

Advance questions and answers on reports on the O&S agenda 28 September 2022

Item 05 – Development Management and Enforcement Performance Update

Question(s) from Councillor Syson:

1. Do you have a timescale attached to the different elements of this? I also assume you would need additional financial resources as you talk about a new back-office system and the digitizing of microfiche records.
2. How much stress and/or time would this save staff - should we as Councillors be more proactive in supporting such a request?

Response:

Many thanks for your comments and support on this.

In response to your questions, I would advise that most of the items listed as key elements of the Service Improvement plan are currently underway. In particular, there is a budget for the replacement of the back-office system and we're now embarking on the project to procure and implement a new system within the next 2 years. We need to ensure that the system that we choose is the right one for us, and I'm sure that you'll appreciate that this is a resource heavy project which we'll be running alongside the regular "day job".

The digitising of office records is part of a wider corporate project which we're commencing at the moment and for which I understand that there will be corporate funding available.

We think that both of these projects along with the other Service Improvement Plan measures will, in the longer term offer significant efficiency savings for the Team and member support would be very much appreciated in that regard.

I hope the above is helpful as a further response but do let me know if you'd like further information.

Question(s) from Councillor Quinney:

Regarding the persistent recruitment and retention issues two questions:

1. Do we undertake leaving interviews? If so, what is the feedback? If not, can we start doing so?
2. Have the planning team been surveyed recently about what pleases/concerns them most about their jobs and what improvements they would prioritise?

Response:

In response to your questions, I would advise that yes we always undertaken exit interviews. Whilst it's not possible to generalise on all of the feedback that we get, 2 recurrent themes are the extent of workload and remuneration levels.

Workload levels is also the most repeated recurring theme amongst existing staff and the area that consistently comes up as an issue in 1-1s.

As indicated in the report for tomorrow's meeting, a recruitment and retention strategy is part of our Service Improvement Plan with work progressing on the use of market supplements as part of that. As also indicated in the report, in response to the earlier uplift in planning applications received, we are currently operating with an increased number of (temporary) Officers to address that, and so at present colleagues feel that the balance between resourcing and workload is about right.

I hope the above is helpful as a quick summary but please do let me know if you'd like further information.

Item 06 – Treasury Management Activity Report

Question(s) from Councillor Syson:

2.1 states you are looking at what has happened over the last 6 months but in fact it is looking at what happened starting near enough a year ago from 1 October 2021.

When should we expect to know how we have done in the first 6 months of this financial year, please?

Response:

As the report is looking at the period 1st Oct to 31st March, as I write the report I am in theory still in March and therefore that's why it says 'over the last 6 months'. However, I can change the wording for the future ones to make this clearer. Thank you for pointing this out. The report for the first half of this financial year to Audit & Standards Committee (moving from O&S to A&S) will hopefully be 22nd November as that is the next meeting date.

Question(s) from Councillor Milton:

1. In Section 1 of Appendix A, the interest rates forecast are already out of date given recent rises. When would this be reviewed and what are the expected impacts of the current rate environment?
2. How will our strategy to mitigate risk need to be adjusted given the negative impact of central government action on the economic picture following last week's mini budget?

Response:

Further to the O&S Chair's Briefing this morning I confirm that (a) these Treasury management reports are backward looking so the interest rate forecasts are those relevant to the last financial year, and have to be written without reference to subsequent events and (b) strategies to mitigate interest risk (borrowing and investment) in the current financial year are being managed as part of the Treasury function, using latest advice and forecasts from sources including the Council's treasury advisers – Link Group – and that the new TM Strategy for 2023/24 will allow members to consider their risk appetite in terms of the strategy for the next financial year, taking account of the borrowing requirements for existing capital commitments and new capital schemes.