

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

5 March 2024

Present:- Councillor Chris Pearson (Chair)
Councillor Paul Dundas, Councillor Dave Harris,
Councillor Alison Jay, Councillor Sara Naylor, Councillor
Paul Smith, Councillor William Sunnucks

Substitutions:

Also Present:- Councillor David King

414. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that: the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

415. Hibernation of Colchester Amphora Homes Ltd (CAHL)

The Committee considered a report requesting that it consider the formal resolutions that were required to bring about the hibernation of Colchester Amphora Homes Limited, with a view to completing this process by 31 March 2024.

Richard Carr, Interim Managing Director (Amphora), attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Committee with its enquiries. The Committee heard that the process which it was being asked to consider was the same process as that which it had previously approved to formalise the hibernation of Colchester Amphora Energy Company (CAEL). It was proposed that Colchester Amphora Homes Ltd (CAHL) be placed into hibernation, which was entirely in line with the strategy which had been considered by the Committee in 2023, and which had subsequently been adopted by Cabinet. A process of due diligence had been carried out which had considered the single asset and all third party agreements which CAHL had, and the report before the Committee detailed how each of these issues was to be treated.

The Committee was requested to consider, as the Shareholder Committee for the Council's wholly owned companies, on the behalf of the Council, the formal resolutions which had been set out in Appendix 3 of the Officer's report, with a view to then proposing those to Cabinet. It was made clear to the Committee that the requisite resolutions that were required from the CAHL and Colchester Commercial Holdings (Limited) (CCHL) Boards had all been formally approved by those bodies.

A Committee member wondered what the risks associated with the grant which had been received from Homes England (HE) were. The grant had been for the provision of 560 homes, however, planning permission had only been obtained for 360 at the Mill Road site; where were the other homes to be built? What was the current status of the HE grant, and had there been a variation of the terms of this, to reflect the apparent reduction in the number of homes which were now to be provided? It was noted that should CAHL be placed into hibernation, the Council would be left with its Events and Helpline Companies, together with some residual work continuing into the provision of Colchester Fibre. Given that these companies appeared to be performing very well, why had steps been taken to recruit a permanent Managing Director for the Amphora Group, given that the function of the companies had been streamlined to such an extent?

The Interim Managing Director (Amphora), explained to the Committee that his understanding of the HE grant was that this was subject to an agreement between Homes England and the Council, and he believed that this was primarily linked to the development of the Northern Gateway site. He had understood that dialogue had taken place between the Council and Homes England, who had been very understanding of the position, and it was therefore considered that any risk associated with the grant funding being lost to the Council had been contained. In terms of what would remain of the Amphora group, a review of Colchester Fibre was currently being completed, and it was considered that there was significant value in Colchester Fibre remaining part of Amphora, as the Council had received a sum of grant funding from central government to install the network, a condition of which was to look for opportunities to commercialise the network which could only be achieved through a local authority trading company. It was considered that there was more residual value in the companies than was immediately apparent, and the new Managing Director role was one which would potentially be filled on a part time basis with appropriate remuneration. A Committee member suggested that the difference between the number of homes for which planning permission had been granted, and the number for which the HE grant had been provided, could be explained by the fact that a proposed healthcare unit on the Northern Gateway site would have contained a significant number of housing units, which would account for the apparent discrepancy.

The Committee were advised by the Interim Managing Director (Amphora), that Colchester Fibre resided within Amphora Trading Ltd. A Committee member wondered why all the Council's companies were not made dormant, with their activities transferred into Colchester Amphora Trading Ltd (CATL)? When considering making CAHL dormant, the Council needed to be sure that all its activities would continue to be dealt with appropriately; where did the responsibility for the Northern Gateway scheme lie, and what was the strategy for dealing with the Mill Road site? It was suggested that a strategy was required to ensure that the HE grant was secure, as this seemed to represent a risk to the Council. It was also important to know the costs associated with making the company dormant, and the full impact of the hibernation on the Council's balance sheet should be considered.

The Chair of the Committee offered assured that he believed that the Council's administration had plans to deal with the Mill Road site, although the actual format of any development was for the administration to determine. He considered that it was unlikely that the HE grant would be requested to be returned, and although this was a risk, the advice and guidance which had been received from the Council's Officers indicated that this risk was small. The direction of travel of the companies was something which had been considered by the Committee in the past, and it was considered that this would be a matter for Cabinet to consider.

The Interim Managing Director (Amphora), confirmed that a crystallisation of the financial proposals was very important, and if the Committee and Cabinet agreed with the proposal then the focus would be on achieving clarity in relation to this before the end of the financial year.

Andrew Small, S151 Officer, attended the meeting remotely and confirmed to the Committee that it had been acknowledged that there would be a cost to the Council associated with the proposed hibernation which was broadly known, and the issue now was to determine the exact amount to ensure that this was included in the Council's accounts for 2023/2024.

A Committee member considered that the option of closing the company down was one that the Council didn't need to take in case it had value in the future. The costs to the Council would be the same whether the company was closed down or placed into hibernation in the hope that circumstances would change in the Council's favour in the future. In the light of this, he wholeheartedly supported making the proposed recommendations to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET that:

- the resolutions set out in Appendix 3 to Annexe A of the Officer's report which was presented to the Committee, be approved.

416. Review of Colchester Borough Homes Performance

The Committee considered a report inviting it to note the performance targets for Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) for 2024/25, and to make any comments or recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Colchester Borough Homes on performance management arrangements for 2024/25 and beyond.

Philip Sullivan Chief Executive of CBH, Esme Cole, Chair of CBH, Karen Loweman director of operations, Goeff Beales, client services Nabarer for CCC, Lucie Bbreadman attended remotely Strategic Director.

Councillor Warnes attended the meeting and addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rules 5 (1). He had worked in housing for a number of years, and was pleased to see a return to housing inspections which he believed indicated a greater focus on tenant satisfaction. His advice to the Committee was to look beyond the statistics and figures which had

been presented to it, and to consider the processes that affected performance. He believed that there was a significant issue in relation to void or empty property re-let time. It was important to recognise that re-letting homes was only part of getting tenants satisfactorily re-housed, but was an important part. The Officer's Report recognised that the time to re-let properties of 42 days was not good enough, and he believed that CBH needed to be much more ambitious, and suggested that the proposed target of a 28 day re-let period was not being ambitious enough. He advised the Committee to look in detail at the processes of CBH, noting that one of the gauges in re-letting properties was the hand-off period, and there was a need to iron out the breaks in the process through process mapping and carrying out work to identify the causes of delays. There needed to be collective ownership of the process, which included working together to increase efficiency in lettings, and consideration should be given to including weekly void meetings.

Councillor Warnes also noted that according to the figures which had been provided, incidences of damp and mould in properties had risen substantially. Damp and mould were seen as dangerous hazards which would prevent a property being re-let, how would this issue be tackled, and was a pro-active approach being taken? There was a need to manage both the property and the tenants within it, as issues could arise from the use of the property as well as more substantial issues like rising damp. The difficulty in recruiting qualified staff was noted, had consideration been given to offering apprenticeships or prioritising applicants who were ex-service personnel?

The Chair reminded the Committee that it would become more pro-active and detailed in its future examination of both CBH and Colchester Commercial (Holdings) Limited, and would be receiving regular reports from CBH which would invite constructive criticism. It was considered that the report which was before the Committee contained greater detail than had been available in the past.

In response to the comments made by Councillor Warnes, Philip Sullivan, Chief Executive of Colchester Borough Homes, offered support for the principle of detailed investigation into the processes of CBH, which he considered could offer an extra element of assurance to the Committee. Damp and mould issues in CBH properties were being proactively addressed and identified through the stock condition surveys which were carried out, and CBH also reacted swiftly when issues were reported by tenants. It was confirmed that under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System one of the category 1 hazards could relate to damp and mould. CBH was now considering property archetypes which were more susceptible to damp and mould, and was also looking at its tenants, particularly in respect of vulnerability, in order to prioritise resources. In terms of social value, CBH did use relevant initiatives and was a member of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme which guaranteed interviews to ex-service personal who demonstrated that they met the person specification for the role.

Councillor Warnes was encouraged by the assurance that had been offered, noting that void re-letting was a difficult process which required a specific skill set. He advised CBH to guard against the use of empty properties for storage of repair

materials while repairs were being carried out elsewhere, and considered that there was a potential danger of relying on consultants to carry out stock condition surveys which may produce cloned results.

The Portfolio for Housing was a member of the Committee and assured the Committee that to ensure the provision of social value, the Council considered a number of social value indicators when awarding contracts, such as the use of apprenticeship schemes and membership of the Armed Forces Covenant. With regard to property voids, the Committee heard that the condition that properties were often left in was considerably worse than at the start of the tenancy, and a great deal of work may be required to prepare it for subsequent lettings. There was a desire to do everything possible to drive the number of voids down to be able to house families who were waiting for housing.

Philip Sullivan, Chief Executive of CBH, attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Committee with its enquiries. The purpose of report was to brief the Committee on the new regulatory housing regime which would commence on 1 April 2024, and to provide an update on the performance of CBH. The Committee heard that CBH managed approximately 5,600 general needs homes, 560 homes for older persons and 1,000 leasehold properties on behalf of the City Council. From April 2024, a new regulatory regime overseen by the Regulator of Social Housing would commence, and the Regulator would pro-actively monitor the Council's compliance with new consumer standards which had been set out in the Officer's report. Inspections would take place of landlords, including the City Council and CBH. The Social Housing Regulation Act which had been passed in summer 2023, had introduced powers to set competency and conduct standards for housing staff which were the subject of a current government consultation. The Committee was asked to consider and note the medium term delivery plan performance, together with the 2024/2025 targets which were contained in the Officer's report. It was proposed that CBH would report on a quarterly basis to the Committee to provide information which would enable the Committee to challenge, and gain assurance of, the compliance of CBH with the new regulatory framework. With regard to tenant satisfaction measures, the full set of benchmarks would be reported to the Committee after these had been collated by the Regulator. CBH had faced some challenges in the preceding year, including void re-let time and damp and mould in properties, with 458 cases requiring inspections in relation to this. Karen Loweman, Director of Operations for CBH, attended the meeting and advised the Committee that driving down void re-let times involved a multi-faceted process, but now the statistics showed an improve position. The re-let time had improved from 42.1 days at the end of quarter 2, to 32 days by end of December 2023 with a further improvement to 29 days by the end of Jan 2024. It was hoped that CBH would be at, or near to, its 28 day re-let target by the end of the financial year. Noting the suggestions which had been made by Councillor Warnes, it was confirmed to the Committee that some of these had already been implemented such as improved communications with tenants, and the holding of weekly meetings.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Chief Executive of CBH confirmed that the new inspection regime would be focussed on senior CBH staff

who had the skills to deal with this. CBH would be alert to the challenge posed by the new regime and would be able to demonstrate the good work carried out by both Colchester City Council and CBH.

A Committee member sought to understand the roles of different parties in the management of CBH, noting that the Committee was acting as the shareholder Committee for the company, and wondering whether too much focus was being directed towards the management of the company while overlooking the portfolio. Was the Committee considering the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in the right way? The very large volume of performance indicators which would be reported to the Committee was noted, however, it was considered that CBH offered a more expensive service than its competitors such as Tendring District Council. Could benchmarked figures which were reconciled back to the accounts be provided to the Committee? It was acknowledged that there were currently significant issues with homelessness which created problems with managing the portfolio, there was a clear need to ensure that dwellings were allocated as efficiently as possible to those most in need. It would be useful for the Committee to consider a breakdown of management costs to understand what work was being carried out and how this overlapped with the cost centres in the Council's own accounts.

The Chief Executive of CBH confirmed that the Committee would be the route for the Council to gain assurance on the new regulatory consumer standards, and through the work of the Committee, Full Council will receive that assurance. There were a significant number of performance metrics, and the Committee heard that the Board of CBH scrutinised its performance as well as working with the Portfolio Holder to ensure that this work was challenged and scrutinised. The HRA was not managed by CBH, and the Committee heard that a review of the constitution of the HRA was currently taking place, and the Committee would receive a briefing on this topic shortly. In terms of benchmarking data, CBH was just under £3m more cost effective than peers. CBH did, however, manage additional functions for the Council including homelessness, housing options, the management and upkeep of corporate buildings which would be reflected in CBH's accounts. Benchmark data could be shared with the Committee, but it was important to ensure that only similar services were compared across different providers.

At the invitation of the Chair, Esme Cole, Chair of the Board of CBH, addressed the Committee. She advised the Committee that a number of Committees were available to the Board of CBH to provide scrutiny and assurance.

Geoff Beales, Client Services Manager, confirmed to the Committee that the ultimate responsibility for regulatory compliance rested with the Council and not CBH. The Committee, in its role as the Shareholder Committee, needed to be assured that the information which was presented to it by CBH was accurate, and in the future it was anticipated that the Regulator would sit in on Committee meetings to listen to the constructive challenge which would be posed by the Committee.

In discussion, the Committee noted that the Officer's report indicated that complaints were becoming more complicated, and sought clarification on what this meant. There

was also a discrepancy between the reported complaint satisfaction rates, with tenant satisfaction being recorded as much lower, what was the reason for this?

The Chief Executive of CBH advised the Committee that complaints were becoming more complicated because of the external environment that CBH operated in, and in particular significantly greater involvement from the Housing Ombudsman. By way of example, there had been had a case where CBH had been found to be at fault for trying to assist someone who had been the victim of anti-social behaviour (ASB), where CBH had been criticised for acting beyond its remit. With regards to complaint satisfaction, the difference in the data was explained by the fact that 2 surveys had been carried out and the higher satisfaction had been reported from those who had actually been through the complaints process, with the lower rate of satisfaction based on a perception survey which had been carried out. It was arguably very positive that those who had actually experienced the service were more satisfied. It was confirmed to the Committee that the complaints figures which had been provided to it included all complaints which had been received by CBH from tenants and third parties.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing considered that the environment that CBH operated in was becoming increasingly complex because of the levels of regulation from government which had the aim of improving standards. CBH was arranging for a dummy inspection to take place to prepare for the real inspection, and the Council needed to be able to demonstrate that CBH was being held to account. On the whole what had been presented to the Committee was very positive, and performance figures presented were generally good, although with some weak spots. The Council did have local letting policies to give priority to those with a local connection to the area to provide first choice of available properties if a prospective tenant with a local connection was in the same band as another prospective tenant. Of key importance had been the switch to charging affordable rents on properties of 70% of the market rate, as opposed to charging social rents at 50% of the market rate, and this additional income had enabled the delivery of more services. It was suggested that CBH had delivered a positive service in very challenging circumstances, delivering frontline services for almost 6,000 households across the city. There was a need to carefully observe compliance with the targets which had been set, but it was felt that these were achievable. Although the performance indicators contained a large degree of positivity, it was hoped that repair times would improve over the coming year.

RESOLVED that:

- the performance targets for 2024/25 be noted,
- the new reporting arrangements as set out in section 5 of the Officer's report be agreed.

417. Draft Statement of Accounts 2022/2023

The Committee considered a report requesting that it note the draft Statement of Accounts 2022/23 prior to the completion of the external audit process.

The Chair advised the Committee that he had been in detailed conversation with Committee members prior to the meeting, and had requested that the Democratic Services Officer make provision for an additional meeting before the end of the municipal year where consideration of the draft statement of accounts 2022/2023 would be the only item on the agenda. It was acknowledged that Committee Members wished to make detailed comments on the draft statement of accounts, as well as the position with the Council's external audit. In the light of these concerns, it was proposed that consideration of this item was deferred until an additional meeting of the Committee could be scheduled in late March or early April 2024.

A Committee member noted that the consultation on the new deadline for getting accounts audited by 30 September 2024 expired in 2 days time, and he was keen for The Council to protect itself by making a substantive response to this consultation, saying that the deadline was supported but that a resolution mechanism for those who don't make the deadline was needed. He had prepared a detailed draft response to this consultation and would circulate this to the Committee and the Leader of the Council.

In response to enquiries from the Committee, the Deputy S151 Officer confirmed that the Council's external auditors, BDO, had recently been very active when considering the outstanding audit of the Council's statement of accounts for 2020/2021, and were starting to work on the accounts for 2021/2022. Further details would be obtained in the near future and the Committee would be updated as soon as additional information became available. Additional questions about the statement of accounts had been received from a Committee member that afternoon, and the Deputy S151 Officer explained to the Committee that the Council's Finance Team was currently engaged with preparing the 2023/2024 statement of accounts and therefore responses to these questions may be delayed.

Andrew Small, S151 Officer, reminded the Committee that the accounts which were before it were only for noting at this stage and were not being presented for approval. The statement of accounts would come back to the Committee with the auditors opinion for the Committee to agree, and it was at this point that any issues with the accuracy of the accounts would be raised. He was satisfied that the reparation of the accounts which were before the Committee was correct, including the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). In relation to the consultation deadline which had been referenced, it was regrettably accepted that the current situation needed a resolution which would inevitably require qualifications for accounts and there were 3 options available to the auditors which would require further detail, and which were to issue qualified, unqualified or disclaimed accounts. The Committee was advised that at the end of December 2023 there had been 777 public sector audits outstanding across the country and it was considered likely that there would be many unqualified or disclaimed accounts issued.

RESOLVED that: the consideration of the draft statement of accounts 2022/2023 be deferred until a future meeting of the Committee, at a date to be determined by the Democratic Services Officer.

418. Treasury Management Outturn 2022/2023

The Committee considered a report requesting it note the Council's Treasury Management Outturn 2022/2023.

Chris Hartgrove, Deputy S151 Officer attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Committee with its enquires. The Committee heard that the Council's borrowing had declined over the previous year from £161.1m to £156.6m, and investments had decreased from £64.5m to £32.5m. The S151 Officer had confirmed compliance with Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rules and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) code, as well as following the advice of the Council's treasury management advisor, LINK. An error in the Officer's report which was before the Committee had been identified in paragraph 6.4 in relation to the weighted average maturity for banks which had been expressed, and a written correction would be circulated.

The Committee discussed the information which had been presented to it, and sought clarification on a number of points. The Deputy S151 Officer explained that the Council's Operational Boundary and Authorised Limit for External Debt as set out in the Officer's report represented controlled borrowing within defined limits, and the boundaries had been set in accordance with the Council's financing requirement. The reason for the gap between authorised an actual borrowing which had been identified was delays to the Council's Capital Programme, which had lead to reduced borrowing.

A Committee member considered that when carrying out the review of the HRA it would be of critical importance to secure market-based interest forecasts as opposed to theoretical forecasts. The S151 Officer confirmed that the information provided by LINK came from economists and the PWLB interest rates were inextricably linked to the gilts market. The Council would set a budget for the following year, and forecasts for the years following this, but the forecasts would be revisited every year based on updated information which would be used in planning for future years. The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan was subject to constant readjustments based on updated information.

The Committee enquired how the Council's operational boundary limit for borrowing of 375m was calculated? The S151 Officer confirmed that the figure was an amalgam of the Council's overall borrowing requirements, in addition to cash flow borrowing requirements and an additional subjective estimation of any potential contingency need which may arise.

RESOLVED that: the treasury management outturn 2022/2023 be noted.

419. Verbal Update from the Council's S151 Officer with regard to the Council's Treasury Management Mid-Year update 2023/2024

The Committee received a verbal update from the Council's S151 Officer with regard to the Council's Treasury Management Mid-Year Update 2023/24.

Andrew Small, S151 Officer, attended the meeting remotely to present the update and assist the Committee with its enquiries. The Committee was advised that the

Council's Finance Team had been engaged with the preparation of the Council's budget and producing final accounts which had caused some delays in providing information to the Committee which it may have expected. Treasury Management Information had, however, been provided to Councillors on 21 February 2024 as part of the budget setting process. The Council's borrowing as at 4 March 2024 stood at £147m, with £123m of this being borrowed by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The overall borrowing level as reported to Council on 21 February 2024 was well below the Council's capital financing requirement of almost £250m, and borrowing remained within operational and authorised boundaries. Total investments as at 4 March 2024 were £32.8m, and were currently being deliberately managed downwards with the aim of achieving a liquidity buffer of £20m which minimised the Council's external borrowing requirement, which reduced risks and overall borrowing costs. The Council had fully complied with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)'s Treasury Management Code for 2023/2024. All the Council's investment was supported by the Council's treasury management adviser LINK. More information on treasury management would come forward at future meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED that: the verbal update be noted.

420. Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring Report 2023/2024

The Committee considered a report setting out the 2023/24 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account positions, for both revenue and capital, as of 31st December 2024.

Chris Hartgrove, Deputy S151 Officer attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Committee with its enquiries. The Committee was advised that there had been an error in the published Officer's report in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital table at section 9.2, which should have had a variance of £1.493m on revenue contribution and £12.395m on borrowing respectively. Updated information would be circulated to the Committee after the meeting.

The Council was experiencing a number of financial challenges, and the Officer's report revealed a forecast general fund net revenue overspend of £1.916m, which represented a slight deterioration of £469k when compared to quarter 2. A key difference had been the pay award of 2023/2024 which had been settled after the quarter 2 forecast had been presented to the Committee. The projected overspend of £2.975m on service budgets which was further analysed in the report, and this was offset by a projected underspend of approximately £1.8m on capital financing costs. The largest spending pressure related to the Council's homelessness service which, in common with local authorities across the country, was experiencing a surge in demand from service users. The Officer's report set out the anticipated use of the Council's reserves and the Committee was reminded that this included the anticipated use of earmarked reserves too which included the spending of available funds as well as the impact of the projected overspend, which had been addressed in the base budget for 2024/2025. The General Fund Capital Programme presented

in the report showed that capital spending had continued to be subdued. The HRA Capital Programme had a projected underspend forecast of £18.244m for the year end with slippage on the Council House New Build Programme forming the largest part of this.

In discussion the Committee noted that when budget had been set in February 2023, inflation at time had been 10.4%, and interest rates had been 4%. The Council had set a budget with anticipated use of reserves set at £2.23m, and it now looked as though use of reserves would be approximately £6m in one year, and it was therefore essential that the Committee and Council did keep closely monitor the reserves, as continued use of reserves at the current rate would deplete them very quickly.

The Deputy S151 Officer explained that the way in which the budget had been recorded in the Council's financial system made the position seem far worse than it actually was. The overspend was reflected in the budget pressures, with homelessness being the best example of this and which had been built into the 2024/2025 budget as a growth item. Other items which had been earmarked from reserves were one-off funds, for example revenue grants which had been unapplied. The way that the budget system displayed this information made the Council's use of reserves appear far more substantive than was the case, and in the future information would be clarified so that the Committee would be provided with greater assurance on this issue.

The Committee noted the large capital underspend, as projects had not proceeded as they were no longer viable. Restrictions on rent had taken a lot of money out of the HRA, which had meant that projects were no longer viable, with the additional effect of meaning more people were homeless and which in turn lead to greater economic pressure on the Council's general fund. There was the need to look carefully as to how to deal with the situation of an aging housing stock with higher repair bills which was taking up the revenue income which was being generated. The Council was in a very difficult and unsustainable position, and the complex position was causing greater financial problems for the Council, particularly in the HRA.

The Committee sought clarification in respect of the Council's use of reserves, which was complicated, and sought to understand where in the accounts the difference lay between the income the Council received, and its expenditure. It appeared that the use of reserves would total approximately £6m, did this use represent a loss to the Council of this amount of money? Andrew Small, the Section 151 Officer, advised the Committee that the use of reserves consisted of money which had been set aside for a specific purpose, and when the money had been spent from the reserves this expenditure was made through the revenue account, and money was taken from the reserves to offset this payment. In this sense, the use of reserves was not a representation of money coming in and going out from the Council, but was simply the use of money which had been set aside in previous years. The Committee accepted that if the Council was using reserves which had been pre-determined then the apparent deficit was not as bad as had been thought. The Committee noted a the existence of a small reserve called the Strategic Plan Delivery Reserve of

approximately £1.5m, and the Deputy S151 Officer confirmed that this reserve had been funded from a VAT refund which had been saved.

The Committee agreed that the clarity of the reports which were being presented to it had improved significantly in recent months, to the credit of the Council's Finance Team.

RESOLVED that:

- The General Fund revenue position at the end of Quarter 3 (31st December 2023) for 2023/24, including actions being undertaken or proposed to ameliorate the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted (including Appendices A, B and C in the Officer's Report);
- The General Fund capital position at the end of Quarter 3 (31st December 2023) for 2023/24 (including Appendix D in the Officer's Report) be noted;
- The Housing Revenue Account revenue position at the end of Quarter 3 (31st December 2023) for 2023/24, including actions proposed to ameliorate the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted;
- The Housing Revenue Account capital position at the end of Quarter 3 (31st December 2023) for 2023/24 be noted.

421. Work Programme

The Committee considered a report setting out its work programme for the current municipal year.

Matthew Evans, Democratic Services Officer, attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Committee with its enquiries.

The Committee noted the decision which had been taken earlier in the meeting to postpone consideration of the draft statement of accounts 2022/2023 until an additional meeting could be scheduled to consider them in the current municipal year.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, attended the meeting, and, at the invitation of the Chair, Addressed the Committee. Councillor King wished to place on record his gratitude to the Committee and Officers for the work which had been carried out to date, and advised the Committee that consideration was being given to introducing a revised timetable for considering the Council's proposed budget in the future. He requested that Officers be given as much notice as possible of detailed questions which Committee members may wish to pose.

RESOLVED that: an additional meeting of the Committee to consider the draft statement of accounts be scheduled for the current municipal year.