

SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
16TH JANUARY 2012

Present: Councillors: David Sheldon (Chairman), John Chidlow, Philip Circus, Leonard Crosbie, Andrew Dunlop, Jim Goddard, Brian O'Connell, Kate Rowbottom, David Skipp, Tricia Youtan

Apologies: Councillor: Brian Donnelly (Vice-Chairman) George Cockman, Laurence Deakins, Josh Murphy, Jim Rae,

Also present: Councillors: Roger Arthur, Andrew Baldwin, Duncan England, David Holmes, Sue Rogers, Claire Vickers

Officers in attendance: Natalie Brahma-Pearl, Director of Community Services; Sue McMillan, Head of Financial & Legal Services; Helen Peacock, Environmental Co-Ordination Manager.

SO/66 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held 7th November 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SO/67 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

SO/68 **ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE OR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

There were no announcements.

SO/69 **MATTERS CALLED IN ACCORDANCE WITH RULE 14**

There were no matters called in accordance with Rule 14.

SO/70 **REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE USE BY THE EXECUTIVE OR AN OFFICER OF RULE 15 (URGENT POWERS) OR RULE 16 (SPECIAL URGENCY POWERS) OF THE ACCESS TO INFORMATION PROCEDURE RULES**

There were no matters called in accordance with Rule 15 or 16.

SO/71 **MATTERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH CRIME AND DISORDER UNDER THE POLICE & JUSTICE ACT 2006**

There were no matters in accordance with the crime and disorder under the Police & Justice Act 2006.

SO/72 **ITEMS UNDER COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION**

There were no items under Councillor Call for Action.

SO/73 **PRESENTATION ON THE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2012/13 BY THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL & LEGAL SERVICES**

The Head of Financial & Legal Services presented the draft Budget for 2012/13.

The presentation would provide Members with an overall look at the projections and the financial pressures that the Council was facing and how it planned to address them in the 2012/13 Budget.

The Committee noted that the Council had saved £7million over the past five years. There had been no increase in net costs since 2005/6 and overall Horsham District Council was a low cost, low tax and low grant Council.

The Head of Financial & Legal Services explained the cuts to the Government grant. Overall 28 percent would be cut from the Council's grant for services which was a significant part of the financial pressure.

The Committee noted that the Council was cutting expenditure faster than many other low cost authorities. At Horsham, the cost per resident was £96.00 and the Council needed to reduce its expenditure by £2.8million which equated to over £20.00 per head, in order to achieve a balanced Budget.

If savings or additional income were not found, the deficit would deplete the Council's reserves by £3.9million by 2015/16.

There was a new grant payment to the Council and this was the New Homes Bonus. The current proposal was that this grant payment would be added to the reserves and therefore the Head of Financial & Legal Services had made this assumption in the projections.

The Committee noted the changes to the Budget in 2011/12 to the 2012/13 Budget.

There were a number of possible redundancies which Members were already aware of; these had been included in the October 2011 Budget discussions. However there was an additional redundancy which had not been listed, this was from the Street Scene team, and was a result of the merger of enforcement services. These proposals would be discussed by the Personnel Committee in February 2012.

The Committee noted how the Medium Term Financial Strategy would be a huge challenge and would require some major change projects, such as the Customer Access Strategy which would ensure the maximum use of on-line service delivery which would be less expensive.

SO/73 Presentation on the Budget Proposals 2012/13 by the Head of Financial & Legal Services (cont.)

The Head of Financial & Legal Services concluded that there would be a hard change programme ahead.

SO/74 **BUDGET REVIEW WORKING GROUP – TO RECEIVE THE WORKING GROUP’S REPORT ON THE BUDGET 2012/13 AND NOTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD 17TH NOVEMBER, 13TH DECEMBER 2011 AND 9TH JANUARY 2012**

The Chairman of the Budget Review Working Group presented the Group’s response to the Budget 2012/13 and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The Budget Review Working Group had considered the position on behalf of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee and presented its report at the meeting.

The Committee noted that as a result of timings, some information had not been available for the Group to consider on the MTFS.

The report presented reflected the views, concerns and conclusions of the Working Group as a whole.

The Group considered the Budget 2011/12 which was set to achieve its target, however there was some concern around the overruns on the budget for Operational Services, as detailed in the report. The car parking revenue was also continuing to come in under budget.

The Group also looked ahead at the Budget for 2012/13 and the challenges the Council was facing to deliver on budget in a period of uncertainty.

The Members of the Budget Review Working Group had also considered 2013/14 to 2015/16 and felt that the MTFS was a major concern for the Council.

There were significant items of expenditure that had not been included in the projections to 2015/16, these were detailed in the Group’s report.

The Group concluded that the Council was facing huge uncertainty across a range of financial factors. A new MTFS would need to be developed and delivered. Members felt that radical options were required to provide solutions to the financial challenges in the coming years.

In addition to the report the Group also asked that the Committee support its proposal to be engaged in more detailed discussions on the Council’s budget in the next financial year, and to carry out more detailed examinations with the senior officers concerned. The Committee supported this proposal.

The Chairman of the Committee opened the Budget up for discussion.

SO/74 Budget Review Working Group – To receive the Working Group’s report on the Budget 2012/13 and notes of the meetings held 17th November, 13th December 2011 and 9th January 2012 (cont.)

Members questioned the necessity of the Warnham Mill Pond reconstruction, which had not been included in the projections.

The Director of Community Services explained that the Council was required to take action to comply with legislation. If the Council did not take action then the Environment Agency would carry out the works and recover the costs from the Council.

The Council was trying to reduce the burden by securing as much funding as it could. The full report on the Warnham Mill Pond reconstruction would be presented to Cabinet for approval.

Members questioned why the leisure centre improvements were not included in a repairs fund budget for the year and whether there was a planned maintenance programme in place. Members were informed that provisions had been made but these had not been sufficient.

The Committee discussed the possibility of increasing Council Tax but Members were informed that a one percent rise would not generate significant extra income.

A suggestion to increase planning application fees was also made but Members noted that these were determined by Government and although they may be increased for cost recovery they could not be increased for income.

The Chairman of the Budget Review Working Group also presented the notes of the meetings held 17th November, 13th December 2011 and 9th January 2012.

RESOLVED

That the notes of the Budget Review Working Group meeting held 17th November, 13th December 2011 and 9th January 2012 be received

REASON

All notes of Working Group meetings are to be received by the Committee.

SO/75 **BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT WORKING GROUP – CHAIRMAN’S UPDATE AND NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD 29TH NOVEMBER 2011**

The Chairman of the Business Improvement Working Group presented the notes of the meeting held 29th November 2011.

The Working Group had identified some future areas of work for its work programme.

SO/75 Business Improvement Working Group – Chairman’s update and notes of the meeting held 29th November 2011 (cont.)

One area was budgeting as a business process. A new business process was in place and once the new Director of Corporate Resources was in post, she would be invited to a meeting to review wider budgeting issues that had been highlighted in the Acorn Plus report.

A second future area of work was S106 and open spaces. The Group noted that work was in progress and once the new Head of Leisure Service was appointed the Group would revisit this issue.

At the last meeting the Business Improvement Working Group had revisited the Council’s use of consultants. The Group felt that the Cabinet response did not do justice to the recommendations made following the original review by the Working Group, and the Members agreed that it wanted to prepare its own paper on the principles and processes of managing the use of consultants. The Chairman was preparing a report for the next meeting of the Working Group, following approval it would be presented to the Committee and then referred to Cabinet again.

The Committee was encouraged by the extra work on the Council’s use of consultants.

The Group received an update report on Redesign and Members were keen to have a role in the bigger change programme. There would be a further review in six months time.

RESOLVED

That the notes of the Business Improvement Working Group meeting held 29th November 2011 be received

REASON

All notes of Working Group meetings are to be received by the Committee.

SO/76 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP –CHAIRMAN’S UPDATE

There had been no further meetings of the Performance Management Working Group.

RESOLVED

That an update be given in respect of the Performance Management Working Group

SO/76 Performance Management Working Group –Chairman’s update (cont.)

REASON

All Working Group updates are to be received by the Committee.

SO/77 **SOCIAL INCLUSION WORKING GROUP – CHAIRMAN’S UPDATE AND NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD 5TH DECEMBER 2011**

- **TO APPROVE THE DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE REVIEW ON DISABILITY ACCESS TO THE COUNCIL’S SERVICES**

The Committee received the notes of the Social Inclusion Working Group meeting held 5th December.

The Committee also received the draft terms of reference for its next review on Disability Access to the Council’s Services, for approval.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the terms of reference for the review by the Working Group on Disability Access to the Council’s Services be approved
- (ii) That the notes of the Social Inclusion Working Group meeting held 5th December 2011 be received

REASON

All notes of Working Group meetings are to be received by the Committee.

SO/78 **PROGRESS ON CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP – TO RECEIVE THE FINAL REPORT**

The Chairman of the Working Group presented the final report following the review on the Council’s progress on Climate Change.

The Group had reviewed the Council’s progress made against the Nottingham Declaration and the Climate Change Strategy and concluded that it had progressed well.

The Group had categorised and highlighted what could be achieved in the future and its priority due to financial constraints and officer time.

The Group considered suggestions from Members i.e. working with supermarkets to reduce the use of plastic bags and also the suggestion to change the name from ‘climate change’ to an alternative name linked more to energy saving.

SO/78 Progress On Climate Change Working Group – To receive the final report (cont.)

The Group also suggested working jointly with West Sussex County Council to produce strategies.

As part of the review, the Group had also looked at other district councils.

A number of actions were identified and categorised into high, medium and low.

Overall the Committee supported the change of the name from climate change to help with public scepticism and changing the direction to objectives the community agree are important.

The public are interested in reducing their costs, which will inevitably reduce carbon emissions.

The Committee also discussed the pilot trade waste scheme and agreed that the Cabinet Member should focus on trade waste and give it high priority. It was also suggested that this issue be pressed through the Local Government Association (LGA)

Therefore the Committee approved the report and thanked the Group for the comprehensive review.

It was agreed that two additions be made to the report, firstly under section 4.5 - *Future actions and priorities*, subsection - *waste prevention*, the following action be added:

“v) To review the impact of any trade waste pilot and make any necessary recommendations”

Secondly, an additional recommendation be made:

“(vii) Propose that the Council use its position within the LGA to press for greater Government action to reduce trade waste”.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- (i) Note that progress has been made in relation to the commitments in the Nottingham Declaration and also with a significant number of projects in the existing Climate Change Action Plan and that carbon dioxide emissions have started to fall, both across the District and from the Councils estate
- (ii) Consider whether to sign the revised Nottingham Declaration; dependant on the resource implications of doing so

SO/78 Progress On Climate Change Working Group – To receive the final report (cont.)

- (iii) Use its position within the LGA to press for greater Government action to reduce trade waste

RECOMMENDED TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

- (i) Consider the actions in paragraph 4.5 as priorities for future areas of work in relation to climate change
- (ii) Support the continued production of the annual report which contains information on the changes in carbon emissions for both the District and the Council, and an update of key projects that contribute to these changes
- (iii) Respond to the consultation on the Environment and Climate Change Board Route Map and Action Plan and consider how this could inform the future direction of the Climate Change Strategy for tackling the causes and effects of climate change across the District
- (iv) Consider whether to adopt the targets included in the Environment and Climate Change Board Route Map and review the targets for its own estate

SO/79 ACORN PLUS WORKING GROUP - CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE AND NOTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD 22ND NOVEMBER, 14TH DECEMBER 2011 AND 4TH JANUARY 2012

The Chairman of the Acorn Plus Working Group presented the notes of the meetings held 22nd November, 14th December 2011 and 4th January 2012.

The Group had concluded that all Members of the Executive should take responsibility for individual budgets and schemes and they should present to Council on a quarterly basis on any budget variances.

The Group agreed that there was a definite link between the Cabinet Members' responsibilities and the Director's terms of reference and that the operation of the schemes should be written into the Director's terms of reference, therefore the Group had suggested a complimentary statement to that effect.

The Members had also looked at other local authorities as part of the review.

SO/79 Acorn Plus Working Group - Chairman's update and notes of the meetings held 22nd November, 14th December 2011 and 4th January 2012 (cont.)

Regarding the information requested on the Acorn Plus scheme itself, the Group wanted confidence in figures. Members noted that overall the cost of the operation was going down.

The Group was confident in the operation of the new Acorn Plus scheme and considered it to be excellent.

It was anticipated that the final report of the Working Group would be presented to the Scrutiny & Overview Committee at its next meeting.

RESOLVED

That the notes of the Acorn Plus Working Group meetings held 22nd November, 14th December 2011 and 4th January 2012 be received

REASON

All notes of Working Group meetings are to be received by the Committee

SO/80 **TRAFFIC IN VILLAGES WORKING GROUP – CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE**

There had been no further meetings of the Traffic in Villages Working Group. The next meeting would be held on Monday 30th January 2012 at 5.30pm.

RESOLVED

That an update be given in respect of the Traffic in Villages Working Group

REASON

All Working Group updates are to be received by the Committee.

SO/81 **ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR WORKING GROUP – CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE AND NOTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD 6TH DECEMBER 2011**

The Chairman of the Antisocial Behaviour Working Group presented the notes of the meeting held 6th December 2011.

The Chairman added that to date 21 responses to the Antisocial Behaviour Questionnaire, which was sent out to parish and neighbourhood councils at

SO/81 Antisocial Behaviour Working Group – Chairman’s update and notes of the meetings held 6th December 2011 (cont.)

the beginning of the review, had been received. Which highlighted the importance of the fear of antisocial behaviour and its affect on communities.

The Group had identified the importance of perception; safety and feeling safe was positioned very high on the parish plan priorities.

The Chairman had visited the Antisocial Behaviour Unit at Horsham Police Station and was very impressed with the work conducted by the team. At the next meeting the Group would hear from the Director of Community Services addressing the issues of funding going forward, for the community safety team.

The Cabinet Member for a Safer and Healthier District suggested that the Group question the Police and Crime Commissioner on the potential diversion away from the District to areas of higher crime levels.

The Group was yet to drill down on the style of antisocial behaviour, but the Group had received some very good data.

The Group and the Committee wanted to thank Chief Inspector Mark Trimmer for his work with the Council for the District.

RESOLVED

That the notes of the Antisocial Behaviour Working Group meetings held 6th December 2011 be received

REASON

All notes of Working Group meetings are to be received by the Committee

SO/82 **TO RECEIVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received a suggestion for the Scrutiny & Overview work programme for the review of Southern Water’s metering programme.

A draft set of terms of reference were circulated at the meeting. This item had been raised by Councillor Rogers as Southern Water were beginning to change households over to metered water and whilst there would be a reduction in charges for some, many would see an increase.

100,000 customers across the Southern Water service area will need support and there was concern that people wouldn’t understand why there was an increase in bills.

SO/82 To receive any suggestions for the Scrutiny & Overview work programme

The rationale and criteria should be challenged and some clarity provided.

The Committee agreed that this was a valid area for review and that the Social Inclusion Working Group would add this to its work programme.

RESOLVED

That the suggestion for the work programme be approved

REASON

All work programme suggestions are to be received by the Committee

SO/83 **REPLIES FROM CABINET/COUNCIL REGARDING SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS**

(a) The Committee noted the response from Council accepting the recommendations made in the report by the Social Inclusion Working Group on the Horsham District Community Partnership.

(b) The Cabinet Member for the Environment presented his response to the suggestions arising from discussions at the Performance Management Working Group.

The Cabinet Member for the Environment also noted that costs had come down over the past few years and the recycling percentage had increased.

The Committee noted that the Council would not save costs if it reverted to monthly collections of green waste.

The Cabinet Members' Clean and Tidy Advisory Group considers ways to save costs and welcomed suggestions.

Members were informed that introducing charges for green waste would be against the Conservative Manifesto.

The Committee noted that residents in the District had the opportunity to buy extra bins in the summer months for green waste. Many people were not aware of this and suggested that it be better advertised.

The employment of agency staff would be increased or decreased depending on the level of collection.

SO/83 Replies from Cabinet/Council regarding Scrutiny and Overview
recommendations (cont.)

Members felt it could be unpopular to drop to monthly collections.

The Committee agreed that this would be left with the Cabinet Members' Advisory Group.

The meeting finished at 7.54pm having commenced at 5.30pm.

CHAIRMAN