

PLANNING & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 1 FEBRUARY 2018

PRESENT: Councillors Richard Kellaway (Chairman), Malcolm Beer, Gerry Clark, Dr Lilly Evans, Julian Sharpe and Leo Walters

Officers: Russell O'Keefe, Jenifer Jackson, Mark Lampard, Shilpa Manek & Nabihah Hassan-Farooq

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No Apologies for absence were received.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 7th December 2017, were agreed to be a true and correct record.

ACTION: Russell O'Keefe & Jenifer Jackson to address any outstanding actions from the previous Planning and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel held on 7th December 2017.

CIL AND CIL GOVERNANCE

Jenifer Jackson, Head of Planning gave a verbal report to the Panel, which updated Members upon the progress of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Governance report scheduled for April's Cabinet meeting. Members were told that the report would outline the proposed CIL Governance arrangements in full and Cabinet Member approval of those recommendations would be sought.

In addition to the CIL & CIL Governance report, a Minerals and Waste Plan Report would also be included for Cabinet's consideration and both of these items had been scheduled and included within the Forward Work Plan for April. The Panel were updated with details of the recent completion of the Minerals & Waste Plan consultation and that a New Minerals and Waste Plan would follow in the summer months. New arrangements had been made to work in collaboration with Bracknell Forest Council, Wokingham Borough Council and Reading Borough Council to formulate the new Minerals and Waste Plan. An Issues and Options Consultation had been carried out last year and a draft plan consultation was due to take place later this year. The new plan would replace the existing replacement minerals plan for Berkshire.

The verbal report was noted by the Panel.

PLANNING TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Chair introduced the report item and explained that the desire to co-ordinate a Task and Finish group had been a co-production by the Lead Member of Planning and Head of Planning to review the Planning Service Function.

(Councillor Dr Lilly Evans joined the meeting)

The Panel were also informed that there had been a Constitution Sub-Committee who had been working to review changes within the Constitution. These changes were to include, peer group recommendations, changes with the proposed reduction of councillors over the next 18 months and to reflect the political composition.

Jenifer Jackson, Head of Planning also informed the Panel that over the last twelve months, significant work in relation to service improvements and performance with planning applications had been undertaken. It was also noted that there had been improvements, but that the anticipated Task and Finish Group would highlight further areas for improvement. The Lead Member of Planning had recommended as part of the Task and Finish group that there should be better engagement with stake holders and more widely, those involved with the service or consultation with the service (which could include, stakeholders, Parish Councils, Agents and Developers). Furthermore, improved reputation of the planning service outside of the organisation was also discussed. Panel Members discussed the current satisfaction of residents and constituents within their wards, and noted that satisfaction was varied throughout the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

Over the past 24 months, the Head of Planning and relevant officers had been working on ensuring the efficient and effective operation of the service with a focus on improvements in the speed of processing of planning applications. There had been some difficulties and challenges with this due to lack of resources, however it was noted that the situation had improved with a successful recruitment campaign and that currently there was a capital bid, which would positively help advance further work in operational improvements over the coming year. Russell O'Keefe, Executive Director outlined options and key considerations for Members in relation the Task & Finish group which were dependent on the outcomes sought. He summarised two options as follows:

1. Narrow focus:- That the Task and Finish group seeks to investigate amendments required to be made as part of the Constitution Review which would further improve delivery of the Planning Service. He noted that this could be resourced with ease.
2. Wider focus- That the Task and Finish group review and identify wider reaching further improvements to the Planning Service as a whole which would require larger resources and support and could not be met within the existing service budgets.

The Panel were also told that the Planning Service did not receive a high number of complaints, but that with any regulatory services, there would be a small amount of dissatisfaction which was to be expected.

The Panel raised the following points:

- What was the current level of satisfaction with the Planning Service from the general public and those involved with the service?
- That complaints relating to timescales of responses to applications should be addressed as part of the Task and Finish Group.
- That due consideration be to the individual needs of RBWM be taken into account, as RBWM differed with specific needs such as, green belt land which had been specifically protected as part of the Borough Local Plan.
- That the impact of a possible expansion of Heathrow and the impact upon planning measures and the Borough could affect the locality and whether this could be explored in the Task and Finish Group.
- Whether public speaking time (which had been a trial under previous Planning Management) could be reviewed as part of the Constitutional changes.
- That the Task and Finish group could have a focus on targeted changes and improvements which could be made to the Planning Service and identify where necessary work could be carried out.

- To look at regulatory functions and discretionary Council functions along with powers and constraints imposed by Government in both law and in speed of processing planning applications.
- Reviewing all relevant Code of Conducts and existing protocols and whether these could be collated into one document separate to the Constitution as part of the Constitutional changes.
- That the Task and Finish Group would require professional expertise for two stage task and finish group, which would look at both the constitutional changes and the wider Planning service.
- That there had been differing positive and negative responses and levels of complaints from councillors
- That clarity of planning processes (for all levels of involved persons, from councillors, stakeholders and members of the public) be a key consideration or a future piece of work which might take in the presumption in favour of development, which it was felt might not be understood.
- That training of members could be considered by the Task and Finish Group which might be extended to include Parish Councils.

ACTION: That the Chair and the Head of Planning agree draft terms of reference to bring back to Panel Members at the next meeting.

ACTION: Draft Membership to be agreed at the next Planning & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel (to be arranged for March).

That the verbal report was noted by the Panel.

BUDGET 2018/19

Mark Lampard, Finance Partner outlined the presentation in relation to the Budget 2018/19 on behalf of Rob Stubbs, Deputy Director and Head of Finance.

The presentation outlined the following key points:

- RBWM has the lowest council tax outside of London, however Council Tax would be increased by 1.95% this year.
- The Adult Social Care precept of 3% had ended.
- Capital Investment Programme- included an increased planned spend in the regeneration of Maidenhead, Estate investment and maintenance, Braywick Leisure Centre, parking card machine equipment.
- Projected Borrowing forecast.
- Fees and charges had increased in line with the RPI increase.
- Benchmarking of neighbouring authorities had been undertaken and Local Parking Charges and Tariffs for RBWM would be increased. No changes to advantage card holders parking charges would be made. £1.5mil of increased income would be generated as a result of the increased charges and tariffs.
- Negative RSG, a consultation is to be carried out with local authorities as to how to offset this in the future.
- CCTV upgrades, expansion and continued infrastructure assets.
- £350mil planned investment by 2025 in supporting the Borough Local Plan and the regeneration of Maidenhead.
- £2.6mil capital funding which was planned for approval in 18/19 had been delivered in 17/18 for Windsor. This had included improvements for Windsor which included street scene and security measures.

ACTION: Russell O'Keefe to provide information relating to the estimated total figure and projected growth accumulated from the New Homes Bonus.

Russell O'Keefe updated the Panel with the current financial picture of the Place Directorate. At present, the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant was being used to offset the cost of statutory housing costs (which included temporary accommodation costs). Current spends for temporary accommodation for the year were approximately £1mil, current staffing costs were approximately £350,000. The Council's contribution was £750,000, and the current Government grant was £1mil and this was forecast to rise to £1.2mil next year. Work was in progress to introduce a range of housing options, including a rent deposit scheme, sourcing adequate and sustainable accommodation for those who were not owed a housing duty or those whose housing duty had been discharged. There had been some income savings from the Planning recruitment freeze and over the last two years there had been significant investment into the Planning Service.

The Panel raised the following points:

- Any assurances relating to the efficiency of parking machine equipment as there had been local issues in the past.
- Advantage Card benefits were not perceived as clear and that any future incentives should be clear and accessible.
- How were the costs of emergency housing being reduced?
- Clarification around the calculation surrounding the New Homes Bonus and any projected growth as a result of it.
- Was there an estimated growth percentage as a result of the New Homes Bonus and the costs of supported growth?
- Explanation of correction funds for business and council tax increases.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: **That the Panel strongly recommended the report and its recommendations in its entirety to Cabinet.**

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members noted the following future meeting date:

Wednesday 18th April 2018 to begin at 6.30pm.

The meeting, which began at 5.00 pm, finished at 6.11 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....