

PARISH CONFERENCE

MONDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2019

PRESENT: Councillors Christine Bateson (Chairman) and Parish Councillor Chris Graham (Acting joint Chairman)

Also in attendance: Councillor Simon Dudley (RBWM Leader), Councillor Saunders (RBWM Lead Member Finance), David Burfitt (Hurley), Harry Clasper (Datchet), Des Warren (Shottesbrooke), Alan Keene (Bisham), Amanda Robson Brown (Bisham), Martin Coker (Cookham), Chris Graham (Bray), Benta Hickley (Horton), Peter Lord (Wraysbury), Jane Clemance (Wraysbury), Margaret Lenton (Wraysbury), Stephen Hedges (Cox Green), Ian Harvey (Cox Green), Jo Stickland (Datchet), Susan Cook (Bray), Anne-Catherine Buxton (Sunningdale), Ruth Davies (Sunningdale), Anne Horner (Old Windsor), Jane Dawson (Old Windsor), Allison Sharpe (Sunninghill & Ascot), Bob Austen (Eton Town Council), Barbara Story (Sunninghill & Ascot) and Sandra Baker (Hurley), Linda O'Flynn (Datchet) Mandy Bray.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Mandy Brar who would be attending late. Chris Graham took her place a joint Chairman alongside Cllr Bateson.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Dudley, Leader of RBWM, informed that it was wonderful to be attending the Parish Conference as he felt parish councillors did a fantastic job for their local communities. The number of RBWM councillors would soon be reduced following the boundary review and that this made the role of parish councillors more important. He was currently a parish councillor representing Bray Parish Council but as he felt politicians should not be parish councillors he would not be standing for re-election.

Cllr Dudley introduced Mr Duncan Sharkey who had recently been appointed as the new Managing Director at the Royal Borough. Mr Sharkey had been appointed after a rigorous selection process and he had a lot of challenges ahead of him including focusing on housing and infrastructure.

Mr Sharkey informed that he was delighted to be appointed as the Royal Boroughs new Managing Director. He had previously been chief executive at two other authorities. His last position was as a director at Milton Keynes where he had a focus on delivering housing. He said he looked forward to working with the Parish Councils and was happy to visit them.

Cllr Bateson welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

MINUTES FROM LAST CONFERENCE

Resolved unanimously: that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2018 be approved.

BERKSHIRE YOUTH SERVICE (15 MINS)

Item deferred to the next meeting.

2019/20 BUDGET (15 MINS)

The Lead Member for Finance, Cllr Saunders, attended the meeting to answer any questions on the draft 2019/20 Budget. He informed that it was a complex budget and asked if the conference had any questions.

The conference asked Cllr Saunders the following questions:

- Concern was raised that only £20k had been allocated to fly-tipping. The conference were informed that this was a specific budget line for mobile cameras to catch fly tippers. There was a wider team that dealt with prevention and prosecution.
- There had been reports of a £7.5 million hole in the budget, how was this being addressed? Cllr Saunders informed that during the current year there had been a number of unprecedented pressures; the increased cost and demand for children in care, lower income from parking charges due to advantage card discounts and housing benefit reconciliation. The pressures had been part offset by the income from the business rates pilot income and efficiency savings. The pressures had been forecasted into the 2019/20 budget.
- The proposed budget had a reduction in the revenue budget and a number of staff changes. Cllr Saunders mentioned he could not discuss staff changes as they were currently out for consultation. The proposed savings had been scrutinised by the appropriate scrutiny panels.
- It was asked if there had been any provision put in place for a possible general election. The conference were informed that the cost of general elections were claimed back from central Government.

The Lead Member for Finance informed that the budget for 2019/20 had been set against a national backdrop of continuing political uncertainty and demand and costs of social care in both adults and children's services. The authority had to continue to provide quality services from a prudent resource base.

As discussed there had been pressures during the current financial year that had been taken into consideration during the budget build process these included a gross overspend in children's services predominantly for children-in-care, and resident advantage card parking charge discounts.. It was good to see an unexpected increased use of the discount but this did create a budget pressure.

Forecasted general reserves for the end of the current financial year are £8.2 million which was £2.3 million above the minimum recommended level. It was proposed to increase council tax by 2.99% which was the maximum amount they could increase it by without a local referendum.

The Lead Member went on to explain that service spend would increase by £11.2m on the 2018/19 revenue budgets. £5 million of this increased budget would be for children's and adults services so the vulnerable in our society could be protected.

The prudent budget allowed weekly bin collections to continue, parking discounts for advantage card holder continues, environmental health, enforcement, CCTV, Community Wardens and tree inspections are all being invested in. There was going to be £0.5 million invested in community facilities such as libraries, leisure centres, Norden Farm, the Guildhall and York House Windsor resident access.

To help fund this growth the Council needed to be run efficiently and thus there were proposed efficiency savings of £5.5 million and additional grant income of £1.3 million.

The Parish Conference noted the 2019/20 budget.

PARISH EQUALISATION GRANTS

The Lead Member for Finance, Cllr Saunders, informed that in 2013/14, a discounted council tax bill replaced direct payments of council tax benefit for those residents affected. This had the effect of reducing the taxbase for the Council and Parishes. The consequent shortfall in council tax income was initially funded by an increase to the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) for Billing Authorities and a suggestion was made by Central Government that Billing Authorities should fund the shortfall for parishes. Since then the Council has funded the difference in taxbase for Parishes through the equalisation grant at a total cost of approximately £62,000 each year.

The Lead Member wished to continue to support parish councils and had written to all parish councils for their views and was presenting at this conference to seek views on how this was best achieved. Options put forward for consideration were:

- Project needs of each Parish Council are submitted each year with funds allocated similar to the Council's Grant Panel by a body run by the parishes.
- The relative number of electors in each Parish in each prior year – as shown as 2023/24 in appendix B is used for allocation of funds.
- The relative tax base difference in each Parish in each prior year – as shown as 2023/24 in appendix C be used.
- The legacy basis applied from 2013/14 to 2018/19 inclusive – as shown as 2018/19 in both appendices B and C be used.

The conference were asked for their views on how to proceed, the following points of view were put forward:

- There was no statutory obligation to offer the grant so why continue with it as the funds could be spent elsewhere.
- Some parish councils cover large areas that are not as populated as other areas and thus the additional funding helped with projects.
- It was recommended that the proposals be discussed at Dalk.
- It parish council should send in their own views independently there was no need to discuss at DALK.
- Every band D property paid 89pence to be redistributed through the grant, this benefited some parishes but not all and not non perished areas.
- If the parishes went for a grant allocation system then this would be delegated to them in future budget builds.
- There were elections between now and the next meeting therefore should the decision be deferred until after the elections.
- Propose that it is kept in the 2019/20 budget pending future discussions.

The joint Chairman Cllr Bateson thanked Cllr Saunders for making the proposals to parish council's.

CIL PROCESS REVIEW AND RECRUITMENT UPDATE(10 MINS)

The Deputy Head of Planning informed that as previously reported to the conference it was planned to appoint an officer responsible for CIL but this had not been successful so there would be another recruitment campaign. A consultant was currently in post.

The Conference were informed that each parish council would be written to advise on where we were with the review and how much they could expect to receive through the process.

PLANNING PROCESS (20 MINS)

The conference were provided with the Council's current Planning Enforcement Policy.

The Deputy Head of Planning informed that whilst working on the Parish Charter it was agreed that parishes would be notified on any significant amendments that materially affected an application. There was also a public consultation period for planning applications and the Royal Borough also sent letters and put up posters for those near the application site. As part of the application process parish councils were also consulted.

The conference were informed that it was up to the planning authority if consultation was required on amended applications. They would look at the level of natural justice, for example if there had been significant change, will it impact original objections and would the changes impact on others who were not originally consulted with.

During discussion on this item the following points were raised:

- Concerns about supplementary planning documents. It was agreed that the revised planning structure chart would be circulated and that if there were any concerns about supplementary information added to an application then they should contact the relevant team leader. Planners were also visiting parish council's to discuss concerns.
- Concern was raised about the borough not applying watertight conditions making it easier for developers to change applications. The conference were informed that national obligations were being met and if a developer proposed changes there was an obligation to consider them.
- Permitted development in the green belt and flood zones. It was asked that if they caused secondary issues such as flooding could permitted development rights be rejected. It was noted that permitted development was a national policy and thus they could only assess against the national policy. If a permitted development caused damage then it could be a civil matter.
- A number of parish council's raised concerns about permitted development and enforcement of certain sites. As these were individual cases it was agreed that they would be discussed after the meeting.

With regards to enforcement the Deputy Head of Planning informed that an updated policy had been approved by Council in December 2018 and was attached to the agenda. The Council had received 400 enforcement complaints the previous year with 321 of these already being dealt with. The team had a substantial workload and prioritised cases as either high, medium or low. High priority cases were investigated in one day, such as work on listed buildings or felling protected trees. Substantial cases can take months to resolve. Medium cases usually take 7 days to investigate and cover areas such as impact on amenities or work not in plans. Low priority cases, such as a fence being too high, are dealt with when possible. The team prioritised cases on areas that impacted on people's lives.

In response to questions the conference were informed that the enforcement process could take a long time as people were given time to 'make good' on work or they may submit a planning application that needs to be processed before further action could be taken. When enforcement was taken this could still take over a year even when the process went correctly. When an enforcement notice was issued it would say what action or work was required to comply with the notice, if this is not done would go to prosecution. The update was noted.

BALC UPDATE (10 MINS)

The conference received an update on the negotiations with the Hampshire Association of Local Council's (HALC) undertaking the role of supporting our parish council's. The role and service level agreement was being drafted and it was hoped that it would be implemented by 1st April 2019.

Due to HALK's greater capacity it was believed a better service would be provided. There had been some concern raised that subsidies would go up but this was not the case as they had been set in November 2018. Services would include additional access to HR, legal advice

and financial guidance. Although it was proposed to move services to HALK the current email address would remain in use.

Concern was raised that training courses would be located in HALC but the conference were informed that the schedule of courses was yet to be agreed but there would be two locations in Berkshire and councillors would also be able to access a greater range of training courses elsewhere.

Concern was also raised that there would be less direct access to advice with a greater use of email rather than one to one contact. The conference were informed that contact via the telephone would still be possible but the preference was to use a generic email as officers worked shifts and this method offered a better way of getting a response to questions quickly and consistently.

The conference were informed that the long term aim was to merge the HALC and BALC websites and that there would be training for clerks in finance and risk assessment. An update would be in the newsletter.

The update was noted.

HOMELESSNESS PRESENTATION (20 MINS)

The Head of Communities, Enforcement & Partnerships informed the conference that Cabinet in November 2018 approved an updated homelessness strategy, approved to formally consult on an updated housing allocations policy and activated the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

The homelessness strategy would guide the Council's approach to the provision of homelessness and rough sleeping services in the Borough over the next five years working with partners.

There had been work and engagement with partners including voluntary organisations such as the Brett Foundation and the Windsor Homeless Project, housing providers such as Radian and Housing Solutions, health service providers and Thames Valley Police.

There was a multi-agency approach to helping the homeless with policies to help prevent homelessness, decrease the need for temporary accommodation, improve the quality of housing provision, support for families, reduced number of rough sleepers and improved services.

The conference were informed that by introducing SWEP the Royal Borough had been ahead of other authorities in its implementation as the regulations only required it to be introduced when the temperature dropped to zero or below for three consecutive nights. Not only had the authority introduced it early but it also remained in place throughout the winter which was far beyond the legislation. So far 22 people had been placed under SWEP.

The authority was also working with local landlords and the homeless grant had been used to provide suitable accommodation and have a bigger pool of housing provision. Temporary accommodation was used to meet legislative requirements and individual needs. No single solution suited all so a robust assessment process was used.

At previous conferences there had been discussion about extending the community warden scheme. This had been done and a new problem solving team had been introduced as well as a Mean coordinator. They had joined the national programme so we were part of a network that the team could learn from. This wrap around care provided intensive support for individuals with complex needs.

Officers had met with the long term homeless to get their views and understand issues. There had also been work identifying and understanding the hidden homeless to help resolve their situation.

In response to a question regarding policies preventing homelessness for children leaving care the conference were informed that there were transition plans in place to prepare for adult life and the council's responsibilities for children in care went up to the age of 25.

The update was noted.

ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Requests for future discussion items to be sent to the chairman, Chris Graham or Sandra Baker.

DATE OF NEXT CONFERENCE

Future meeting dates to be circulated when available.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 9.00 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....