

Pre-Scrutiny Questions and Answers- O&S 04 June

Report Title: Annual Performance Update from the South Warwickshire Community Safety Partnership (2023/24)

Report Author(s): Liz Young, Safer Communities & Civil Contingencies Manager

Councillor Milton: The addition of ward level data will be useful. I also wonder if there are two other things which we could explore further.

1. in the risks and challenges 7.2 it highlights the challenge of finding the right level of funding. With March 2025 not too far away it would be good if you could share what is being done to resolve those challenges.
2. I would also be interested in examples of where parish or town councils have been able to effectively engage with the partnership, or local services like the police to effect improvements. This may be something that individual councillors would find useful.

[Response: Ward level crime data pdf was circulated to all members of the Committee by Elizabeth Young.](#)

Councillor Armstrong:

I'd like to second Andrew's point about sharing plans for post-March 25 funding. The report shows a really excellent picture of current activity and it would be a shame to lose any of it to expiring grants.

Report title: Housing Revenue Account Budget and the Associated Risks

Report Author(s): Lisa Barker (Head of Housing, Health and Communities) and Steven Leathley (Strategic Finance Manager)

Councillor Russell: I have a couple of quick questions about para 1.8 of the HRA Business Plan Review which talks about energy prices.

1. Has the gas contract been renewed and typically how long are these contracts for?
2. As ESPO source gas and electricity and the caps are a lot higher and prices still volatile, does WDC still benefit when prices drop (is there a variable rate in the contract).
3. Are we able to direct ESPO as to where we would like our energy to be sourced from?
4. Is there any particular reason why the caps are so much higher for councils?

[Response:](#)

1. New contract is in place from 1st April 2023. Typically, contracts awarded through frameworks are for four years as is the case with this contract. The current contract expires on 31/03/2027.
2. Rates are variable annually on this contract. However, what we pay in-year is then fixed and is based on our predicted usage over a year and the best market prices TG&P have been able to purchase that energy in advance through 'Aggregated Trading'. This provides stability for budgeting purposes.
3. We can choose between green and brown tariffs for electricity, however, if what is being asked is whether WDC can direct where the gas comes from, such as refusing gas from Russia, for example!? No we can't. Neither we nor TG&P control the wholesale supply and storage of gas to the UK. Energy suppliers purchase from the wholesale supplies. This .gov website might help explain: UK gas supply explainer - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
4. Energy price caps only applied to domestic energy supply, not commercial/business.

Councillor Milton:

1. As an aside, I have to say that having read the four page report I found it much easier to understand the cabinet paper from March. Maybe there's something in there we can adopt for future in terms of an approach. It's helpful that you have outlined something that you would like us to discuss and provide input on.
2. It would be helpful to know a little bit more about our current stock condition, particularly the part that age plays in the cost of maintaining them. I'm interested to know whether we have any profiling about our properties in terms of which are the most economic for us vs the ones that cost the most to maintain.
3. The other area that would be helpful to know a bit more about is the approach for decarbonising the stock. Are we doing everything that would be required to shift the EPC up or are we taking a more targeted approach e.g. focussing on the investments that have the biggest return?

Response: We do have age profiles for our stock but haven't undertaken an assessment of maintenance cost against stock age. Although age can play a part in overall costs, it is not the only factor as how a property is used, eg its 'crowding' and how heating is used, also plays a part.

The bulk of our capital spend is distributed right across the stock, as this targets the age or condition of components (or attributes) that each property has eg Windows and doors, kitchens and bathrooms etc where investment programmes drive annual spends to ensure that our homes are decent. Attribute investment programme costs going forward are largely directed by regular stock condition surveys, (every five years). These can then be modelled and smoothed to give an indicative annual budget requirement.

A decarbonisation and energy efficiency strategy is being drafted for Cabinet to consider which would see the standard of the homes that we provide being increased to a minimum EPC C which provides better thermal equality for our tenants. The work is prioritised on a worst first basis.

Councillor Syson:

My question relates to Universal Credit mass migration. The deadline of May 2024 has now passed - so what steps are being taken to identify tenants who are at risk, and thus the Council at risk, of losing their income, and is there a remedy?

Response:

We are working closely with our colleagues at DWP Universal Credit team to ensure any information is passed on to our customers as soon as we are made aware. We have included information on rent statements, and have a campaign advising customers about the changes highlighting what they can do to access support from both ourselves and partner agencies. We also have officers that check accounts on a weekly basis and contact all our tenants who have fallen into rent arrears or are likely to fall into arrears, which means we are in regular contact with households at risk and then ask our financial inclusion team to undertake assessments to support any relevant households to claim UC or any other benefit that they are entitled to.