

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 19 November 2018

Present: Councillor Tom Dawlings (Chair)
Councillors Hannam, Hill, Huggett, Lidstone, Mackonochie (Vice-Chairman),
Ms Palmer, Scott, Mrs Soyke and Woodward

Officers in Attendance: David Candlin (Head of Economic Development and Property), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Section 151 Officer)) and Gary Stevenson (Head of Housing, Health and Environment)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Simmons and Reilly.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

OSC34/18 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Uddin and Thomson.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

OSC35/18 There were no declarations of interest made, within the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Members.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

OSC36/18 The minutes of the meetings dated 8 October 2018 were submitted.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Committee meeting dated 8 October 2018 be agreed.

ITEMS CALLED IN UNDER OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 13

OSC37/18 There were no items which had been called-in under Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 13.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

OSC38/18 The chairman confirmed the order of the agenda.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER PLANS AND PROGRESS: PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

OSC39/18 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance, Councillor David Reilly, presented his portfolio holder update for 2018/19. During discussion the following matters were highlighted:

The Council had a fully funded capital programme of ambitious projects as well as maintaining normal business and providing services. Bringing this together was resource intensive and a programme management office had been set up to include project management expertise, IT skills and senior management input to ensure that resources were diverted to the appropriate areas. It was recognised that some areas of the Council were higher risk in terms of resources and through partnership working some of the risk was shared.

New projects would continue to be received via applications for the capital programme. Funding would be a mixture of approval for those schemes already progressing; the revenue budget for 'business-as-usual', and any new areas of investment in IT would progress through the IT Strategy.

Resources for development had to be carefully prioritised and those projects that were critical for the Council to operate would be prioritised. The benefits of Mid Kent Services (particularly with IT) were an increased resilience and a greater pool of skills to draw on. There was also a wider path for career advancement which encouraged staff retention.

It was not known whether the new Transparency website would operate within the Council's website or separately – Members would receive further information after the meeting.

Windows 10 would be the new platform for the Council's website and for the upgrading of software. Upgrades would no longer be supported by Windows 08 and this further demonstrated the Council's efforts to remain up-to-date and avoid vulnerability. The Council would have different working practices by 2022 in anticipation of moving to new offices including tablet based functions for Members and officers and a sharper use of technology.

The Council was required to have a Senior Information Risk Officer and this role was held by the Director of Finance, Policy and Development. Part of this role was meeting as the Kent Resilience Team who called upon the expertise of GCHQ and National Cyber Security Centre. This provided a collective strength to help deal with the types of cyber attacks faced by local authorities. Most attacks (in terms of resilience) had been stopped early on. One of the Councils strategic risks was dealing with business continuity, which included cyber-security attacks.

The fee set for the collection of garden waste within the Household Waste and Recycling contract represented an average of the local authority charges looked at in the build-up to setting the fee. The fee was set at a level that anticipated and hopefully avoided further rises as part of an opt-in service, and as part of the Council's user-pays strategy. Tonbridge and Malling had a lower garden waste charge but had a higher council tax charge. It was estimated that 12,000 households would take advantage of the garden waste collection service. There were a number of components which made up the Household Waste and Recycling contract and the 'optimum method' had been used to determine the collection of garden waste and was one that produced a lower costs for contractors, and one that had been adopted nationally. Tunbridge Wells was one of the few areas in the south East to not charge for garden waste collection.

RESOLVED to note the portfolio holder's update.

DRAFT BUDGET 2019/20 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

OSC40/18 The Director of Finance, Policy and Development, Lee Colyer, introduced the report. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

The reduction in car park income had been due to lower footfall at Royal Victoria Place as result of several units being kept deliberately empty as the scheme was looked at again. There was no future impact on the budget as it

was expected that the units would become occupied and the cultural offer in the Town increased.

The Cabinet would consider the Fees and Charges report within the week which included the garden waste charge and all the charges that the Council was able to take a view on and set itself.

The Council's total cash reserves would reduce from £22 million to £12 million as the existing capital programme was delivered. Calverley Square would be funded separately including by borrowing. A better view of the Council's financial strength was shown in the balance sheet. The Council had no significant debt.

The Council's spending power per head calculation was determined by the resources obtained through taxation (for the Council this was the council tax collected) and the tax base – the number of properties (which for Tunbridge Wells was 46,000). The grant received by the Council from Government was another factor (which for Tunbridge Wells was nil) as was the new homes bonus, which for Tunbridge Wells, was one of the lowest in Kent.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy was used to predict the behaviour of all income and expenditure lines and a prudent approach was taken to all major contracts. The benefit of arranging contracts (which were not consumer price index linked) over a longer term was that more certainty was provided in terms of amounts needed. Efficiencies could be made through economy or through investment in technology.

RESOLVED to note the report.

CALVERLEY SQUARE UPDATE

OSC41/18 The Head of Economic Development and Property, David Candlin, and the director of Finance, Policy and Development, David Candlin, presented the update. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

The current recipients of community grant funding were aware of the amounts they would be receiving in the next year. There would be a £70,000 reduction in the funding, however, the funding level would then be retained for a further two years. It was anticipated that additional proceeds from the shared business rates growth could be utilised to fund community grants in the future.

The funding of community groups was historically based on an expectation that when local authorities received revenue support grants from Government, funding would be provided to those groups. As previously stated, the Council no longer received any revenue support grant, yet the Council had still managed to find £200,000 to support community groups.

The Government policy to reduce the deficit focused on delivering growth and it was recognised that local authorities had a role to play and were in a position to develop growth. Government had incentivised local authorities through business rates growth and as a result it was important that economic development opportunities in the borough were promoted.

RESOLVED to note the update.

TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - VERBAL UPDATE

OSC42/18 Councillor Joy Podbury, Chair of the Reducing Single-Use plastics in the Town Hall Task and Finish Group updated Members on the Group's work. During discussion, the following points were noted:

It was recommended that the Council discontinued coffee/tea capsule machines and single use cups and replaced them with hot water machines, tea bags and jars of coffee. It was also recommended that reusable cups were used and disposable cups were used for visitors only. An independent staff team in the Council was looking at reducing plastics and also suggested adopting this option.

Councillor Podbury would be attending a meeting of the staff Plastic Reduction Group where it was hoped the recommendations above would be discussed.

The Town Hall refuse is classified as business waste and is independent of household domestic waste. A recent bin audit of the recycling bins in the Town Hall discovered that the bins were not correctly labelled for this type of waste, which may have contributed to the survey revealing that users of the Town Hall were unsure which items could be recycled. As a result it was recommended that the bins were correctly labelled and clearly marked '**NO CUPS**'.

Plastics collected and processed under Kent County Council's contract remain in the United Kingdom for the remanufacturing of 'future' polymers. Plastics are sorted and transported to facilities where they are washed and reprocessed into either flakes and pellets or are sold back into the manufacturing industry i.e. plastic milk containers.

The Council's Procurement team were, who alongside their work on Social Value, were considering standard wording for Tender documentation to include environmentally friendly or sustainable alternatives where appropriate.

A visit to the new Cripps offices had been arranged to look at "green" office space. It was considered vital that the Council take an active lead and send a message to communality groups within the borough, including residents and businesses.

Councillor David Scott, the Chair of the Transparency Task and Finish Group, update Members on the Group's work. During discussion, the following points were noted:

The Council produced a large amount of information and transparency was not just about finding the information but making it available and easy to access. The Council was developing a new website with an improved search facility that would provide a quicker and more efficient means for accessing information.

The service areas in the Council had their information on different servers and maintaining and providing up-to-date information was resource intensive.

The Group would adjourn for a period of six months to allow development of the Website.

RESOLVED to note the update.

UPDATE ON TOPICS FOR THE WORK PROGRAMME

OSC43/18 The Chairman provided an update on the Committee's work programme. It was agreed that the following topic be added to the Work Programme:

The Council's Grounds Maintenance Contract.

It was further agreed that a task and finish group be appointed to look at the topic and that Councillors Chris Woodward, Dianne Hill and Peter Lidstone be appointed to the group.

RESOLVED to note the Committee's work programme.

URGENT BUSINESS

OSC44/18 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

OSC45/18 The next scheduled meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 28 January.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 8.15 pm.