

CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 27 OCTOBER 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Dr Lilly Evans, Richard Kellaway (Chairman), Jack Rankin, MJ Saunders, Adam Smith (Vice-Chairman) and Simon Werner

Also in attendance: Cllr Love

Officers: Andy Jeffs, Andrew Brooker, Chris Hilton, Mark Shephard, Simon Fletcher and David Cook.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received by Councillor McWilliams.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

The Part I minutes of the meeting held on 25 August 2015 were approved as a true and correct record.

FINANCE UPDATE

Andrew Brooker, Head of Finance, introduced the latest financial update. Reserves remained strong with the development fund totalling £2.2m. General reserves totalled £6.95m which was over the recommended level of £5.43m. The main area of overspend continued to be Adult social Care which had reported an overspend of £901,000 primarily driven by demographic growth. An additional £500,000 had been allocated from the Development Fund but this would be subject to Council approval in December 2015.

Councillor Saunders questioned why £986,000 had been transferred from reserves without any explanation and that there needed to be more transparency so the same questions were not always asked. Andrew Brooker informed that a breakdown would be provided to the Panel.

(Cllr Dr Evans joined the meeting)

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: The Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Panel requested clarification on the transfer of funds (£896,000) on the Current balance on the Development Fund table (appendix A) as it was not clear where these funds had come from.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT - ANNUAL REPORT

Andrew Brooker informed the Panel that cash balances at the end of the year totalled £42m. The council partially funded its own cash requirements and capital projects through these funds to save on interest payments and due to the poor returns on savings. The council had saved over £900,000 by utilising this strategy

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Panel felt that the authority had

done a fantastic job in a climate of limited opportunities. It was suggested that that Cabinet might consider the potential returns by offering residents the opportunity to pay their council tax in one lump sum at the end of the year with an agreed % increase of about 2% as this would create extra income for the authority and give residents the opportunity to get investment returns on their own money.

REVIEW OF DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

Andy Jeffs, Head of Benefits and Business Services, informed the Panel that the Council had not reviewed its overall Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for some time and it was appropriate to consider this due to the proposed changes to the policy designed to improve the application process, provide greater clarity to the decision makers and to reflect new business rates measures announced by Government since the last review.

The current policy requires updating to provide for:

- The Government increasing Retail Relief from £1,000 to £1,500 for 2015-16.
- The doubling of Small Business Rate Relief being extended until 31 March 2016.
- The Council to have the ability to consider applications from child care providers (nurseries and day nurseries).
- The Government providing New Build Empty Property Relief for all newly build commercial properties completed between 1 October 2013 and 30 September 2016, for a period of 18 months.
- The removal of Flood Relief.

During the review specific attention was given to Rural Rate Relief and how this was applied in RBWM. The Panel felt that a more proactive approach could be taken to setting / applying the criteria for identifying areas that could be classed as rural settlements to help support the local community. Members felt that the use of census data could be supplemented by the use of the electoral register when establishing population figures. The Council could also call upon neighbourhood plans as supporting documents.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: The Corporate Services O&S Panel considered the report and endorsed the recommendations. The Panel felt that with regards to Discretionary Rural Rate Relief the report should give delegated authority to officers and the Portfolio Holder to identify other areas that could be designated as rural settlements that meet the qualifying criteria. The Panel did not accept that this could only be done by using the 2011 census and the existing parish boundaries. The electoral register could be used to identify population below 3000 e.g. Cookham and Eton Wick, as long as an appropriate buffer was used, a new review was needed to meet the December deadline.

WORK PROGRAMME

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted its work programme. The Chairman recommended that the Panel should look at the Senior Management Review. A special meeting of the Panel may be required to look at the November Cabinet reports.

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 following items 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.

MEETING

The meeting, which began at 6.30pm, ended at 8.50pm.

Chairman.....

Date.....