

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
20 JANUARY 2020

Present: Councillors: Leonard Crosbie (Chairman), Brian Donnelly (Vice-Chairman), Roy Cornell, Michael Croker, Billy Greening, Frances Haigh, Nigel Jupp, Lynn Lambert, Tim Lloyd, Louise Potter, Josh Potts, David Skipp, Ian Stannard and James Wright

Absent: Councillors: Jack Saheid

Also Present: Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture
Director of Community Services
Director of Corporate Resources
Head of Finance
Corporate Project Manager
Head of Property and Facilities
Councillor Ruth Fletcher
Councillor Christian Mitchell

SO/44 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th November 2019 were approved as correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to an amendment changing the first bullet point in SO/39 to read £308,000 not £308,000,000.

SO/45 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SO/46 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Committee welcomed its new member Councillor Wright.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee stated that he would be standing down as Chairman after the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 23rd March 2020.

SO/47 **MINUTES OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUPS**

i) Task and Finish Group on Off Street Parking

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group on updated the Committee on the Group's work. An Area Highways Manager from West Sussex County Council had attended the group's meeting on 16th December 2019 and two senior officers from the County Council had attended a meeting on 20th January 2020. These officers were a County Highways (Development Management) Team Manager and a Principal Planner in the Transport Planning & Policy Team.

There had been a discussion about the rationale behind the County Council's planning matrix which determined the number of off road car parking spaces required for a development. The members of the Task and Finish group felt the numbers allowed by the planning matrix were inadequate and that ward members needed to be more involved in decisions about parking spaces as they knew the area. They proposed to develop their own parking matrix whereby:

- a one bedroom place would be allocated 2 parking spaces
- a two bedroom place 2 spaces
- a three bedroom place 3 spaces
- a four bedroom place 3 spaces.

At the next meeting of the task and finish group on 10th February 2020 the group would put together a recommendation for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that Horsham District Council should develop its own planning matrix.

The Chairman sought assurance that the task and finish group had gone into thorough consultation with County Council officers regarding their statutory responsibilities and he was assured that there had been discussions and the situation was open to interpretation. It was stated that having West Sussex County Council Highways as a consultee with a no objection position would protect Horsham District Council legally from planning appeals. Arun District Council and Crawley Borough Council had done this whilst having their own SPD planning matrices.

There was a further discussion around whether the work on the new planning matrix would feed into the Local Plan consultation. The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group said he was happy for it to do so.

ii) Task and Finish Group on Public Health

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group reported that the last meeting of the group had been on 19th November 2019 and the Cabinet Member for Community and Wellbeing had attended. The CCG would not attend meetings of the group despite repeated invitations. The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group felt that Overview and Scrutiny was meant to review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area as set out in the Council's Constitution.

The Chairman suggested sending a copy of the minutes of the Task and Finish Group to Horsham's MP Jeremy Quinn.

The members of Overview and Scrutiny asked the reasons the CCG had given for non-attendance and were told that they were purdah, that the CCG representatives were too busy and that a phone conversation was offered instead.

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group also reported that Democratic Services at Horsham Council had received an email from Democratic Services

at West Sussex County Council saying that Horsham should not be scrutinising health. The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group felt West Sussex covered a very large area whilst the Task and Finish Group was focusing on a much smaller area of Horsham District and a specific issue.

RESOLVED

To send a copy of the Task and Finish Group Meeting on public health to the MP Jeremy Quinn.

SO/48 **COUNCIL BUDGET 2020/21**

The Director of Corporate Resources presented the Council Budget for 2020/21. The net budget requirement for 2020/21 at £11.2m was £0.77m higher than in 2019/20. The budget included £3.5 million to cover additional costs including the loss of £0.87m recycling credits received from West Sussex County Council and increased charges for customers paying by credit card. The Council had made £2.76 million efficiencies to help offset these costs. The Council was able to set a budget which would generate a surplus which would help towards funding future transformation to maximise efficiency and effectiveness.

The proposed 2% Council tax increase remained the lowest in West Sussex and in the lowest quartile nationally.

The proposed capital program for the next financial year would cost £13.3 million and would include improvements to rural car parks, the Highwood development, and disability adjustments to homes.

It was reported that it was felt that the Council's reserves were sufficient to cover the revenue and capital budget at the present time but that beyond 2021 the situation was more uncertain. The director suggested that it was not possible to try to produce a balanced budget for two years in the future as there were too many unknowns to determine whether the Council's estimates were likely to be accurate such as the future of the New Homes Bonus, the Fair Funding Review and potential loss of business rates. Indications were the loss of these funds could leave the Council approximately £7,500,000 worse off.

It was requested that in future the Chairman invite the Cabinet Member for Finance to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when large financial matters were discussed.

The losses of £261,000 for the museum and of £222,000 for the Capitol were questioned by Councillors. It was noted that neither had ever produced a profit but were greatly appreciated by the community. It was further noted that the Capitol had been adversely affected by the opening of the Everyman Cinema.

It was noted that most new posts were created because of the move towards digital technology.

There was a loss of £871,000 in recycling credits from West Sussex County Council. It was felt that County Council financial losses were being moved on to the District Council. It was further noted that if Horsham Council was required to collect food waste it would cost half a million pounds and involve changes to recycling schedules.

There was a question around the budget of £3,000,000 a year for investment properties held by the Council. It was explained that sometimes there were good investment opportunities for the Council and at other times there were not. There was a discussion about the money kept aside in the budget to pay for this. The money was not rolled forward from year to year.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Finance would be invited to future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when large financial items were to be discussed.

SO/49 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORTING TO FULL COUNCIL**

The Chairman stated that he would like Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports and task and finish reports to be reported to meetings of the Full Council as they were of relevance to all Councillors and constituents so reporting would give everyone an indication of what Overview and Scrutiny were doing. The Monitoring Officer had said that reports and recommendations could go to Full Council but the Constitution did not allow Committee minutes to do so. It was noted that a summary of the findings of the task and finish groups and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would go to Council.

SO/50 **MEETING OF THE CHAIRMAN OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL / SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee stressed the importance of transparency. He stated that as Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny he was encouraged to liaise with the Leader of the Council and he would continue to do so as recommended in the Government guidance so that Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive were each aware of the work of the other.

SO/51 **ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS ON PROPOSED HIGHWOOD COMMUNITY CENTRE**

The Chairman considered that major schemes should be brought to the attention of Overview and Scrutiny earlier as recommended in Government guidance. Also, he had asked to see the Cabinet report for the Highwood development and the report was now available before going to Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture had been invited to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. He explained that consultation on the proposals for the Highwood Community Centre had begun on 23rd November 2019.

The Head of Property and Facilities gave a presentation about the proposed Highwood Community Centre and Drill Hall redevelopment. Key points were as follows:

- The Town Centre had other assets including: The Needles Centre, The Drill Hall, the Scout Hut, the ambulance station, the Park Barn, the Capitol Studio. The Cabinet Member also mentioned the Millennium Hall in Roffey and the Methodist Hall on London Road. Local Members questioned the availability of other venues at the times required.
- The Drill Hall had a capacity of roughly 1000m² with a hall of 375m². The Drill Hall's regular users were dance groups and events about once a month. There were also larger ad hoc events. Regular large events included Sussex Artists for 15 days and beer festivals.
- The Drill Hall received a financial subsidy of approximately £45,000 per annum.
- The Drill Hall was approximately 90 years old and had been purpose built for military training. It had poor thermal performance and the cavernous main area was inflexible with all the meeting rooms leading off the main hall. However the sprung floor appealed to dance groups.
- The Highwood site would have daytime parking on site
- The main option for the future of the Drill Hall was to redevelop it to create approximately 20 affordable homes for rent.
- Another option was to refurbish it. This would mean decanting the existing users and closing the building for at least 9 months. There would also be a capital cost of £1 million. It was estimated that the subsidy would increase to £90,000 and there was no guarantee that existing users would return.
- The total revenue cost to the Council of the Highwood development would be £38,000. If the Drill Hall were redeveloped it could create an additional £137,000 per annum for the Council through rent to its housing company.
- The proposal which had been put forward would give existing users of the Drill Hall two years to find an alternative venue.

During the subsequent discussion, other arguments for and against the redevelopment of the Drill Hall were as follows:

For

- The Drill Hall was only used, on average for 9.8% of its usable hours and the Council had a statutory responsibility to ensure public funds were well used.
- Purpose built community centres were much better.
- Building a community centre at Highwood was needed to prevent potential social problems in the future and in order to be able to provide a large nursery facility on the site which would generate revenue.

- Affordable housing was really needed in the town.
- The Highwood Community Centre could be easier to access by car.

Against

- Denne Ward, where the Drill Hall was located, included the town centre so the Drill Hall was an asset for the whole town not a neighbourhood community centre.
- There had been no cost benefit analysis of the option to repair the Drill Hall and then charge higher rates.
- Decisions on the future of the Drill Hall did not need to be linked to decisions on Highwood.

It was noted that Berkeley Homes had a specific agreement to provide the land for the community facility as part of the development at Highwood. They had also provided money by way of an easement contribution.

Two Councillors not on the Committee were permitted by the Chairman to put their views to the group. Their points were as follows:

- It was being presented as a fait accompli that social housing would be developed on the Drill Hall site and better consultation was needed.
- There had been little information and other options had not been considered.
- There were access problems to the Highwood development
- Better use could be made of the ancillary buildings at the Drill Hall

The Chairman was concerned that a sum of £2 million had been identified as the cost of the overall project. £1.2 million plus some Section 106 funding had been received from Berkeley Homes as a contribution to the project. Therefore less than £700,000 was needed from Council funding.

He also pointed out that Highwood was 3 miles from the centre of Horsham.

In conclusion, the Chairman proposed the following motions:

- a) The Highwood community centre development be treated as a stand alone scheme at a net cost to the council of less than £700,000.

The motion was defeated

- b) The future of community facilities in the town needed to be considered together with the proposed development of the Drill Hall for (affordable homes) and an overall review of the site as a whole.

The motion was defeated.

SO/52 **CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

This agenda item was deferred to a later meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN