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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date and Time: Tuesday 17 August 2021 at 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present:

Axam, Collins, Crookes, Davies, Farmer, Forster, Smith, Wildsmith and Worlock
(Chairman)

In attendance:

Cllr Tony Clarke
Cllr James Radley
Cllr Tim Southern

Officers:

Daryl Phillips, Joint Chief Executive
Emma Foy, Head of Corporate Services & S151 Officer
Mark Jaggard, Head of Place
Jenny Humphreys, Committee Services Officer

22 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of 20 July 2021 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Dorn (Cllr Forster was present as his substitute).

24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Farmer declared a non-pecuniary interest as Chairman of Hart Swimming Club based at Hart Leisure Centre.

Councillor Forster declared a declaration of interest (non-prejudicial) for item 9 on the agenda (MTFS), as he is a Cabinet Member for Hampshire County Council.

25 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (ITEMS PERTAINING TO THE AGENDA)

None.

26 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

27 CORPORATE SERVICE PANEL UPDATE

Councillors Axam, Crookes and Smith, members of the Service Panel gave feedback on the recent panel meeting for Corporate Services.

Members summarised it was well run, informative and they are comfortable the service is performing well with its current resources.

Members also praised the format of the report, as it's simple, straightforward and easy to understand. (Copies of the report are attached to the minutes).

The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that all Heads of Service are now using these templates and the Corporate Services document as a basis.

Dates for other Service Panels have been arranged and reports will be circulated in advance of future O&S Committee meetings.

28 ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2021/22

The Joint Chief Executive (JCX) summarised the Annual Review Letter from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (The LGO) and highlighted the council's good relationship with them.

This year The LGO reviewed four cases for the council, an average for the organisation.

The JCX summarised the cases: the building of a play area; listed building consent; out of date food being sold at a supermarket, and a Housing Benefit case that was upheld.

Members were encouraged to look at the Ombudsman website where previous national complaints cases can be reviewed for reference.

RECOMMENDATION

The report was noted.

29 WEBSITE REDESIGN PROJECT

The JCX summarised the report and highlighted that the current eight-year-old website needs to be replaced. This report highlighted that approval was being sought to agree to the principle of its replacement which would be done through an open tendering process.

The report outlined four options that are being considered for the new Content Management System (CMS), and members knowledge and input in the design process was encouraged.

Work is expected to begin in November 2021, with the new website going live in July 2022.

Members highlighted improving accessibility, enabling sufficient code for braille readers and usability as key factors in building the new site.

Members queried the total costs of the project and the JCX confirmed that earmarked reserves of up to £150,000 have been set aside.

Members questioned if all data could be retained on the site in archives and the JCX indicated that due to GDPR regulations the organisation would be unable to retain certain data. Historic Committee Meeting Minutes and Agendas and planning applications would be retained and available in the most compliant way.

The JCX reminded members that the council is currently running a website survey to gather users opinions and gauge what new features they would like to see. Feedback will be shared with members in the coming months.

The JCX and Change and Digital Manager to provide a written response on the key differences between options three and four in the report.

The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that option three will feature improved e-forms.

DECISION

The Committee recommended that:

- Progress updates are to be more frequent than six months and more in line with decision stages.
- More emphasis on the carbon neutral and climate change implications that the project may incur.
- The Cabinet report to include a clearer indication of the total cost of the whole project.

30 2022/23 BUDGET & MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

Prior to the meeting the Chairman had circulated a list of points and questions that had been raised by a local resident. These were addressed point by point in the officer's presentation of the report.

Head of Corporate Services summarised the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and highlighted that the key changes are Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Growth and Commercial Income.

Commercial Income has increased from £196,000 to £783,000, with £550,000 from the investment in Centenary House and a £37,000 increase due to faster lettings at Edenbrook than predicted.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance confirmed that the council is not changing the budget, this can only be set and changed by Council, and that more up to date figures are being given throughout the year.

Head of Corporate Services added that the council is moving from a contribution from reserves to a potential contribution to reserves and are only changing the known knowns.

Members praised the Head of Corporate Services and her team for the report, it's transparency and accurate estimates.

Members discussions included: losing the New Homes Bonus and its implications; losing the Garden Waste income revenue and the additional costs this scheme could incur (this has currently been identified as £900,000), and the council's eligibility for New Burdens funding.

Members also questioned: the Commercial Income and why it appears flat; the possibility of borrowing from other local authorities, SANGS or earmarked reserves, and the possibility to use the council's estate and assets more effectively and for financial gain.

Head of Corporate Services recognised that 2022/23 would be a difficult year due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and that funding implications are still unknown.

The Council is expecting to hear more on the New Homes Bonus or its equivalent scheme in later in the autumn.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and JCX addressed a question on the change of contract providing Hart's CCTV. It was confirmed the new contract will provide a sufficient service with extended hours.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance also confirmed that workshops would be set up with members if required for Level Three savings.

DECISION

1. The issues around the emerging budget for 2022/23 and level of savings were noted.
2. The tier system for rating savings was noted. Level Two savings are to be further investigated and brought back to future Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings.
3. The Portfolio Holder for Finance confirmed that workshops would be set up with members if required for Level Three savings.
4. The timetable for 2022/23 budget setting was noted.

5. The reserves policy in Section 6 of the report were noted.

31 QUARTER ONE - REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING AS AT 30TH JUNE 2021

The Head of Corporate Services presented the Quarter One (Q1) forecast of the outturn position against the General Fund revenue budget, to give an expectation of possible variances against budget.

The Council will implement a quarterly accruals focus from December 2021 with increased accruals starting from September, which is a new way of displaying information for the council. Members agreed that this was a very sensible decision by the Head of Corporate Services.

Members discussions included the Corporate Services forecast of £1,19 million overspend on the Leisure Contract and any income protection the council is entitled to.

RECOMMENDATION

The Quarter One forecast for the General Fund Revenue budget and the key reasons for projected variations between actual expenditure and budgeted expenditure were noted.

32 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT SERVICES UPDATE

The Head of Place updated the Committee on the current progress of the Development Management Service Action Plan.

Key points included:

- The volume of planning applications continues to be high and is greater than the previous two years applications.
- The council is generating a good fee income.
- A short report format has now been introduced for some applications.
- The registration validation process has been reviewed.
- The Development Management & Building Control Manager has now left the organisation but an interim manager is now in place
- There are two new employees in the team and two further employees will start next month.
- The team is currently advertising for a permanent Development Management & Building Control Manager.

Members questions included, Systems Thinking (Stratford-on-Avon's approach)/lean thinking, what this is and what it involves and the the Article 4 Direction (preventing office to residential permitted development).

Members also discussed the 5-year Housing Land Supply figures and SCI, the no posting of site notices.

The Chairman suggested that a future presentation from an external party might be beneficial on Systems Thinking/Lean thinking would be helpful

The JCX and members commended the Head of Place and his team for their efforts.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee noted the written update.

33 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme was noted.

The JCX confirmed that the following had been passed on to Cabinet for consideration:

- The Parking Review that came into effect in May and its impact.
- A review of the progress Civic Quarter regeneration project.

34 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny work programme was noted.

Members also wanted to see the Service Board reviews reflected in the programme.

The JCX highlighted that work on IT security on laptops and mobile devices, including overseas travel and cyber security will also be considered.

The inclusion of the review of Community Safety Transition, Multi-Agency Flood Forum, Corporate Risk Management update, and Waste Management client team transition to Basingstoke were also confirmed as to be added to the agenda.

The meeting closed at 9.31 pm