of its previous capacity;
- n) The Council carried out a demand survey of public transport in August when 50% of respondents still did not know if they would return to their pre-Covid travel habits.

Financial Update:

- a) The Council held a legal reserve fund to cover areas where a more significant legal challenge to the Council might be made. This was reviewed annually to make sure it remained at the right level;
- b) Day care centres were re-opening, but on a reduced level of operation and it was difficult to predict how well they would recover. Staff in Adult Social Care were looking at a recovery plan over the next few months, but it was not possible to quantify what the increase would be yet;
- c) Local authorities were still waiting for the details from the Government on how additional funding from the National Insurance increase would affect the provision of Adult Social Care. The Council had no idea what the cost pressures would be when it had to take on full provision from October 2023. It was impossible to do any financial modelling at this stage as there may well be a complete change in how the Adult Social Care market operated in the future.

**RESOLVED –**

1. That all the contributors to this evening's meeting be thanked for their presentations and contributions to the Committee's consideration of the items being scrutinised.
2. That as part of the work to develop PlanMK 2, the Council considers reviewing how landscape maintenance is funded to ensure that the finance is available to enable the Council and its partners to look after public open spaces in a proper manner for the benefit of the residents and council taxpayers of Milton Keynes.

3. That the Committee's Planning Group considers undertaking a more detailed budget analysis of how landscape maintenance is funded as part of the future Work Programme.
4. That when considering the future of the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) booking system, the Cabinet be requested to consider the total effects of the system, including the dynamics of the use of the HWRCs, any impact on kerbside collections, the effect of Covid-19 on residents' waste disposal habits and whether these have changed significantly, the possibility of a knock-on increase in fly-tipping and the budgetary implications of the various scenarios.
5. That as part of this review, the Cabinet also considers whether the decrease in the number of health and safety incidents at the HWRCs to zero has produced a resource saving for the sites' operators, H W Martin, and whether all or part of this saving should be refunded to the Council.
6. That the Committee's Planning Group considers whether the Committee needs to undertake a more detailed piece of work into the costs of all the strands of waste management in Milton Keynes to ensure residents are getting value for money.
7. That the Strategic Lead: Transport includes information on the cost per passenger per mile for the Demand Responsive Travel Service compared to standard bus services and information on the contract Key Performance Indicators in the report which will be presented to the Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee in January.
8. That the Head of Finance be asked to supply the Committee with additional information on:
  - How the legal savings have been achieved;
  - Commuted sums for landscape maintenance;
  - The current occupancy rate for local care homes.
9. That the Committee's Planning Group considers including work on how the Council is addressing recent changes to the local economy as part of the preparation work prior to the January Challenge meetings.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 21:01

The presentations and other documents referred to in these minutes can be found on the Council's Committee Management Information System (CMIS) at: [CMIS: Budget & Resources Scrutiny Committee - 30 September 2021](#)

The recording of this meeting is available to view on the Council's YouTube Channel at: [Milton Keynes YouTube Channel: Budget & Resources Scrutiny Committee - 30 September 2021](#)

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