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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date and Time: Tuesday 19 January 2021 at 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present:

Axam, Davies, Dorn, Drage, Farmer, Lamb, Makepeace-Browne, Smith, Wildsmith and Worlock (Chairman)

In attendance: Crookes, Oliver, Quarterman and Radley

Officers: Foy, Lloyd and Phillips

86 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 15 December 2020 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

87 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Wright.

88 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

89 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (ITEMS PERTAINING TO THE AGENDA)

None.

90 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that a summary of the discussions held at the mid-year Overview & Scrutiny review on 6 January 2021 would be circulated.

At the mid-year review, Members agreed:

- To reinstate presentations from external bodies.
- To encourage non committee member participation.
- Members to attend independent training in the form of a webinar by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.
- Service Plan review process.
- The lack of public participation at meetings.

The Chairman thanked Steve Bennett and his team for rolling out Modern.gov and for all their efforts getting this project up and running.

The Chairman moved agenda Item 10 to the end of the meeting.

91 SERVICE PERFORMANCE – HEADS OF SERVICE ATTENDANCE

The Head of Corporate, Emma Foy advised Members that the current year Service Plan had demonstrated that Corporate Services will be able to deliver all elements with the exception of three areas:

- Review of the expansion opportunities at Edenbrook Leisure Centre.
- New draft consultation on community engagement
- Roll out of updated project management governance which will now be completed in May due to a large additional burden of work due to the impact of COVID.

Completed objectives include the updated financial regulations, internal audit plan, new IT security policies and the statement of accounts, which were published and audited on time. The team continue to work hard to meet all other objectives.

92 CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP

Councillor Oliver updated members on the progress made by the Climate Change Working Group and the three ways where this cross party working group can work together with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

1. To encourage its members and contacts to provide information, through their political group structures, to their representatives on the Climate Change Working Group. As this is a cross party working group there should be no barriers to discussion on priorities or opportunities to achieve the Councils ambition of Net Carbon Neutrality by 2040.
2. To scrutinise the progress on the agreed Climate Change Action Plan prior to its submission to Cabinet. This was timetabled for Oct 2020 but due to resource constraints and due to the pandemic, it is now hoped for this to come forward in March/April 2021.
3. To scrutinise projects that come forward for funding in support of the Climate Change Action Plan. Current and proposed budgets only allow for operational costs of developing and investigating opportunities for the Council to reduce its carbon footprint. Investment and implementation will be agreed through the Councils normal funding process and agreed by Cabinet.

The next meeting of the Climate Change Working Group is 25 January 2021.

Peter Summersell was acknowledged for his commendable work and presentation to Members on 15 December 2020.

93 CAR PARKING CHARGES

Members were updated on the current situation on the car parking charges review, which concluded in November 2019, and the proposals sent to all Parishes who have an HDC Public Car Park, on the proposals HDC intended to implement in May 2020. Due to the pandemic these were not implemented but are now scheduled for May 2021. The fees structures proposed are included in this year budgets. Members were advised that a review was carried out to introduce 1 hour free parking across all Hart DC owned car parks. Other options offered to support residents and businesses which would be more affordable is a 30 minutes free parking but to increase parking charges over 3 hours.

Parish decisions:

- Fleet preferred to keep charges as they are.
- Blackwater declined any changes in rates.
- Odiham declined free parking in their small car park and are looking at various schemes for token parking along the high street.
- Hook are extending 30 minutes free parking to 1 hour which will come into effect from May 2021.
- Hartley Wintney already pay and subsidise 90 minutes free parking in red bays. There is the possibility of introducing 1 hour free parking across all parking bays. Responses are required in the next 2 months.

It has been agreed to reconcile any estimates and impact on revenue projections with Parishes at the end of the year. The new free parking regime will require the user to log in to park for free for easier enforcement.

94 CIVIC REGENERATION WORKING GROUP

The Portfolio Holder for Commercialisation and the Commercialisation Manager updated Members on the progress made with the Civic Quarter regeneration project, work undertaken, findings and recommendations for next steps.

Members were advised:

- Good progress is being made.
- The Council has engaged with external consultations on various options.
- There will be a consultation strategy as advised by Create Streets to engage with the wider community and currently working through example questions.
- Budget for research on commercial opportunities is drawn from the commercialisation strategy budget up to £500k.
- The Council is making positive steps and cooperating well with HCC and the library services.
- The Working Group is confident with multiple task timescales of the project.
- Engagement to be made with residents from the whole of the Hart District and it was advised that research questions aren't overwhelming.

Members considered and confirmed that the Working Group will continue to investigate possible opportunities for potential redevelopment alongside its position with the town and any potential impact on Fleet town as a whole and are happy with the balance of questions and level of detail.

DECISION

The Committee noted the advice provided by Create Streets regarding the proposed public engagement strategy and potential questions.

95 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Members were presented with the draft Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2021/22 which incorporated the Annual Investment Strategy and Prudential and Treasury Indicators.

Members were informed;

- That the key change in this report and the previous report is an update in interest rates which remain low.
- Policy changes in investments have been amended to allow longer term investments.
- Officers have recently sought permission for a temporary increase in the Counterparty limit for Barclays to cover funds to pay business rate grants.

Members discussed assessing the credit risk of other Councils which currently includes looking at budget monitoring and audit reports.

DECISION

That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy for 2021/22 be recommended to Cabinet.

96 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme was considered, and the Chairman requested clarification in costs associated with the Harlington roof repairs. The Monitoring Officer told Members a written response will be circulated accordingly.

97 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was considered and suggested as follows:

- Climate Change Working Group update to the Committee in advance of Cabinet in April.

- To move items listed at the top to the back of the work programme after discussions have taken place to create a rolling document.

98 DRAFT BUDGET 2021/2022

The Committee were asked to consider the information and forward to Cabinet any comments it had. The report provided a summary of the revenue and capital budget proposals for 2021/2022 and the Committee was invited to forward its comments on the proposed draft budget and Council Tax levels to Cabinet. This draft budget referenced numbers included in the provisional finance settlement for 2021/2022 which was published on 17th December 2020. The final settlement was expected in late January or early February 2021.

Members were updated on:

- Impact of new homes bonus budget predictions
- Lower tier settlement grants.
- No changes to the Council Tax local support scheme.
- Loss in recycle income.
- Fees and charges with parking charges to be rectified.
- Increased costs of £140K spent following in-sourcing decisions.
- Adjustments to income have been made.
- Budget deficit of £381K for 2021/22 and future pressures are even more challenging.

Members debated:

- Legacy payments stopping.
- Commercial income in 2021/22 of £196K is rental income from the scheme at Edenbrook.
- Net service budget has risen due to increase in staff salaries, contractual inflation and also indexation provisions for long term contracts.
- Net service budget breakdown to be provided to Members in order for the Committee to update findings to Council.

DECISION

The Committee agreed to forward to Cabinet its comments and approach adopted to preparing the draft budget after it has been forwarded to Council.

(Appendix 2 of this report was Exempt from Publication)

In order to discuss Appendix 2, Members agreed to exclude the public.

99 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Members agreed that the public interest in maintaining an exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

DECISION

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the discussion of the matters referred to, on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

The meeting closed at 9.45 pm