

Title of report: Fees and Income

Meeting: Scrutiny Management Board

Meeting date: 21 November 2023

Report by: Statutory Scrutiny Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

All wards

Purpose

To provide board members with information concerning Herefordshire Council's Property Services, Asset Management Plan, together with update reports on council acquisitions of College Road Campus and Three Elms Trading Estate.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The committee members note the appendices.**

Alternative options

1. The appendices are provided for background information. No alternative option is therefore provided.

Key considerations

2. At the board's recent meeting, on 7 November 2023, the board considered the matter of fees and income, making a number of recommendations to be considered in relation to the service cost recovery position, with a view to feedback being provided at the board meeting of 21 November 2023.

- a) assurance be given on how income and charging items that are going to be built into the 2024/25 budget will relate to the policy framework, and
 - b) detailed information on 'quick wins' 'and 'big wins' be provided, and
 - c) details of the priority order in taking work on income and charging forward be broken into a timeline of first, second a third tranches, and
 - d) details be provided of the plans and timeframes for the piloting/development of consultancy offerings of which the council were already aware, prior to Price Waterhouse Coopers' involvement, and
 - e) service charges handbook, what the ambition and priority framework is in terms of what is expected for the budget for the coming year and what will then continue to be a work in progress, and
 - f) Parking charges be used as an example of how net income is linked explicitly to the service it supports, and
 - g) consideration be given to options, particularly in the area of planning, for fees to drive positive behaviours in the community, and
 - h) assurance be provided that public money is not being used to subsidise the delivery of services that compete with the commercial sector, and
 - i) assurance be given that Herefordshire Council will recover the cost of the consultancy carried out by Price Waterhouse Coopers and that a payback period will be identified for that.
3. The chair has also requested that various documents be supplied to the board concerning the council's property services, its asset management plan, as well as update reports on council acquisitions of College Road Campus and Three Elms Trading Estate.
 4. The documents are attached as appendices to this report.

Community impact

5. The scrutiny function supports community development through robust scrutiny of the council's policy framework, including the Local Plan, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, County Plan and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
6. Scrutiny also supports community issues more directly through the work of the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee.
7. The function also helps to ensure that the council discharges its corporate parent duties effectively, through scrutiny of the corporate parenting board and the council's broader work to support its looked after children and their families.

Environmental impact

8. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.

9. All reports to scrutiny committees, as with all council committees, include appraisals of the impact of the report content on climate change. Scrutiny committee work programmes directly link to the County Plan priorities, including the key priority to “Protect and enhance our environment and keep Herefordshire a great place to live”.
10. Climate change and carbon reduction related issues are directly identified in the remit and therefore focus of the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee.
11. Whilst this is a decision on back office functions and will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council’s Environmental Policy. Examples include:
 - a. Creation of an online-only briefing programme, eliminating the need to travel to Hereford for a single meeting.
 - b. Paper-free briefings and informal meetings, eliminating the need for printed paper.

Equality duty

12. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
13. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying ‘due regard’ in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. As this report is primarily for information, we do not believe that accepting (or rejecting) this report will have an impact on our equality duty.

Resource implications

14. Effective scrutiny produces evidence-based recommendations. These can be informed by learning from best practice and an understanding of ‘what works’ at other similar local authorities, as well as developing a robust picture of what the situation is locally based on data, intelligence and insights. Where adopted recommendations can help with the efficiency and effectiveness of services that can be delivered differently, as well as informing the development of current and new policies.
15. As this report is primarily for information, there are no direct resource implications arising from this report. However the function may require some funding in order to carry out its work effectively. Requirements may include purchasing training or expert advice. However it is anticipated that much of the training and development required during the year can be met using existing council resources.

Risk management

16. Effective scrutiny is a feature of the council's governance arrangements, where the council is operating executive arrangements. There are a range of factors that could result in risks to the council of not doing scrutiny effectively. These include the failure to:
 - a. challenge and hold decision makers to account
 - b. link scrutiny work to the delivery of the council's priorities and risk management
 - c. carry out thorough and appropriate research to make evidence-based recommendations
 - d. engage partners and providers
 - e. ensure that structures and models of operation are fit for purpose and match ambition and available resources
 - f. ensure that scrutiny can operate as the voice of communities and
 - g. draw on member knowledge and experience to inform policy development.
17. To mitigate, tolerate or eradicate these risks, enablers for effective scrutiny include:
 - a. operating in an apolitical manner
 - b. clarity of vision and purpose
 - c. scrutiny support availability, capability and capacity
 - d. effective engagement and commitment by members and officers at all levels, including cabinet, opposition leaders, scrutiny chairs and senior officers who play a central role in setting the tone and direction
 - e. robust work programming and prioritisation of topics with clear objectives and expected impacts
 - f. ensuring that scrutiny work will add value to the council and communities e.g. through strong links between work programme topics and the integrated strategic plans that set out the actions and timescales to deliver the priorities in the County Plan
 - g. access to and availability of robust data and intelligence and
 - h. good relationships with partners and providers.

Consultees

None

Appendices

1. Property Services Strategic Asset Management Plan
2. Property Services New Ways of Working Informal Brief November 2023
3. College Road Campus Cabinet Member decisions update

4. Three Elms Cabinet decisions update

Background papers

None identified