

Pre-Scrutiny Questions and Answers – Cabinet Agenda 6 December 2023

Report Title: Q2 Budget Update 2023/24

Report Author(s): Steven Leathley

Councillor Syson:

Question 1

1.1.1 Salary costs. Does “This forecasts that 100% of the General Fund Vacancy Factor (£1.132m) has been met” means we are indeed likely to save the budgeted £1.132m? It always seems odd to me that we appear pleased by this but in the next paragraph we spend more than expected, £0.464m, by using agency staff. As a matter of interest if the budget for agency staff budget, and overspend, are added together does that come to more than the General Fund Vacancy Factor?

Response:

The vacancy factor takes into consideration budget that is used to fund agency or overtime to backfill gaps in the establishment before being reported as met. Therefore the agency cost outlined within 1.1.1.2 is to note that as a Council we are currently using more agency than we had originally budgeted for, and is something we are looking to address as part of the ongoing recruitment and retention work.

To note this also includes where we may need short term agency cover for maternity or absence e.g. a planned or unplanned operation for example. We also need to recognise that where there are specialist roles e.g. planning that is a national issue on recruitment not just for WDC we may need to use Agency to ensure posts are filled.

Turnover

Turnover from 1/4/23 for previous year = 17.36%

Turnover from 1/12/23 for previous year = 13.66% (102 starters, 69 leavers) – significantly down from April – benchmark is 15.56 as industry average

Vacancies

Sept 12.7% (78) vacancies

October 13.8% vacancies

November 12.1% (71) vacancies at present with some on hold due to using budget for other areas or review of area

We continue to work with service areas to manage our vacancy control.

Question 2

"1.1.7.1 Planning fees

From 1st April 2024, new legislation allowing the increase in planning fees of 25% for small applications, and 35% for larger application will increase the value of planning income, although the current predictions show this will not meet Budget and will still show under achieved. "

This increase in fees will only affect the budget for next year and onwards, so will not affect this year's budget. I assume it will help with future budgets, but will the increased fees actually cover costs? I have an idea that they don't partly because this is an area where we are still relying on agency staff. Would they if we didn't rely on agency staff? I note the comments about a further review.

Response:

The increase in fees is actually coming in from 6th December 2023 and we have factored this into our projections in terms of income from planning fees for the remainder of 2023/24. It is certainly the case that this increase will help future budgets however – even with this fee increase – planning fees will not cover the full cost of delivering the planning service. In terms of the use of agency staff, clearly any situation where we do not need to rely on agency staff will help the budget position. The use of agency staff is, however, useful in certain cases including where posts are short term in nature or where we encounter significant challenges in recruiting. In terms of the 23/24 budget, although we are relying on some agency staff within the planning service, we are still expecting not to exceed budget targets in terms of our total staffing budget.

Question 3

"1.1.7.5 New contract for Softcat install equipment and managements fees included within this forecast. This will be reviewed for budget setting 2024/25. Loss of rent and able to relet space at the Creative Quarter. " This all seems a bit cryptic to me - could someone please unpack it a bit. Softcat? I assume it is "loss of rent" I assume this is all enterprise development.

Response:

Softcat is a new supplier, supporting with data connectivity and networking, including managed allocation and secure internet provision at two Enterprise buildings. The current contract is with Konnex – a company that will be wrapping up at end January 2024. Together with that, current equipment is coming to its "end of life" and therefore requires a complete overhaul. As such, one-off costs have been incurred in-year – covering new kit and installation.

Enterprise business tenants require a secure, segregated private internet facing networks through wired and wireless connections. Unfortunately, WDC has benefitted considerably over the past 12+ years under the current contract(s) with Konnex. The procurement exercise revealed that Konnex were simply not charging market rate for such service delivery, and for some reason were vastly undercutting themselves. This was not expected and has come of out of the blue.

In addition, technology demands are changing significantly – not least in the way businesses now utilise cloud-based systems, necessitating greater demand on bandwidth capacity. Whilst we have coped with standard commercial broadband connections (a largely contended service) this is beginning to fail as tenants challenge for greater robustness. All this can only be achieved through leased circuit lines which are more expensive.

A portion of ongoing costs will be absorbed by increased charges to tenants – through an increase in licence fees and fixed service charges, we need to address this in a balanced way, as we work through various increases that are applicable to inflation too.

Response from David Elkington:

The Enterprise Hub provides complimentary ICT networking services for its tenants. This service includes filtered and managed internet access, Wi-Fi access throughout the building and wired network points in each office. This is an attractive offer to tenants, who would otherwise have to make their own arrangements, potentially delaying occupation and adding costs to their business efforts.

The company who previously provided services for the hub announced at the beginning of the year they were withdrawing their offer. As a result, a new supplier was required.

ICT worked with the Enterprise Hub team to procure a new providers service and following a competitive exercise, Softcat were awarded the contract. As part of their service offer, they have upgraded the internet feed to the centre, replaced all of the network hardware and now offer support for the centre tenants.

In terms of inclusion in the forecast, this would refer to the cost of the service being included within the operating costs of the centre. This is approximately £33,823 per year.

I hope this helps, but naturally Andrew or Steven would need to double check that last sentence (the value is correct from the Contract Register) about what the inclusion means - just in case my understanding is wrong.

Question 4

"1.1.8.1 Green Spaces - Extensive works required in the maintenance of our outdoor paddling pools."

Was this a one-off or will it be recurring at this level in future, or a mixture of both?

Response:

The extensive works would be a one off and the paddling pools would be left in better condition resulting in improved on going running costs. A full cabinet report will be coming forward in the new year covering the appraisal of future paddling pool provision.

Question 5

"1.1.9.4 Anticipated costs of the basic allowance showing a forecasted overspend in year. The Service Manager, supported by Accountancy to review and improve the monitoring process for future forecasts, and incorporate this into Budget setting for 2024/25. " Again, could you unpack this for me a bit. It is all to do with Democratic Representation, I think.

Response:

This is covered within Recommendation 5 and section 1.6) of the report.

That the Cabinet recommend to Council that the members allowance and allowance for the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council up rating for 2023/24 be 3.8%. This is typically agreed once the NJC pay award has been approved to ensure that the value equated to that received by officers in their uplift.

Councillor Syson:

Thanks for this report but how can this be a realistic MTFs if it doesn't include something for Kenilworth Abbey Fields swimming pool? The borrowing costs are not insignificant money. As a Council we have already approved the go-ahead for the build subject to costs not exceeding a confidential £Xm so it is not a complete unknown.

Response:

Council has agreed the funding but it is subject to LCG signing off the final contract negotiations due to close in January. At that point once they are known to be agreed then all Councillor will be notified. If they are not within budget then there will need to be a consideration of what next and this will also be notified to members.

If we include any values in a public MTFs, these could be reviewed and reverse engineered to outline what budget the Council has confidentially outlined for the project, which could impact upon ongoing negotiations.

I take it from 1.3.3. that the MTFs doesn't include provision for current variances already identified for housing benefit and waste contract services that are likely to be repeated, are not included either.

Response:

It does not. Further understanding of the implications of both are required, to ascertain whether we expect these to remain as non-recurrent issues, or whether they will become ongoing. This work is taking place as part of the budget setting process.

Has any provision been made for costs arising out of the Pennington report?

Response:

The costs approved to date in response to the report (Cabinet report 15th November) have been funded from the Service Transformation Reserve or existing Consultancy budget, and therefore have not impacted upon the position of the MTFs. In

response to the action plan we are currently reviewing what further resourcing may be required. The expectation is that any additional resource will be short-term, and given that the report relates to social housing, will not feature within the MTFS but rather be factored into the HRA Budget in February, and the HRA business plan in March (if ongoing).

Has provision been made for the likely increased costs of asylum seeker accommodation given that the Government wishes to shift this from their coffers to those of local authorities. I am aware that we have quite a number of asylum seekers in hotels in the District?

Response:

We are not expecting our costs to increase in relation to asylum seeker accommodation.

Councillor Dickson:

Thanks, Steven, for this report.

On the GF the forecast adverse variance of £0.6M against spend of £38M does not appear to be a major cause of worry, especially when the largest single reason for this appears to be the slowdown in the housing market about which WDC is fairly powerless to do much? This has resulted in fewer larger development applications being received and thus an adverse variance of £0.968M. However, is it true that the adverse variance would have been worse had decisions not been taken to defer the £0.16M Abbey Fields Cycle Track expenditure and also not to prioritise the purchase of land for the £0.606M Trees For Future programme? If so, were these deliberate Cabinet decisions and when were they taken?

Response:

In relation to the Trees for the Future programme, this was funding set aside to purchase land. We may well still want to do that subject to a review of the Trees for the Future Programme. However, as the money wasn't going to be spent this year, it should be shown as a favourable variance. There has been no Cabinet decision (formal or informal) on this yet, typically a decision on whether to carry forward budget is made as part of the Earmarked Reserves approval following year-end.

This is the same principle for the cycle track.

Councillor Milton:

Thanks for all your work on the Q2 budget report.

There are obviously some areas of concern in the report that we will probably want to discuss on Tuesday. However, my main question relates to paragraph 4.1.1 and the process for reviewing budgets. It references the involvement of officers on a monthly basis, but can you also outline how Portfolio Holders are involved? I think committee would be interested to understand whether there are some obvious things we could/should be doing to improve this and get tighter control?

Can you also confirm who is accountable for ensuring the budget/plan is met in each service area?

Response:

Budget managers are the owners of their respective budgets. Finance support managers in setting budgets which align with the key underlying assumptions as set out within the budget setting process.

There is not currently an outlined process whereby Portfolio holders have a direct involvement in budget monitoring, although Senior Officers have confirmed that these conversations do take place where there is a specific need (linked to a project / policy / known issue etc). Budget monitoring is carried out against budgets agreed by Cabinet and subsequently Council, and therefore an expectation would be that Portfolio holders engage with their service leads in supporting processes for setting new Fees and Budgets for their areas through the Fees and Charges and Budget setting processes.

Report Title: Replacement of footbridge off Radford Road, Royal Leamington Spa

Report Author(s): Steve Partner

Councillor Russell:

At full council last month, I raised the issue of the terminal state of the existing bridge only being spotted once repairs were due to be carried out. I am concerned that by not ascertaining the true state of the bridge at an earlier stage, time has been lost in which a replacement could have been arranged and the replacement made. This would have meant minimal time without a crossing rather than the 12 months or more we now face. With that in mind, are we taking steps to check on other similar assets (such as they are) that WDC are responsible for to check the state of repair?

Response:

It is the case that the Council was aware that some significant work was needed to the bridge following an earlier external building surveyor report, which led to some £50,000 being allocated in the Planned and Preventative Maintenance Budget for the current financial year.

In order to specify and prepare a schedule of works for that repair, the Council engaged Pick Everard to undertake a more detailed structural inspection and it was at that point that the extent of delamination to the Glulam boards became known. That delamination was not easily visible without a degree of intrusive inspection and it was that which triggered the immediate concern from Pick Everard.

As a precaution, the Council is engaging Pick Everard to carry out checks to other bridges, irrespective of construction materials and any concerns arising from that survey will be reported to Members.

Report Title: Climate Change Action Programme

Report Author(s): Dave Barber

Councillor Armstrong:

1.I assume you're aware of the list of grants at www.crowncommercial.gov.uk/carbon-net-zero-funding-and-grants-2? There are several grants there that are not yet mentioned in the Programme and could be used to meet certain ambitions. Particularly the workplace charging scheme, EV charge point/infrastructure grants and OZEV on-street charging scheme, which all fund or part fund EV charge point installation, supporting the related points in Ambition 1. There are also multiple tree-planting funds, including for land leasing, the Green Heat Network Scheme, and a Skills fund which appears to cover payments for specialists/consultants on carbon and net-zero actions. Could you confirm these will be investigated if they haven't been already?

Response:

Grant funding is a key element of the Funding Strategy. However, we can't mention every grant in the Strategy, not least because opportunities keep changing. In the climate change team, we do keep ourselves pretty well informed about opportunities and do use our networks to stay in touch with opportunities as and when they arise. Having said that, there is always a risk that we will overlook schemes and so it is useful to receive this prompt which I have shared with the rest of the team. In relation to the specific schemes, you mention I would comment as follows:

- EV charging: we are aware of these schemes and work with WCC on EV charging. However, in general WCC are the lead authority for EV charging (except for charging in our assets), so they have tended to lead on grant bids. We will be bringing an EV charging paper to Cabinet early in 2024 which will cover relevant funding opportunities for us.
- Tree planting and land leasing: the Programme Team are very well connected with grant opportunities and have been liaising closely with the Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission (Forestry England) to explore woodland creation options. We hope to bring forward options for this next year once we have completed work on this and subject to members' advice.
- Green Heat network: we have used this (since the past 2018) to fund studies regarding Heat Networks in the District. We are keeping this in mind as we consider how best to decarbonise the heat in our central Leamington assets.
- We applied for the Phase 4 Low Carbon Skills Fund but were unsuccessful. This would have provided funding for the APSE energy study mentioned in my answer to the Q3 below.

2.I have noticed the 9-month post being advertised (REF RWD0000359 Building Climate and Energy Manager). Can you let me know what advertising is going out for this post? A fixed term 9-month post requiring quite technical skills seems to me like a tough one to fill. How does this post relate to the Action Programme? Lastly, do we have the skills in council to assess applicants for this (or a plan to account for that), given it requires quite technical knowledge?

Response:

The 9-month fixed term was an error which HR have now corrected. It is a permanent role, so I'm grateful you raised that. This post will be critical in providing specialist technical advice for retrofit of our assets and new build projects. It will play a key role in enabling us to accelerate progress on Ambition 1, theme 1 and on parts of Ambition 2 theme 3 (notably 3.1). Assuming the last part of your question relates to the new Net Zero Carbon DPD, we have plans to appoint to another new technical post to support that work (we just require funding to be finalised through 2024/25 budget process) and in the meantime we are arranging training for members and officers so that we can start making it requirement once the Inspector provides the green light for us to adopt the DPD.

3. There are several mentions of consultant reports in the Programme. Could you give us an overview of the current consultant projects ongoing and planned, and what the brief given to consultants in each case is?

Response:

My answer only relates to studies commissioned by the Climate Change Team. We have the following currently being looked at:

- a) APSE Energy: undertaking Heat Decarbonisation Plans for around 8 of our key assets to enable us to plan future decarbonisation investments and to ensure we are best positioned for making future funding bids (such as Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme)
- b) Syzygy: undertaking a high-level desktop study of solar energy options on our assets including rooftop solar and ground mounted solar. The study includes information on funding and legal arrangements.
- c) CENEX: undertaking a detailed study of EV charging opportunities, costs, and funding for WDC car parks
- d) COMO UK: advising on how to expand Car Clubs (and especially eCar Clubs) in the district
- e) Waterman: preparing the Biodiversity Action Programme with us

There are consultants also involved with other aspects of WDC's climate change work. Examples in Arup who are advising on the climate change evidence to support the SWLP; Edgars/Bioregional who have provided technical expertise to help prepare the Net Zero Carbon DPD and are now planning the training associated with this.

4.Last and simplest, what is the Able to Pay scheme mentioned in the planned budget?

Response:

The is also known as the Home Energy Help scheme that we have set up through Act on Energy: [Home Energy Help Scheme - Act on Energy - Energy Advice Charity](#)

Councillor Russell:

As the new Corporate Strategy is yet to be agreed, is it envisaged that once done so, the CCAP will change its benchmarking, or will it continue to deliver its progress against the Council's existing three pre-existing climate change ambitions as set out?

Response from Councillor Davison:

The new corporate strategy was agreed at full Council on 15th Nov. It gives suggestions for success measures, states that “The measures developed will be informed where possible through benchmarking and other evaluation techniques” but does not specify them.

As stated in 1.9 of the service area plan report, it is proposed that the climate change action plan, CCAP, will be split* between strategic priorities (SP) 2 and 3. It would be up to the programme board and working party for strategic priority 2 to decide the appropriate success measures within its remit. Although it is proposed not to initially have a working party for strategic priority 3, I would like group leaders to consider whether to retain the CCAP working party to work with that programme board.

It is important to decide which programme board will decide whether to keep, amend or end the current 3 climate ambitions as success measures. My feeling is that Ambition 1 (net zero carbon Council by 2025) should be considered within SP2, Ambition 3 within SP3 and probably Ambition 2 in SP2. Both O&S and cabinet may take a view on this and whether it should be included in the report (and indeed what realistic timeline should be followed).

Councillor Russell in response:

My mistake with regard the corporate strategy, of course it was agreed. The sharing of the proposed details of splitting I guess would be useful at the appropriate time.

Councillor D Harrison:

How can we secure funding for our project aiming to increase the green canopy cover in Myton and Heathcote ward? Collaborating with Heart of England Forest, we've identified potential areas for tree planting. With an estimated need for at least 500 trees and hedgerows, we're exploring eligibility for funding. Referencing CCAP funding strategy, Appendix 4, pages 1-3, it highlights tree planting as a focus area. Could you provide insights into the allocation process and how we can draw funds for our initiative, aligning with the strategies outlined by SDC, WDC, WCC, or Town Councils?

Response:

There is no budget or process to support urban tree planting at present. Until now, the funding and resources that have been aside for tree planting have focused on large scale schemes which have sought to significantly boost tree coverage and the total number of trees, rather than smaller scale schemes. The current tree planting project is under review and it will be for members to decide as part of that review how they want to refocus that. There will be a trees project board convened in the new year to start that review.

In terms of the specific proposals for the Myton and Heathcote area, there may be opportunities to support that depending on where you have in mind and how many trees you are thinking of. So please do let me have more information and I'll try to signpost you. However, that is not part of the CCAP

Councillor Milton:

Thanks for your ongoing work on the CCAP.

It is an extremely expansive piece of work and I think this makes it difficult to scrutinise effectively. I have some separate thoughts on this that I will discuss with officers that should help in the future. In that instance I only have two substantive questions/comments at the moment:

Appendix 3 - is about the Communications Strategy. I would suggest that it's useful to add in a measure for the number of residents actually reached through our communications. Otherwise, we risk talking to the same people repeatedly but feel like we're generating a lot of activity. I would also encourage the provision of a small budget for activity like paid-for social media campaigns that could help us reach a wider audience. That seems to be missing at the moment.

Appendix 4 - Funding Strategy. I note the reference to the offsetting fund. I understand the basic thrust of this but given the concerns from some members about the concept of offsetting can I have some reassurance that a paper on this specific issue will come to cabinet before anything is implemented.

Response:

- a measure for the number of residents actually reached through our communications:
the climate change measures that were report to O&S on 31st October are now incorporated in the Service Area Plans and will form the basis of ongoing monitoring and reporting on climate change. We gave some thought to your question when preparing that report but found it hard to come up with a measurable and meaningful way to measure that. We have included "no. of visits to WDC Climate Change webpages in last quarter", but I recognise this is very limited. However, without some kind of regular survey of residents, it is hard to see how this could be measured – although we are always grateful for suggestions.
- also encourage the provision of a small budget for activity like paid-for social media campaigns:

there is already a small communications budget of around £10,000 allocated from the CCAP. This includes social media communications. The work around this is planned through a weekly meeting of the climate change team and the communications team. We can ask them to give further thought to social media campaigns.

- reassurance that a paper on offsetting will come to cabinet before anything is implemented:

yes, I can give that reassurance. I am conscious of the members interest in this issue. We have talked about it at the Climate Change Working Party and have agreed I will prepare a paper to discuss there. Beyond that, we would certainly need Cabinet approval for any policy around internal offsetting. As an aside, it is worth noting the offsetting in the relation to the Net Zero Carbon DPD will be up and running as soon as the DPD is adopted, so I just wanted to clarify that is sperate.

Response from Councillor Davison:

The new corporate strategy was agreed at full Council on 15th Nov. It gives suggestions for success measures, states that “The measures developed will be informed where possible through benchmarking and other evaluation techniques” but does not specify them.

As stated in 1.9 of the service area plan report, it is proposed that the climate change action plan, CCAP, will be split (The director of climate change has proposed details of this splitting and could share this) between strategic priorities (SP) 2 and 3. It would be up to the programme board and working party for strategic priority 2 to decide the appropriate success measures within its remit. Although it is proposed not to initially have a working party for strategic priority 3, I would like group leaders to consider whether to retain the CCAP working party to work with that programme board.

It is important to decide which programme board will decide whether to keep, amend or end the current 3 climate ambitions as success measures. My feeling is that Ambition 1 (net zero carbon Council by 2025) should be considered within SP2, Ambition 3 within SP3 and probably Ambition 2 in SP2. Both O&S and cabinet may take a view on this and whether it should be included in the report (and indeed what realistic timeline should be followed).

Report Title: Service Area Plans

Report Author(s): Dave Barber (on behalf of SLT)

Councillor Russell:

In section 1.14 it makes reference to 'working parties'. How will these 'working parties' and their remits be different to the PABs that existed under the previous council, and how will participation by members be encouraged?

Response from Councillor Davison:

Group leaders and cabinet (LCG) will be discussing this on Monday (tomorrow), so there should be more detailed proposals to share after that. My current response is:

- PABs were covering specific portfolios, whereas these are focussed on strategic priorities 1 (Delivering valued, sustainable services) and 2 (Low cost, low carbon energy across the district).
- Membership could be the lead portfolio holder and 5 other councillors: each political party offered one place; if any are declined, they are then offered to the other parties.
 - Perhaps for priority 1, the Transformation portfolio would be appropriate and Climate Change for 2.
- I would welcome all councillors' views on encouraging participation, if it is agreed that such working parties are a valuable way for councillors to feed into creating policies. You saw cabinet suggestions back in August and I'm cautiously optimistic that a new committee management system, hopefully in place by next summer, will help. I'd be grateful for all views via group leaders for us collectively to decide.

Councillor Milton:

Thanks for everyone's work on the Service Area Plans. I have a number of questions if you are able to help, please although I'm not going to try and go into the detail of every plan.

In terms of setting targets who do we benchmark ourselves against and where do we aim? Are we aiming for top quartile? Top decile? etc. Is the aspiration the same for all areas?

Item 1.6 states that 'much of what the council currently does is high quality and value for money.' Could this statement be validated please with some objective reference points?

Item 1.8 makes reference to 'working parties'. Would you be able to outline more detail about how these will operate, their terms of reference and what officer support will be provided?

Response from Graham Leach:

Dave Barber has asked me to reply to this as performance management overall at the Council falls within my service area.

In terms of setting targets who do we benchmark ourselves against and where do we aim? Are we aiming for top quartile? Top decile? etc. Is the aspiration the same for all areas?

Benchmarking has been difficult to establish as identified within the Peer Review Report. This is why resources are being added, as part of the corporate core, to further develop performance management and benchmarking. Currently the measures are mainly set within the specific service areas however some of these are (a) required for statutory purposes (b) set by outside agencies. For example the ICO requires FOI/EIR requests to be responded to on time 90% of the time, there are also set measures by the oflog in respect of a number of areas such as waste/recycling collection.

Item 1.6 states that 'much of what the council currently does is high quality and value for money.' Could this statement be validated please with some objective reference points?

This currently validated through performance measures but also through external reviews such as the peer review and also the annual audit/value for money statement.

Item 1.8 makes reference to 'working parties'. Would you be able to outline more detail about how these will operate, their terms of reference and what officer support will be provided?

These are being discussed by LCG this evening (Monday 4 December) to look to develop these and ensure they make a valuable contribution.

Councillor Dickson:

Thanks Dave for this report and its appendices. On CMIS at the moment

It is good to note (Section 1.14) that membership of the Programme Boards for the Change Programme and Climate Change Action Plan will be cross-party. This is consistent with value 4 of the new Corporate Strategy, i.e., partnership working. When is it envisaged that these Boards will be operational?

It is difficult to assess the efficacy of the Service Area Plans in the absence of specific Performance Measures in the Corporate Strategy document. However, it is welcome that that the SAPs for Priorities 1 and 2 include specific Performance Measure and that it states which of these will appear in the Corporate Strategy – have these been formally adopted by the Cabinet?

It's noted that that there are several Performance Measures marked red. Accepting that some of these are not completed evenly throughout the year, what reassurance is there that these targets will be achieved?

Response from Councillor Davison:

Unfortunately I can't see some of the points that you are making.

1.14 refers to working parties and it proposes that "cross party members working parties are established to develop policy and provide advice to the Programme Boards regarding Strategic Priorities 1 and 2". The terms of reference are to be developed with group leaders.

Sections 1.6 & 1.7 refer to the proposed programme board for SP1, and 1.8 to 1.10 for SP2. We haven't given a timeframe, but I would expect their first meetings to be early in the new year.

Clearly the SAPs and associated success measures will feed into the relevant strategic priorities; my view is that one of the first tasks for the programme boards will be to decide the key success measures, taking due regard of the working parties and service areas.

Regarding performance measures in red, it's probably best to discuss the specifics with heads of service & portfolio holders. Regarding the SBRR, the different meanings & interpretations of 'red' have been discussed and need to be considered in the forthcoming review. I expect that will be relevant, here.

I hope this helps but suspect several conversations will be needed!

Response from Dave Barber:

Ian Davison has provided a response to this. To add to his response on the final question about red performance measures. One of the key roles of the Service Area Plans is to inform the ongoing performance management process and in that context, each of the measures will be reported through Senior Leadership Team and discussed there. Where there are issues (such as the red measures) these will either be addressed through the service management team or by SLT. It is expected that this would enable us to drive improvements. It should be noted, that it is intended the measures will also be reported through scrutiny as and when required and will also be available for all members.

Report Title: Significant Business Risk Register

Report Author(s): Richard Barr, Chris Elliott and Councillor Davison

Councillor Syson:

Question 1-14. Risk of failing to provide, protect and maintain Council-owned property (buildings and equipment). The Pennington report seems to have blown a hole in all our mitigating actions here. In the light of this does internal audit have plans to audit other areas of mitigating actions to check that we are doing what we say are?

Question 2-5. Risk of ineffective workforce planning.

It seems to me that in some areas such as planning and licensing this is already having a serious effect, and until recently committee services. In my opinion this is not reflected in the rankings.

This is a comment rather than a question I am aware that the Risk register is to be reviewed. I do hope the risk of inadequate scrutiny is to be included somewhere. In my opinion O&S is overloaded with responsibility particularly in the financial and housing areas. The committee does an amazing job but faced with Cabinet papers such as these for December it is a very hard task.

Response:

(Cllr Ian Davison) To me, the Pennington's report requires urgent and substantial improvement to this risk mitigation: "Systems and contracts in place to deliver compliance on electrical testing, asbestos management, fire safety, gas servicing, lift servicing and Legionella monitoring with appropriate systems in place across all Council assets. (HoNaA /HoH&C)". Clearly this was uncovered by an external review, and we may wish to undertake external reviews elsewhere in future. However, given the huge work currently required to address the Pennington's report, it makes sense to wait until this reduces.

I agree that workforce planning needs to be taken very seriously. Given that the council is looking to change the SBRR substantially, it was decided only to make changes to risk ratings at this time if some factor has changed (like the Pennington's report) i.e., not to reevaluate the basis for previous decisions, which can be done during the review process.

(Richard Barr) On the Internal Audit one, I agree with Ian that, if we have significant concerns of a similar nature in other areas, these are best investigated through external reviews performed by industry experts. Of course, Internal Audit has a role to play here and, in terms of the property regulatory issues identified by Penningtons, Internal Audit had already established, in conjunction with the Head of Assets, a series of compliance reviews within its strategic audit plan (starting this year), although clearly these won't be to the level of technical detail that industry experts would perform. Ian Davy can provide more information on those if that is required.

Councillor Payne:

Quick question please on the Risk Register re. contract management. Appendix 1, Page 7. The part on service quality.

What does 'effective contract management' mean in terms of a series of practical steps / plans? What is the legal support typically required?

I.e., what does 'contract management' now involve in terms of specific actions with contractors?

Response from Councillor Davison:

Thank you for this question, Josh, about 'effective contract management'. Note that it seems to be on page 13.

I've copied in Jonathan and Rebecca to respond as this is their area, and I believe a key reason for having procurement champions.

Report Title: Safe and Legal Cap

Report Author(s):

Councillor Syson:

This prompts me to ask what is the present state of play on 1 Warwick Street which is supposed to provide more accommodation for single people, amongst others. It seems to have been taking a very long time to reach planning committee.

Response:

Lisa Barker: A good question. The application has been with planning for some time now so your question might be better directed to them.