

CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 19 JANUARY 2017

PRESENT: Councillors David Burbage (Vice-Chairman), Lynne Jones, Ross McWilliams, Eileen Quick and Colin Rayner (Chairman)

Also in attendance: Cllr Coppinger and Cllr Cox

Officers: Alison Alexander, Rob Stubbs, Craig Miller, Rob Stubbs, David Scott and David Cook.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received by Cllr Bowden, Cllr Carroll, Cllr Rankin, Andy Jeffs and Russel O'Keefe.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received. It was noted that all Members had a dispensation regarding the Budget Report.

MINUTES

The Part I minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2016 were approved as a true and correct record.

Cllr Coppinger informed that he had noted that the resolution for Delivering Differently in Adult Services mentioned that he was not in attendance to present the report. He informed the Panel that he attended Adult Services and Health O&S Panels and would be happy to attend other Panels when invited.

FINANCE UPDATE

The Panel considered the latest Cabinet Financial Update report that was projecting a £473,000 underspend on the General Fund which was a further increase of £38,000 since the last reported figure at Cabinet. The Panel were informed that the council remained in a healthy financial position with combined General Fund Reserves of £6.33m, which was above the recommended limit set by Council..

The Adults, Children and Health directorate project an overspend of £192,000, Corporate and Community Services projected an underspend of £64,000 and Operations and Customer Services reported a £596,000 underspent.

(Cllr Saunders joined the meeting)

The Chairman asked if there were any issues on the horizon and was informed that future pressures were dealt with in the Budget report being considered by the Panel.

Resolved unanimously: that the Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the Financial Update Cabinet report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Panel were informed that there were no unforeseen budget risks and future pressures were in the Budget report. The Chairman thanked the Lead Member for attending the meeting.

BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX

The Panel were addressed by Cllr Saunders, Lead Member for Finance, on the 2017/18 Budget report due to be considered by Cabinet and Council. Cllr Saunders provided a brief overview of the report and said he was happy to answer any questions.

Cllr Saunders informed that Panel that the proposed budget contained an increase in revenue investment of about £2.5 million to help protect the most vulnerable people in the Borough. Examples of increased investment included £1 million added for adult social care, £400k for expanding the practical support for homeless residents, £330k for rising home to school transport for special needs pupils requirements and £120k over three years for increasing early years pupil premium spend.

There was also proposed investment in the Planning Department, for tree maintenance and investment for our voluntary organisations providing community needs.

The proposed council tax increase was 0.95 percent which was lower than the retail price index. There was also a proposal to increase the adult social care precept by three percent.

The Panel were informed that the proposals meant that a band D property would pay £961.46 for their council tax, this figure included the three percent increase for the adult social care precept.

With regards to Fees and Charges the Panel were informed that the majority of charges would see no increase in real terms. There had been a few increases that brought the borough in line with neighbouring authorities where we had been significantly under charging in the past.

With regards to Capital investment Cllr Saunders informed the Panel that he had already presented to the Audit and Performance Review Panel the need to change the way we funded our major capital projects.

Cllr Saunders informed the Panel that over the last few years the Council had decided to make a number of strategic capital expenditure, such as school expansion and new library. Historically loans would have been taken to fund these projects however it had been decided that instead of loans the Council would use its reserves to fund capital projects saving about £150k in interest rates. The Panel were informed that, as demonstrated in the Financial Update reports, this policy was no longer sustainable and thus it had been decided borrow money for capital projects.

It was proposed that over the next year about £75 million would be spent on capital projects that included a further £12.1 million for the ongoing schools expansion plan, £14.5 million for stage one of the new leisure centre, £9.4 million for stage one expansion of Broadway Car Park, £9.2 million enhancing York House, Windsor, £8.3 million for other property and parking improvement, £4.5 million for the consolidation of the St Clouds Way development site and £1.6 million for LED street lighting.

The Panel were also informed that with regards to Business Rates it was proposed that there would be a local newspaper business rate relief of £1,500 per title, all locally controlled rate reliefs maintained, rural rate relief extended and redefined and relief for reinvigorating vacant retail units to be extended to all commercial and industrial premises.

Cllr Jones reported that as the report had been marked as To Follow on the agenda she had not been able to give it sufficient consideration and thus would not be supporting the recommendations at this meeting; she did report that she supported in principle the update provided by Cllr Saunders.

Cllr Jones mentioned that she would like to see an evidence base for the proposed increase expenditure for Adult Social Care to show the increased spend and cost per person over the last five years. Cllr Saunders reported that the Council had a statutory responsibility to provide this information for audit and officers were currently producing this information. Cllr

Coppinger informed that there had been demographic growth and people were living longer. There was also the impact of the living wage and a large number of care homes facing financial difficulty that may need support when contracts are negotiated. By increasing spend on Adult Social Care we would also be supporting the NHS.

Cllr Jones asked if we were aligning our salaries with neighbouring authorities and was informed that the delivering differently programme had showed that we had comparative salaries, if not better terms and conditions, when compared to the other partnership authorities.

Cllr Jones asked if it was right to pass on the apprenticeship levy to schools and was informed that there was an additional tax set by Government on UK businesses with a pay bill over £3 million. Maintained schools were expected to pay the levy as part of RBWM.

Cllr Jones asked if the additional funds for homelessness was available across the borough and was informed that the Council had a statutory responsibility to help where ever a homelessness person presented themselves, the funds followed the individual not a specific location.

Cllr Burbage congratulated Cllr Saunders on preparing his first budget as Lead Member and asked that with regards to the increase to pupil premium funding over the next three years how would we know if this would make a difference. The Panel were informed that there would be specific training programmes set up for individual children and schools aimed at closing the attainment gap.

Cllr Burbage asked that with delivering differently for Adult Services where were the efficiencies in the budget. The Panel were informed that there was a raft of savings across the service that were not dependent on delivering differently these included a decrease in domiciliary care and savings in re-enablement. It was believed that partnership working could also provide additional savings without reducing service delivery.

Cllr Burbage questioned the impact of a loss on business rates and was informed that if we were to sustain a loss of £1m, then we would be expected to cover 49% of the loss (Central Government 50%, Fire 1%); the Head of Finance informed that he would send the Panel confirmation on this issue.

Cllr McWilliams asked how much would a 0.95% increase in Council Tax bring and what would it be spent on. The Panel were informed that the increase would raise £610k that would go towards the revenue investment mentioned at the start of the meeting and tactical revenue investment.

Cllr McWilliams asked why the Council did not make further reductions in other areas or borrow the amount. The Panel were informed that the proposals were a product of two forces officers being challenged to provide savings whilst meeting the revenue costs of maintaining services residents expect.

Cllr McWilliams asked why not increase fees and charges rather than council tax and was informed that the level of fees and charges needed to be fair and we should not be asking for more than the inflation rate. Some areas were increased below 2% but there were also about four areas where the increase was made to bring us in line with neighbouring authorities.

Cllr McWilliams asked if we relied on the new home bonus as a revenue stream and was informed that some Councils, such as Surrey CC, however RBWM was not reliant on grants. This was a significant grant and as we were expecting increased development we would expect this to remain as a meaningful contributor.

Cllr McWilliams questioned the increase in adult social care and was informed that in the short to medium term the increased allocation but us in a good position to meet increased demand.

Cllr McWilliams asked if the increase spend on homelessness would be used for residents moving into the Borough and was informed that it would be spent to help the Borough meet its statutory obligations.

Cllr Quick mentioned that she supported the Budget and was delighted we were not in the difficult position other authorities were facing.

Resolved that: the Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the Budget Cabinet / Council report and endorsed the recommendations, Councillor Jones abstained from the vote as she felt she did not get sufficient time to give due consideration to the report that had been circulated after agenda dispatch. The Panel requested clarification on the allocation of business rates. The Chairman thanked the Lead Member for presenting the report.

DELIVERING DIFFERENTLY IN OPERATIONS & CUSTOMER SERVICES - CCTV

The Lead Member attended the meeting to present the Cabinet report on the findings of the initial review of the council's CCTV system. The Panel were informed that the service costs £540k on an annual basis with line rental and staffing being the largest expenses. The network was over 20 years old and at an end of its serviceable life and thus the ability to maintain the system was becoming more difficult.

The Panel were informed that the Council had a duty to review its CCTV provision and that other authorities such as West Berkshire had decided to de-commission their cameras. A review of the system was proposed to see if we could better utilise new technology. The review would come back to Cabinet in August 2017. Thames Valley Police (TVP) had been fully involved in discussions and were in agreement with proposals.

The Panel were informed that the borough had the largest camera network of any local authority in the Thames Valley and ran it 24 hours 7 days a week. It was proposed to look at different ways of providing CCTV that was reasonable and effective.

Cllr Burbage asked what could be learnt from the review that was not already known and was informed that the review would be looking at technology, service usage and service options.

Cllr Burbage also had concerns about having mobile cameras instead of static ones as it could result in incidents being missed. The Panel were informed that they would be mobile units that could be redeployed as needed however it was expected that they would stay in location for long periods of time.

The Chairman asked that if a village had cameras that the Council wished to de-commission would the parish council have the option to pay to keep the camera in place. The Panel were informed that this would be an option that could be explored as part of the review.

The Chairman mentioned that it would be important to be able to run the service 24/7 in times of emergency.

Cllr Quick mentioned that Thames Valley Police made use of the system and asked if we knew how many convictions had been made as a result of this. The Panel were informed that TVP did not provide that level of data.

Cllr Burbage highlighted that TVP made five visits to the CCTV control room per day and asked if we could charge them for reviewing CCTV footage. The Panel were informed that this was an option but would need to be discussed with TVP as we were also looking at shared services.

Cllr Jones asked if the paper would be brought back to this Panel after the review and it was confirmed that it would.

Resolved unanimously: that the Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the Delivering Differently in Operations and Customer Services – CCTV Cabinet report and fully endorsed the recommendations subject to the Panels points below (and comments made during Part II Private Session) being taken on board by Cabinet. The Panel noted that in the recommendations the implementation options should refer to point 2.28 of the report and not 2.41.

It was mentioned that consideration should also be given to charging Thames Valley Police for use of the CCTV system and provision of evidence bundles; it was noted that this may be subject to collaborative proposals being explored. The Panel noted that Thames Valley police on average visited the control room five times a day yet they contributed little to the running of the control room.

The Panel felt that the cost of removing the cameras seemed excessive at £3000 each, it was suggested that this figure be tested before the work went ahead to remove the cameras.

As part of the review the Panel asked that if residents associations, parish councils or ward councillors with their discretionary budget wanted to retain their cameras would the council would come up with a fee structure that would allow the cameras to stay.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Member for presenting the report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting, which began at 6.30pm, finished at 8.20pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....