

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
22 JANUARY 2024

Present: Councillors: Paul Clarke (Chairman), Anthony Frankland (Vice-Chairman), Sam Bateman, Tony Bevis, Philip Circus, Mike Croker, Len Ellis-Brown, Liz Kitchen and Jonathan Taylor

Apologies: Councillors: Nigel Emery, Alex Jeffery, Dennis Livingstone and Belinda Walters

SO/41 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

SO/42 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SO/43 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

SO/44 **PARKING POLICY UPDATE**

Officers had been asked to provide an update on parking policy, which was a matter that had been previously considered by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group.

The Head of Strategic Planning explained that West Sussex County Council, as the highway authority, were a statutory consultee on planning applications and as such provided advice on any transport implications of development, including parking. The County Council's advice was a material consideration when determining planning applications. The County Council had its own parking guidance, which was last updated in September 2020. This guidance was used in both rural and urban parts of the Horsham district and also covered other matters including cycle spaces and parking requirements for commercial developments.

The Task and Finish Group undertook a review of parking in late 2020 / early 2021 and suggested some updated parking standards. It was agreed that consultants would be appointed to help review these standards to help develop a supplementary planning document.

The Council appointed a firm of consultants called SYSTRA in February 2022 and tasked them with reviewing the County Council's 2020 parking guidance to identify where any changes were required and whether the parking standards

suggested by the Task and Finish Group were workable. The consultants also looked at cycle standards and good practice in terms of parking and design. The study found that:

- Many of the problems identified with parking and development predated the 2020 parking guidance. In Horsham town, there was a lot of Victorian development with on-street parking which was difficult to retrofit.
- The 2020 parking guidance was generally acceptable, but there were some concerns that the standards were too low in Horsham town centre based on existing levels of car ownership.
- The 2020 parking guidance could be improved in terms of cycle provision.

The outcomes were reported to Planning and Development PDAG in January 2023 where it was noted that the study would be progressed into further guidance. The Strategic Planning team had, however, spent most of 2023 drafting the Regulation 19 Local Plan.

In terms of next steps, the Head of Strategic Planning explained that if a supplementary planning document was to be created it would need to be based on a Local Plan policy as a basis on which to provide further guidance. This needed to be the new Local Plan, which still had to go through the examination process. The timetable for creating such a document would need to be discussed with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure.

The Head of Strategic Planning also explained that the Council was bound by the National Planning Policy Framework when setting parking standards, otherwise there was a risk that decisions could be overturned at appeal.

Following the update, Members made comments and asked questions. Among the points raised were:

- That the Task and Finish Group sought to have a policy that reflected parking needs in new developments. The Planning Policy Team Leader reported that the consultants had recommended that more work was undertaken around design. Officers had undertaken some preliminary work in that regard. He explained that the government now required local authorities to produce design codes, which could be used to provide improved guidance on parking.
- Where examples of good practice would be obtained from. The Planning Policy Team Leader explained that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had undertaken a lot of work at a national level, in particular the national design code. He advised that the team would probably look wider than Horsham district or even West Sussex for examples of good practice.

The Head of Strategic Planning agreed to put together a timetable as to what the next steps could look like. She highlighted that, aside from the need for there to be a Local Plan for a supplementary planning document to be based around in terms of providing the necessary policy basis to develop the

additional guidance, there were also resource limitations as it was envisaged that the whole of the Strategic Planning team would be working on the progression of the Local Plan to examination. There was also a possibility that the Planning Inspector could require changes to be made to parking policy in the Local Plan which would affect any eventual supplementary planning document.

The Chairman would look to bring the item back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June.

SO/45 **CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGY**

The Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery provided an update on the Climate Action Strategy, which the Cabinet would be asked to adopt at its meeting on 25 January. This was a 10-year strategy covering the whole of the Horsham district which supported the Council's target to reach net zero by 2050. It was noted that the Council's emissions represented only 1% of the emissions within the district and that the Council could not tackle climate change alone.

The Cabinet Member provided an overview of the strategy including the delivery routes and the outcome of the public consultation and engagement that had been undertaken.

The Cabinet Member advised that progress on the strategy would be reported annually and the strategy would be reviewed a minimum of every other year. The strategy would be mapped onto and monitored using an online platform called OnePlanet.

Following the update, Members made comments and asked questions. Among the points raised were:

- How the cost of the strategy could be communicated to members of the public. The Head of Sustainability and Green Spaces explained that, whilst there was a cost to the strategy, the Council's role was one of leadership and facilitation. The decarbonisation of the Council's estate was a more direct cost.
- If the cost of investing was itemised, then the cost of not investing should also be itemised.
- That the social and environmental benefits needed to be considered as well as cost.
- That the strategy should have been adopted by Full Council so that all members of the Council took ownership of it.
- That the strategy should be reviewed more frequently than every two years, and that the annual report should be timetabled into the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme.
- That there should be performance measures aligned to the strategy timetable. The Head of Sustainability and Green Spaces explained that performance would be measured using the OnePlanet platform,

however, the strategy was not just for Horsham District Council and the Council could not include detailed action plans for other organisations. The Council had been awarded grant funding with the South Downs National Park Authority to work with community groups and parish and neighbourhood councils, and that project would start in February 2024.

- The importance of communication, including with councillors, to delivering the strategy.
- Whether councillors could be offered training on use of OnePlanet. The Head of Sustainability and Green Spaces explained that the platform had been updated and officers would be receiving some further training on it. Once officers had received that training, a session may be able to be provided to councillors.
- Whether a briefing for all councillors on the strategy could be arranged. The Cabinet Member confirmed that it could.

The Chairman confirmed that the strategy would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in more detail after the summer.

SO/46 **CAPITOL THEATRE REFURBISHMENT**

The Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Green Spaces provided an update on the proposed Capitol Theatre refurbishment.

The Cabinet Member stated that the refurbishment was an investment in the local arts, in line with the Council Plan. He explained that The Capitol was also the greatest carbon producer that the Council was directly responsible for, and the refurbishment would also lead to a reduction in those emissions.

The Cabinet Member stated that, as a result of the investment, an increase in the quality of productions could be expected, which (along with other changes) would impact upon the bottom line and the annual subsidy.

The Cabinet report sought approval of an investment of £10.7 million, to be funded from the Environment and Infrastructure earmarked reserve.

The Cabinet Member advised that all Members had been provided with an opportunity to be engaged with the proposals and an FAQ document for Members was in the process of being finalised. A public version of that document would also be made available.

Following the update, Members made comments and asked questions. Among the points raised were:

- That residents in some parts of the district did not relate to facilities in Horsham as much as those residents who lived in and around Horsham, and whether more could be done to make The Capitol more accessible to those residents that did not live near to Horsham.
- That increasing the number of seats would enable The Capitol to improve its offering.

- That the extent to which The Capitol could decrease its emissions was limited by the decarbonisation of the grid. The Head of Leisure and Culture explained that the figure contained in the report (a reduction of 100 tCO₂e) was a conservative one and it was expected that emissions would reduce further.
- The social benefits of The Capitol were acknowledged.
- The importance of reaching different audiences, especially those with disabilities and special educational needs. The Head of Leisure and Culture advised that The Capitol had quite a vast programme in terms of its reach. Examples were dementia and autism friendly film screenings. He explained that part of the proposed refurbishment involved the introduction of a changing places facility, which was important for the night-time economy.
- Whether there would be sufficient governance to ensure that the project was delivered within budget. The Head of Leisure and Culture confirmed that there was a project manager. A project work group would also be set up and the procurement process would also put measures in place.
- Whether a risk register would be made available to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Head of Leisure of Culture confirmed that it would.
- A concern was expressed in relation to the impact on the bottom line and whether the annual subsidy would increase.
- That spending the money on The Capitol meant that the money was unable to be spent on something else.

SO/47 **ANNUAL PLAN 2024/25**

The Head of Finance and Performance provided an update on the proposed Annual Plan 2024/25. The Annual Plan sat beneath the adopted Council Plan 2023-2027 and identified the items that the Council would focus on in 2024/25, of which there were 86.

Following the update, Members made comments and asked questions. Among the points raised were:

- Whether the KPIs would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee once they had been reviewed. The Director of Resources advised that the list of suggested KPIs for 2024/25 that was appended to the report on the Annual Plan had been slightly modified as a result of discussions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He encouraged Members to review those and make any suggestions during the meeting. He added that it would be sensible for the KPIs to be built alongside the Annual Plan when planning for 2025/26.
- How many of the KPIs were the same as those that went to the Audit Committee. The Director of Resources confirmed that some of them were the same but all of them were reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- Whether the line “Ensure all vehicles purchased for the Council fleet emit very low carbon or are electric” should be followed by “if needed at all” given that mechanically propelled vehicles still had a carbon footprint.
- Whether consideration should be given to KPIs for planning. The Director of Resources confirmed that PIs for planning were collected and it would be for Members to decide whether they wished to see any of those PIs reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as KPIs. It would not, however, be practical to have every PI reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

SO/48 **REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources provided an update on the proposed Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The Cabinet Member highlighted the following:

- Net expenditure would increase by £800,000, which was essentially the result of inflation and the pay settlement. In order to fund this, Council Tax would increase by 2% for the majority of residents in the Horsham district. A 2% increase for a Band D property equated to £3.34 per year, taking the annual amount to £170.28. This remained the lowest in West Sussex. Residents in the unparished areas of Horsham town would also see an increase in the special charge of around £9 per year for a Band D property, taking the annual amount to around £35. This was less than half of the average parish precept last year.
- Council Tax support would continue, in recognition of the cost of living crisis. This would be funded by a specific one-off grant.
- There would be a £10.5 million capital programme. This included initial spending on The Capitol and other projects across the district. Some items were carried over from the previous year.
- The Medium-Term Financial Strategy was projecting a £3.7 million deficit by 2030. Proposals for reducing this deficit would be brought forward in the next financial year.

Following the update, Members made comments and asked questions. Among the points raised were:

- How capital spend was monitored against the budget. The Cabinet Member confirmed that it was monitored on a monthly basis. Whilst the Council aimed to spend 100% of its capital budget, this had historically been quite difficult because it could be affected by factors outside of the Council's control. Capital spend in the previous financial year was around 50% and the forecast for the current financial year was around 85%.
- Some discussion took place in relation to a suggestion of holding a referendum on increasing Council Tax by more than the statutory limit to

support the Council's capital programme. The Cabinet Member confirmed that there were no plans to hold a referendum.

The Cabinet Member also explained that the receipt of temporary one-year financial settlements from central government made it difficult to plan long-term.

SO/49 **UPDATE FROM TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Councillor Bateman provided an update on the progress of the Fair Space Task and Finish Group. The Group had met at the beginning of January to review policies that linked to the usage by teenage girls of the Council's outdoor sports and leisure facilities. She explained that there were some new staff members at the Council and it was felt that they were not yet in a position to make changes to those policies.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Green Spaces had been requested to attend some of the Group's future meetings.

One of the members of the Group had stood down as a councillor. Councillor Frankland agreed to join the Group.

It was also reported that there had been external media interest in the work of the Group.

SO/50 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman outlined proposals for two new Task and Finish Groups.

The first proposal was a suggestion by Councillor Walters to review a sample of the Council's existing building contracts and to evaluate the outcome of those contracts in terms of cost effectiveness, potential profit and benefit of existing and acquired assets. The desired outcomes were to improve the governance of the decisions taken, and to introduce a register and a protocol to ensure that each contract was logged effectively in that register.

Members agreed to take the proposal forward.

Councillor Bevis agreed to join Councillor Walters on this Task and Finish Group. Membership would be open to all members of the Council.

The second proposal was a suggestion by the Chairman to improve the delivery of the non-financial aspects of s106 agreements such as hard and soft landscaping, public open space management and transfers of land from developers to management companies. He explained that there was evidence of some provisions under s106 agreements not being delivered. The proposal was to introduce a way of recording the non-financial aspects of s106 agreements so that officers could monitor whether they had been delivered.

Members agreed to take the proposal forward. One Member commented that Horsham District Council should not be excluded from scrutiny where it had made the commitment to provide the space.

Councillors Croker, Ellis-Brown, Frankland and Taylor expressed an interest in joining the Chairman on this Task and Finish Group. Membership would be open to all members of the Council.

The Task and Finish Group on building contracts would be set up first and the Task and Finish Group on the non-financial aspects of s106 agreements would be set up once either the Fair Space Task and Finish Group or the Task and Finish Group on building contracts had concluded.

SO/51 **CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.

SO/52 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.25 pm having commenced at 5.33 pm

CHAIRMAN