

CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 26 JANUARY 2022

PRESENT: Councillors Phil Haseler (Chairman), Gary Muir (Vice-Chairman), Julian Sharpe, Lynne Jones and Simon Werner

Also in attendance: Councillor David Hilton, Councillor Samantha Rayner, Councillor Christine Bateson, Councillor David Cannon, Councillor Ewan Larcombe and Councillor Donna Stimson

Officers: Mark Beeley, Emma Duncan, Adele Taylor, Rebecca Hatch, Alysse Strachan, Andrew Vallance, Nikki Craig, Duncan Sharkey and Neil Walter

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29th November 2021 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Councillor L Jones suggested that the Panel should go through the actions from the previous set of minutes, to ensure that they had all been completed.

The Chairman suggested that it would be good to bring all the actions together at the bottom of the minutes.

Mark Beeley, Democratic Services Officer, said that at the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Panel, the clerk produced an actions table, listing each action and what the result of the action had been. This was circulated amongst the Panel after the meeting and ensured that all actions were picked up and completed. The Panel agreed that this would be a useful addition for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

ACTION – Mark Beeley to produce actions table after each meeting and circulate it amongst Panel Members.

BUDGET 2022/23 - FEES AND CHARGES

Andrew Vallance, Head of Finance, explained that the fees and charges were raised where they could be by inflation, this would look to offset contract fees where they had also been raised. Some fees were statutory and were therefore controlled by the government, some were ring fenced and could not make a profit and in other areas the council had benchmarked against other local authorities. Considering some of the major fees and charges, Andrew Vallance said that:

- Parking had increased by inflation.
- Roads and street works had to be considered on a case by case basis but was nearly at inflation.

- Green waste had been increased by 4.8%, in previous years RBWM had increased this above inflation.
- The figure on Building Control should be 3%, this had been missed out on the original report which had been included in the agenda pack. Building Control had recently come in house so RBWM was able to set the fee.
- Marriages and civil partnership ceremonies had gone up by 3.5% due to statutory obligations.
- Cemeteries and church yards had gone up by inflation.
- Local Land Charges was an example of where officers had benchmarked against another local authority.
- Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders and Highway Licenses were at inflation.

The Chairman asked what the rationale was for the increase in car parking prices which RBWM was looking to implement and why they varied across the borough.

Alysse Strachan, Head of Neighbourhood Services, said that the parking fees and charges were set out with the same principle as all the other fees and charges. A number of factors needed to be considered, for example usage, parking patterns, considering previous increases, considering fees in similar car parks both in and out of the borough and the cost of administering any changes. The cost of the residents discount parking scheme also needed to be considered. The 4.8% increase was the overall budget position rather than individual tariffs. Most of the difference had been due to rounded up car parking charges, with the biggest increase being 50% which was for commercial permits.

Councillor Sharpe said that there was a reasonable level of inflation. He asked if changes had been made due to other local authorities and how much they were charging.

Alysse Strachan said that other local authorities parking charges were considered by the team. RBWM offered a residents parking discount to encourage residents to park in the borough.

Adele Taylor, Executive Director of Resources, said that fees and charges were determined on a service by service basis. For things like Building Control, RBWM needed to consider other competition in the market. The 4.8% was not necessarily on the fee itself but on the budgeted amount.

Councillor L Jones said that there was a large range of car parking charges across the borough, particularly in Windsor. The residents parking discount scheme did not apply in shopping areas and was a particular issue for those with mobility issues who needed to park close by. Victoria Street was a good option and was close to the shops in Windsor, Councillor L Jones understood that Windsor was a tourist town but she wanted this to be reconsidered by officers, either by incorporating this car park into the residents discount scheme or bringing down the parking charge. She asked how much extra income RBWM would look to receive from the increase in parking charges. Councillor L Jones continued by explaining that she was pleased to see that parking permits were not increasing however she expressed concern with the visitor vouchers, where a one hour restriction meant that two hours permit needed to be paid for.

Councillor Werner and Councillor Muir joined the meeting.

Alysse Strachan said that the Victoria Street option was included in the report that had been considered by Cabinet, but this was not agreed due to the cost that the council would incur. Alma Road and Alexandra car park were the options which had been agreed would be where the residents parking discount would apply. Regarding the visitor vouchers, the two hour charge was £1 and therefore the charge was minimal but this could be explored in future years.

Councillor L Jones said that it cost £2.40 for one hour at Victoria Street and £3.90 for two hours, these prices were unfair on those that needed to use the car park. She asked if there was any way that this charge could not be increased, it was something that Councillor L Jones felt should be revisited. She requested that this comment was recorded in the minutes as a minority comment.

Alysse Strachan confirmed that the offer would be reviewed and that officers could consider Victoria Street car park as part of this review.

Adele Taylor added that it would be part of the review on the residents discount scheme, officers had to consider the impact on the budget if Victoria Street had been included. Any recommendation would need to consider what the alternative method of funding would be.

Councillor L Jones asked if the figure in terms of income that would be lost could be provided, if the parking charges were kept the same and were not increased.

Alysse Strachan explained that to include Victoria Street in the residents discount scheme would cost the council £100,000. For the figure on how much it would cost the council if car parking charges were not increased, Alysse Strachan said that she would take this away from the meeting and report back.

ACTION – Alysse Strachan to find out information on how much it would cost RBWM if car parking charges were not increased at Victoria Street car park.

Councillor Werner said there was a similar issue in Maidenhead, two open air car parks were part of the residents discount scheme but these were scheduled to be closed and built on in the immediate future. He asked if officers had done analysis on the level that parking could be increased by before a decrease in usage would see the council lose money.

Alysse Strachan said that officers monitored usage and trend data constantly to see any impact an increase in fees had. Once the residents discount scheme had been implemented, this could be reviewed. West Street car park was in high demand and would be part of the discount scheme.

Councillor Werner asked if officers felt the Nicholsons Shopping Centre car park was too expensive to include in the residents discount scheme.

Alysse Strachan said that various data and models had been used. It was a balance of cost and use, she was happy to share the models and data with Councillor Werner outside the meeting.

ACTION – Alysse Strachan to provide the Panel with the data and models used to decide which car parks in Maidenhead would be part of the residents discount scheme.

Adele Taylor added that the decision on the residents discount scheme had already been made by Cabinet and the call in period had expired. However, the feedback would be useful to consider as part of the review.

Councillor Werner commented on the Platinum Jubilee celebrations for the Queen, which would be taking place in June 2022. He asked what permissions residents would need from the council to hold things like street parties.

Adele Taylor said that information on this would be coming out in due course, a dedicated website would also be created which residents could easily access. A message would also go out in the Borough Bulletin.

Councillor L Jones considered the income targets that had been set for parking. There had been a significant impact on the modelling from Covid but this had predicted an uplift after the

pandemic. However, this was not to the level of previous parking targets, she asked what rationale had been applied to ensure that parking targets were achievable.

Neil Walter, Parking and Enforcement Manager, said that officers had modelled the effect of the pandemic on parking and this had been very accurate. RBWM was back to about 80% of its expected parking income and there was an ambition for this to eventually rise back to 100%. A number of car parks across the borough were above pre pandemic levels in both usage and income targets. However, season tickets were a concern. Workers were not returning to the office and therefore parking season tickets had not been renewed. An example was one business which usually had over 250 parking season tickets, they did not currently have any and this was a significant lose to parking income.

Councillor L Jones asked if the 80% for parking income was the average across the borough. On season tickets, she asked if this was a risk in achieving the proposed parking income targets.

Neil Walter confirmed that it was 80% average across the whole borough. Season tickets were already a concern for officers and this had been budgeted for.

Adele Taylor said that the season ticket risk had been factored into the budget, any income budget was a risk as it was demand led. She explained that it would be considered as part of her report, income was harder to predict. Adele Taylor was confident that best estimates had been made but this would be monitored closely.

Councillor Cannon, Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Parking, responded to a question by Councillor Werner earlier in the meeting about street parties. He said that any fees for the road closures would be waived by the council.

Adele Taylor said that she would confirm the details after the meeting and report back to the Panel.

ACTION – Adele Taylor to provide information on street closures for street parties for the Queens Platinum Jubilee.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel was asked to comment, and make recommendations to Cabinet, on:

- i) The proposed fees and charges for 2022/23 as set out in Appendix A.**

BUDGET 2022/23 – CAR PARKING INCOME TARGETS

This was discussed as part of the agenda item above.

2021/22 Q2 DATA & PERFORMANCE REPORT AND FUTURE PERFORMANCE REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

Adele Taylor said that the new Corporate Plan had recently been approved by Full Council and this document set out the key strategic priorities of RBWM for the next five years. The performance of the council for Q2 had been outlined in the report. New performance monitoring arrangements would take effect from April 2022, Members had been informed at the start of January of the new arrangements. Considering the Q2 report:

- 6 measures were meeting or exceeding targets.
- 2 measures were short of target but within the set tolerances.
- 1 measure was off target and out of tolerance.

The continued impact of the pandemic meant that business rate collection was off target. It had been challenging to set targets in this area due to government driven benefits for some businesses. A recovery strategy had been launched which involved a number of campaigns ensuring that residents were given confidence, there had been an encouraging increase in footfall in town centres. The council had secured some additional funding for the climate strategy and this would allow decarbonisation plans to be developed.

The Chairman asked when the new portal for monitoring performance would go live and be available to both Members and residents.

Rebecca Hatch, Head of Strategy, confirmed that this would go live in April 2022.

Councillor Sharpe asked if there was anything in the performance report that officers were concerned about.

Adele Taylor said that business rate collection was a concern as it was off target but the reasons for this had been explained and much of this was out of the council's control. This was also similar to other local authorities and was therefore not unique to RBWM. The percentage of calls abandoned could be improved but there was a variety of reasons why this could be the case.

Councillor Sharpe asked if RBWM was taking over 5G transmission stations in the borough.

Adele Taylor did not have this information and did not think this was within the remit of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor L Jones said that the Panel was considering the performance report from Q2 but this was now Q4 and therefore the monitoring information related to a period which was a significant amount of time ago. She asked if this was the normal timeframe for the Panel to consider the report as she felt that comments made by the Panel would not have much of an impact. Considering the new performance monitoring arrangements, Councillor L Jones expressed concern about the Panel taking on oversight of the process and that the Panel therefore needed to have the right Member cohort. She suggested that more Members could be needed on the Panel. Councillor L Jones concluded by explaining that the report was dense and contained a lot of words, she would prefer to see a highlights or summary section at the beginning. She asked if the Panel was able to influence the areas of the council that would be monitored going forward.

Rebecca Hatch said that the role of scrutiny was to hold the council to account and make recommendations on how things could be improved. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel would take on the overarching responsibility and would receive quarterly progress reports. Reporting would be focused and by exception, with key areas being picked out where issues had occurred. Panel Members would be able to review the data through the new Citizens Portal and this would address the issue of the time lag in reporting as data on the portal would be live, up to date and accessible on demand.

The Chairman asked if a Member briefing would be organised on the Citizens Portal so that all Members understood how it worked.

Rebecca Hatch said that this was planned when the portal was launched in April 2022.

Councillor Sharpe asked if Members would be able to drill down into the data detail through the portal.

Rebecca Hatch confirmed that this would be possible and that Members would be able to compare and contrast data in a number of different ways too. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel would have the ability to recommend any parts of the report for further consideration by one of the other Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

The Chairman asked if a scoping document would be required for work to be delegated to another Panel and if so, which Panel would have the responsibility for creating the scoping document.

Emma Duncan, Monitoring Officer and Deputy Director of Law and Strategy, said that a scoping document would not be needed. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny could make a recommendation for another Panel to consider a specific topic area, the Panel in question could then make a decision on what they wanted to do with this recommendation.

Councillor L Jones said that if the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel identified an issue, would this fall to Corporate to initially investigate the issue or would the issue only be identified before being sent on for consideration by one of the other Panels.

Emma Duncan said that this was a good point and suggested that it would be sensible for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel to do some initial work on the area before deciding if it should be referred to another Panel.

Rebecca Hatch suggested it would work like the Corporate Plan challenge session in October 2021, once issues had been identified officers could then be invited to the relevant Panel to allow Members to ask questions and understand the reasons behind any issues, for example.

Emma Duncan added that the Panel could also ask why certain information had not been included in performance monitoring reports.

Councillor Sharpe asked how the new performance monitoring arrangements would fit in with the Panel's meeting schedule.

Emma Duncan said that additional Panel meetings could be arranged if required, but it was hoped that the performance monitoring would fit into the current system fairly easily. Performance monitoring with live data would improve the process. There was the issue of the work programme to consider too, with some issues being urgent and needing to be considered at the next meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the report and:

- i) Noted the new and transitional performance reporting arrangements as agreed by Cabinet on 16 December 2021 and the role of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel within these arrangements.**
- ii) Noted the 2021/22 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel Q2 Data & Performance Report in Appendix A.**

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT

The Chairman explained that the annual scrutiny report for the Panel needed to be completed. He asked for any contributions from Panel Members to be sent via email outside of the meeting.

Councillor L Jones asked if the previous annual scrutiny report could be sent to Panel Members so that they could review the progress.

Mark Beeley said that he would be able to send the last two years reports, from 2020 and 2021, out to the Panel after the meeting.

ACTION – Mark Beeley to send out copies of previous annual scrutiny reports to Members of the Panel.

The Chairman suggested that any comments on the report should be sent to him in the next couple of weeks.

WORK PROGRAMME

Mark Beeley gave an update on the communication and the customer journey topics, which had been suggested by Councillor L Jones. A meeting would be arranged with the relevant officers and Councillor L Jones to determine the scope of the suggestion and whether there was an overlap of work.

Councillor L Jones said that the two suggestions and the RBWM App item all overlapped and therefore could be considered as one item, rather than three separate items.

Councillor Werner suggested an item on the procurement process and the different levels of approval for different contracts. Some contracts were signed off by officers under delegated authority and it would be good if Members had oversight and were aware of what contracts had been signed.

Adele Taylor said that she was happy to point Councillor Werner in the right direction and discuss this topic with the relevant officers.

Councillor L Jones said that there was a similar item on the Audit and Governance Committee work programme, it would therefore be worth discussing this with the Chairman of the Committee to avoid duplication of work.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 8.40 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....