

Law and Governance

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To Members of the City Executive Board

10 September 2013

Dear Councillors

CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD - WEDNESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2013

The following Scrutiny Reports are attached (agenda item 4)

Allocation Scheme Review
Customer Contact Strategy
Treasury Management Quarter 1
Quarter 1 Spending.



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**



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To: City Executive Board

Date: 11th. September 2013

Report of: The Scrutiny Housing Panel

Title of Report: Allocation Scheme Review

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To report the comments and recommendations of the Scrutiny Housing Panel on the Allocation Scheme Review.

Key decision: No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Smith

Executive Lead Member: Councillor Seamons

Policy Framework: Meeting Housing Needs

Recommendation(s): For the City Executive Board to say if it agrees or disagrees with the following recommendation.

A Communication Strategy should be in place to explain the scheme as agreed, what it means for applicants alongside some general information on the likelihood of being housed. Communication should include the opportunity for feedback on the scheme itself and the understandability of it.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Housing Panel considered the proposals for the Allocations Scheme. They were supported in their debate by Stephen Clarke, Dave Scholes and Councillor Seamons the Panel would like to thank them for their time and advice.
2. The Panel agreed a few drafting changes with officers and the Board member to provide greater clarity in some areas. The Panel had in particular been asked by the scrutiny Committee to consider how we

communicate our allocation scheme, give advice and receive feedback. The recommendation below relates to this.

Conclusions and Recommendation

3. Panel Members outlined a number of instances from their own experience where it was clear that those on the register were not clear how the scheme worked in relationship to their own position and highlighted misconceptions about the likelihood of being housed for the first time or transferred. They heard from officers the methods currently used to communicate with those on the register and the nature of that communication but the Panel felt this was a good opportunity to reinforce and compliment what already happens in a robust and transparent way.

Recommendation

A Communication Strategy should be in place to explain the scheme as agreed, what it means for applicants alongside some general information on the likelihood of being housed. Communication should include the opportunity for feedback on the scheme itself and the understandability of it.

Comments from the Head of Service and Board Member

4. I agree with this recommendation, it is a helpful and constructive suggestion.

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List of background papers: None

Version number: 2

To: City Executive Board

Date: 11th. September 2013

Report of: The Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Customer Contact Strategy

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To report the comments and recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on the Customer Contact Strategy.

Key decision: No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Mills

Executive Lead Member: Councillor Brown

Policy Framework: Efficient, Effective Council

Recommendation(s): For the City Executive Board to say if it agrees or disagrees with the following recommendation.

Recommendation 1

To ensure that separate arrangements for consultation with the Business Community are included in the information gathering to inform the final Strategy.

Recommendation 2

To explore the use of Skype as a communication tool within this Strategy.

Recommendation 3

To ensure that any service developments are evaluated financially around clear value for money principles.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee considered the proposals for the Draft Customer Contact Strategy. They were supported in their debate by

Helen Bishop and Councillor Brown the Committee would like to thank them for their time and advice.

2. The Scrutiny Committee was pleased to see the ambition of the Council to improve further its Customer Service offer. A number of recommendations were made for the City Executive Board to consider.

Conclusions and Recommendation

3. The Committee discussed the range of consultation methods to be used to gather customer data to inform the development of this Strategy. There is no direct mention of the business community and the Committee feels this group may have specific views and needs,

Recommendation 1

To ensure that separate arrangements for consultation with the Business Community are included in the information gathering to inform the final Strategy.

4. The Committee discussed using wider opportunities to allow residents to communicate with the City Council and a member outlined the use of Skype in some Children's Centres connecting clients with various advice agencies.

Recommendation 2

To explore the use of Skype as a communication tool within this Strategy.

5. The benchmark data showed the service to be high cost across all channels and in particular "face to face". The Committee accepted the quality of the offer to our customers and the higher costs that may be associated with that but good value for money principles need to apply.

Recommendation 3

To ensure that any service developments are evaluated financially around clear value for money principles.

Comments from the Director and Board Member

6. Comments at the meeting.

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List of background papers: None

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To: City Executive Board

Date: 11th. September 2013

Report of: The Scrutiny Finance Panel

Title of Report: Treasury Management

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To report the comments and recommendations of the Scrutiny Finance Panel on Treasury Management.

Key decision: No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Simmons.

Executive Lead Member: Councillor Turner.

Policy Framework: Efficient, Effective Council.

Recommendation(s): For the City Executive Board to say if it agrees or disagrees with the following recommendation.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Finance Panel considered the Treasury Management outturn for 2012 – 2013 and the quarter 1 performance for 2013 – 2014. They were supported in their debate by Anna Winship, the Panel would like to thank her for her time and advice.
2. The Panel was pleased to see good performance against prudential indicators and that the budget target for investment income is on track to be achieved. However, this was due to higher than expected funds rather than meeting the target rate of return. A number of recommendations are presented for consideration by the City Executive Board around the management of the investment fund.

Conclusions and Recommendation

3. The Panel noted the high levels of investment balances with a peak of £64m in June. It seems likely that these levels will continue going forward. The management of this level of available investment with falling average rate of return is a concern to Panel.
4. Opportunities taken by officers to invest in property funds have been successful and the Panel welcomed this diversification but noted the limits placed on non-specified investments would limit opportunities. The Panel wants to see a change in this area.

Recommendation 1

To raise the non-specified investment limits from their current levels and redefine what is grouped in this area to manage risk, in an effort to encourage investment diversity and higher rates of return.

Recommendation 2

Wherever it provides for good value for money to consider using investment funds for internal borrowing in order to avoid prudential borrowing.

Comments from the Director and Board Member

5. Comments at the meeting.

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List of background papers: None

Version number: 2

To: City Executive Board

Date: 11th. September 2013

Report of: The Scrutiny Finance Panel

Title of Report: Quarter 1 Spending 2013 - 2014

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To report the comments and recommendations of the Scrutiny Finance Panel on budget spending at quarter 1 contained with the Integrated Performance Report.

Key decision: No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Simmons.

Executive Lead Member: Councillor Turner.

Policy Framework: Efficient, Effective Council.

Recommendation(s): For the City Executive Board to say if it agrees or disagrees with the following recommendation.

Recommendation 1

To express concern about the availability of resources to deliver the Capital Programme.

Recommendation 2

To reconsider the reporting of the Commercial Property rental measure using dates that align to produce a more accurate picture of performance.

Recommendation 3

That the City Executive Board bring forward their strategy for the provision of contingencies with the forthcoming medium Term Financial Strategy to the next meeting of the Panel in November.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Finance Panel considered budget spending at quarter 1. They were supported in their debate by David Watt, the Panel would like to thank him for his time and advice.
2. The Panel agreed that the Council's finances are in a robust state. The Panel pointed out a few errors in the report and officers agreed to make the appropriate changes.
3. The Panel has asked officers to provide more detailed information in some areas. This is listed below for information:
 - Model the financial affects in the HRA and GF of the proposed transfer of assets.
 - Details of contingencies and reserves for the last 5 years showing movements in and out.
 - In future reports to show variances to date as well as variances against budget.
4. A number of recommendations are presented for the City Executive Board to consider.

Conclusions and Recommendation

5. Capital Programme delivery.
The Panel discussed the difficulties outlined of delivering planned efficiencies in Corporate Property and wanted to be sure that the resources are available to deliver our significant Capital programme. Officers outlined that considerations of resources are underway.

Recommendation 1

To express concern about the availability of resources to deliver the Capital Programme.

6. Reporting Commercial Property Income.
The reported outcome against the rent arrears measure is shown as significantly off target. The explanation suggests that the date used to compare collection against the debit due is always likely to produce a "false" outcome. This is unsatisfactory.

Recommendation 2

To reconsider the reporting of the Commercial Property rental measure using dates that align to produce a more accurate picture of performance.

7. The Panel discussed the large amounts in contingencies and as mentioned earlier in the report have asked for more data on the total

amounts available in contingencies and reserves and how these have moved and developed over the previous 5 years. In addition the Panel heard that the robust delivery of savings and efficiencies has meant that £800k of the contingency set aside to support non delivery in this area will no longer be needed.

8. At the last budget round the City Executive Board, in response to a scrutiny recommendation, agreed to reconsider the current strategy for the provision of contingencies and to consider a policy of pooling risks. The Panel hope that these considerations will be available to them as soon as possible.

Recommendation 3

That the City Executive Board bring forward their strategy for the provision of contingencies with the forthcoming medium Term Financial Strategy to the next meeting of the Panel in November.

Comments from the Director and Board Member

9. Comments at the meeting.

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List of background papers: None

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