

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
25 NOVEMBER 2019

Present: Councillors: Leonard Crosbie (Chairman), Brian Donnelly (Vice-Chairman), Roy Cornell, Michael Croker, Billy Greening, Frances Haigh, Nigel Jupp, Lynn Lambert, Tim Lloyd, Jack Saheid and David Skipp

Apologies: Councillors: Louise Potter, Josh Potts and Ian Stannard
Absent: Councillors: Richard Landeryou

SO/35 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd September 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SO/36 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that Councillors who also served as County Councillors only needed to declare an interest if an issue pertained to their ward.

SO/37 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

SO/38 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

The Head of Finance explained that the report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was based on estimates because the impact from the future of business rates and the Fair Funding Review in the 2020/21 budget settlement had been delayed by the Government's parliamentary election and until the UK's relationship with the European Union was resolved. The funding for the 2020/21 budget year was therefore prepared on a 'same as last year' basis. With the existing political and financial uncertainty being exceptionally high, the actual budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy the Council would set in February 2020 for 2020/21 might well change.

There was a discussion around the following issues:

- The Council might have to collect food waste which would have an associated cost and potentially alter recycling rates. The cost of introducing

a food waste collection was anticipated to be a one off cost at the present time but there would be an ongoing increased cost of collection.

- Whether the Government could expect District Councils to have all the responsibility for the collection of funds and the difficulty of maintaining a balanced budget if the Council had to increasingly rely on revenue which it had raised itself. There was a discussion around whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should request the Leader of the Council, in conjunction with other councils in West Sussex, write to the new government requesting clarification on the future funding of local government.
- The specific reserve used to fund a sum of £770,000 being allocated for safeguarding wildlife and the carbon agenda. It was stated that it would come from general reserves. It was further explained that a sum of approximately £325,000 which was allocated for the Digital Transformation Programme would come out of the Transformation Reserve.
- The net expenditure on statutory services only. The Director of Corporate Resources explained that it was hard to neatly split out what was statutory and what was non statutory because there were often non-statutory elements to statutory services. It was noted that the whole of Communities and Leisure was a non-statutory service. The Director of Corporate Resources stated that our residents' survey showed it was the non-statutory services which residents valued most highly.
- The MTFs did not include any assumptions of cyclical recession. If there was a recession there was a lag before the effects were felt by the council. There was a question around whether the levels of the Council's reserves were high enough at approximately £6 million. The Director said that represented more than six month's money and was higher than many councils held for this purpose.
- Whether there was anything the Council could do to reduce the cost of bed and breakfast accommodation used to house homeless people. The Head of Finance said the Council had tried to do this and had built more temporary accommodation in recent years. However, the number of homeless people had risen at the same rate.
- The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee wanted the Audit Committee to request a section of their reports confirm the value of Horsham District Council retail assets as at the end of 2019.

RESOLVED

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee request that the Leader of the Council, in conjunction with other Councils in West Sussex, write to the Government requesting that they eliminate the uncertainty on future local government funding.

SO/39 **REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S FINANCE & PERFORMANCE IN 2019/20**

The Director of Corporate Resources presented this agenda item. She highlighted that:

- There was a surplus of £308 thousand at the end of month 7.
- Capital expenditure was 27% of the approved £21.2m capital programme.
- 84% of key performance indicators were on target.
- Council tax collection rates were 0.7% off target.
- Extra casual staff had been taken on to help with Customer Services. However the impact of the recently called General Election was now likely to mean this indicator would not be met. Councillors asked about the causes of election calls. These were explained as: postal vote and proxy vote applications and questions about the electoral roll.
- Income levels at the Capitol were very susceptible to whether there were any blockbuster films. It was noted that the present loss was particularly large and that the impact of the new Everyman Cinema was being felt. It was agreed Overview and Scrutiny would revisit the financial position of the Capitol at the end of the year.

There was a discussion around asking the Leader of the Council and Cabinet members to appear at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings to discuss issues that were being considered. It was agreed that the previous structure of cabinet members presenting themselves to the Committee on a roster basis proved to be ineffective. Therefore it was agreed that in future, cabinet members would be invited to support a scheme or projects which they had initiated and which had been reviewed by the Committee.

SO/40 **UPDATE ON THE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of the Task and Finish Group on Public Health updated the committee on the work of the group:

- There had been two meetings so far
- The terms of reference agreed at the meeting on 15th October 2019 were around the difficulty in obtaining GP appointments. It was recognised the scope might need to be widened.
- The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing had attended the second meeting of the Task and Finish Group on 19th November 2019.
- Three representatives from the CCG had been invited to the meeting but they had declined to come citing purdah.
- The task and finish group chairman felt strongly that the group had a right to ask its questions and would try to get a representative from the CCG to attend in January 2020 to talk about the Care Plan which would be published by the CCG on December 2nd 2019.
- Task and Finish Group meetings could be open to the public at the discretion of the Chairman of the Group and this was welcomed

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group on Off Street Parking noted that:

- There had been two meetings of the Group
- The Monitoring Officer had attended the second meeting of the Group to discuss issues surrounding the Group's wish to remove West Sussex County Highways as a statutory consultee regarding off road parking issues.
- A Strategic Planning Officer had also attended the second meeting of the Task and Finish Group to discuss these issues.
- A third meeting of the group had been arranged for 16th December 2019 at which a representative of West Sussex County Council would be present.

It was stated that the Task and Finish Group on Off Street Parking aimed to produce a report by February 2020. The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group on Public Health explained that the report from that group would be delayed until after the CCG proposals had been released but did plan to have an interim report by February 2020.

It was reported that the production of a cycling infrastructure plan had been delayed until after the Town Centre Plan had been produced. It was anticipated that the Cycling Infrastructure Plan would be produced in January 2020.

SO/41 **CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

It was noted that:

- The Highwood Community Centre Development Proposal and Construction Contract Award would not go to Cabinet until January 2020.
- Money for disabled grants came from the County Council.

RESOLVED

That:

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee request a copy of the business case document for the Highwood Community Centre Development Proposal.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee request a copy of the documents relating to the Housing Strategy.
- The Cabinet Members responsible for the Highwood Community Centre proposals and the Housing Strategy proposals be invited to Overview and Scrutiny

SO/42 **CORPORATE PLAN**

Members of the Committee welcomed the production of the Corporate Plan. There was a question surrounding plastic use. The members of the Committee agreed to support the Corporate Plan.

SO/43 **STRUCTURE AND DURATION OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEETINGS**

It was suggested having an estimated time for discussion of an item on the committee agenda. It was noted that the Committee Officer had already requested that specific questions related to matters on the agenda were submitted in advance of the meeting.

It was requested that the Local Energy Plan be circulated to Members.

RESOLVED

- a) To review the structure and duration of Overview and Scrutiny meetings at the end of the municipal year.
- b) That meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue to start at 5.30pm.

The meeting closed at 7.24 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN