

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date and Time: Tuesday 16 January 2024 at 7.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present:

Dorn (Chairman), Butler (Vice-Chairman), Smith, Butcher, Davies, Engström, Harward, Farmer, Thomas, Vernon and Worlock

In attendance:

Forster, Neighbour

Officers:

Daryl Philips, Chief Executive

Graeme Clark, Executive Director, Corporate Services & S151 Officer

Joanne Rayne, Finance & Property Manager

Christine Tetlow, Strategic and Corporate Projects Manager

Nikki Jenkins – Community Partnerships & Projects Manager

93 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of 19 December 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

94 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Coburn – Councillor Worlock attended as substitute.

Councillor Worlock announced that Councillor Coburn had given birth to a boy last week, congratulations were offered.

95 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations made.

96 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first Overview & Scrutiny Committee of 2024 and thanked Cllr Butler for chairing the last meeting.

Mr Clark introduced the new Committee Services Officer, Kathy Long.

The Chairman also thanked members of the CCTV Task and Finish Group and Butterwood Homes Scrutiny Panel for their hard work.

97 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (ITEMS PERTAINING TO THE AGENDA)

None.

98 GYPSY AND TRAVELLER TEMPORARY PITCHES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Mr Philips explained that he was asking members to indicate what they wished to be included in the draft terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group to agree at a later date. This Task and Finish Group would start in the new municipal year.

Members were advised of some areas to consider:

- Non-enforcement options. The aim was to get to the root of the issue and consider the evidence-based unmet need for temporary stopping spaces and transits in the area.
- To focus not on finding sites but on how Hart could get the Community to help find sites and move the discussion on from enforcement only
- Not being asked to replicate planning policy that covered the need for permanent pitches.
- The main issues that affected Hart were having no transit sites (non-permanent sites where people could stay for a few months whilst passing through) and no temporary stopping spaces (non-permanent sites where people could stay for a few nights). This latter group was often chased around the district and neighbouring authorities at public expense.
- What would providing temporary stopping sites mean for Hart?
- How Hart can work with Parish, Town Councils, neighbouring authorities, and Hampshire County Council to find sustainable solutions.

It was stated that these were not easy conversations and that there would be no easy solutions.

The aim was to develop draft terms of reference that covered how to engage with communities about the current situation and how to encourage them to help work toward solutions.

Members discussed various issues, including:

- The use of blanket banning injunctions was raised. It was confirmed that the Supreme Court had decided on this while it was not common to serve injunctions on persons unknown, if it was targeted with a specific evidence base it might be appropriate to use them.
- The number of stopping sites that might be required across the district. It was stated that any increase in the current situation of no sites would be useful.

- Identify best practice from other areas. Members were told that the LGA had looked at this in the past and that exemplar sites did exist, which were managed by liaison officers who understood the specific needs.
- How to engage people in these complex discussions and whether a level of expertise was needed to achieve this. It was confirmed that advice from the LGA will be sought.
- What consultation would occur specifically if new potential sites were identified? It was stated that as part of any planning application process full notification would be carried out but at this stage, it is a scoping exercise.
- The focus would be on changing the language around engagement to emphasise the benefits and positive outcomes rather than focusing purely on the negative consequences of not engaging.

Mr Philips requested Councillor support for drafting the terms of reference if there was interest.

A small group of members agreed to meet with Mr Philips to move this forward. Councillors Butler, Farmer and Harwood put themselves forward.

99 FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY SERVICE PANEL MEMBERS

Councillor Butler gave a summary of the meeting attended. Members were informed that it had been a very positive meeting and well attended by managers. Only one project had slipped within Housing, this was due to staffing issues and increased workloads. Hampshire Council County funding was being used to refurbish empty homes for rent and the Community Safety Team was working with businesses in Fleet Town Centre to reduce shoplifting.

Members suggested that more challenging KPI's should be set for the next round of Service Plans.

100 DRAFT BUDGET 2024/25 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Mr Clark introduced and set the context for the report. It was explained to the meeting that the comments they made would be put to Cabinet for consideration and the budget itself would then be taken to Full Council for approval. During the current year various work had been undertaken to support this:

- reviewed the purpose of reserves and realigned budgets accordingly
- reviewed the detailed budget eliminating any unnecessary budgets
- reviewed the Medium-Term Financial Strategy
- provided quarterly monitoring reports

Members were informed that this was the first full year of the in-house finance team being in post and thanked them for their work.

The headlines were:

- There is still budget volatility, estimates were based on a set of assumptions and forward forecasts, using the best information available
- The government grant settlement had been increased this year and was higher than expected. It was again a one-year settlement, so offered no certainty to project forward.
- The Medium-Term Financial Strategy still shows a budget shortfall for the next 3 years.
- Forecasted reduction in government grant.
- Future changes to waste collection services.
- Impact of exiting external contracts and bringing services in house
- A bid has been submitted under the governments public sector decarbonisation fund, the overall scheme was £2.2M and we anticipate receiving £1.6M from that fund. The balance had been approved by Cabinet to be from an earmarked reserve, this would be added to the capital schemes listed in the annex.

Members queried:

- The value of the New Home's Bonus and it was confirmed to be a reduction to £790K .
- Leisure centre charges and it was stated that they were CPIX August which was 7.8%.
- The level of decrease in parking income from 2019/20 until now. It was established that it had reduced by approximately £150K.
- The increase in green waste subscriptions, and what profit was being made, December year to date subscriptions have increased by 118%. As it is a seasonal service it is difficult to predict.
- Investment property rental income was confirmed as a reclassification of the income to track the reclassification of the asset.
- The cost and timescales of the car park ticket machine rollout. It was confirmed that upgrading 22 of 26 machines for £74K during 2024/25 year
- Clarification of the new roles in Community Services, Community Safety and Housing Needs. It was explained that a new role within the Community Safety Team focusing on antisocial behaviour, crime prevention role and covering statutory safeguarding. The second role was within the Housing Solutions team and focused on the increased use of bread and breakfast, homelessness and keeping residents in their homes.
- Funding for the planning resources, and whether the costs were anticipated to be one-off or ongoing. The 80K set aside for planning resources was dependent on the nature of the business case being recommended from the efficiency review.
- Funding for the peer review was confirmed as a one-off cost and the tree planting work was for backlog clearance.
- Whether it was possible to give an indication of the tests the budget met and whether it was just met or exceeded.
- Were there any other stress tests that could be used above the statutory test listed. It was confirmed that additional tests were available such as

sensitivity analysis for income and use of prudential indicators for treasury activity.

Members were invited to contact Mr Clark if they had any other questions and drop-in sessions would be offered.

101 TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND CAPITAL STRATEGY ANNUAL STATUTORY REVIEW

Mr Clark introduced the report, stating that much was prescribed by regulation and statutory guidance. It provided a framework for our banking, borrowing and investment. No changes had been proposed as the policy had served Hart well this year.

A Member requested that the interest rate return and maturity date be added into the Treasury investment tables.

102 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUNDING BIDS

Ms Tetlow introduced the report that detailed applications received for UKSPF funding for either community hubs or young people engagement projects. Many applications had been received, and it had been over-subscribed. The report contained recommendations as to which applications should be successful. Non-successful applicants would receive assistance with accessing other funding streams.

Members queried;

- Scoring criteria, specifically if detailed objective information was available to justify individual scores. One application was highlighted as showing anomalies. It was explained that applications were scored by a team, each score for each application was available. Officers explained that the organisations could request their own scoring sheet and that members could request any of them.
- How was the reach information was used in the decision-making process. Concern was raised over the checking process of the reach claims
- Whether applicants had any contact with the team after the initial selection phase. It was stated that most applicants had been contacted for clarification.
- Whether any scoring weight had been given to match-funding given that this was suggested in the UKSPF guidance. It was confirmed that no weight had been given to match-funding following consultation with stakeholders to maximise the level of applications received.
- Which officers sat on the panel, Ms Tetlow explained that it comprised 4 officers and varied in grading and from different departments, The Young Peoples Panel also had a representative who sat on the Local Children's Partnership
- It was stated that no submission had been confirmed as successful prior to the closing date.

- Concern was raised over the change of the fund allocation between the two projects. One unsuccessful application was highlighted as scoring the same as a successful bid.
- Concern raised that the funds had been moved unilaterally across the two streams.
- The lack of consideration for organisations with access to other funds or match-funding was highlighted in relation to one application.
- The level and nature of stakeholder involvement.

Members were reminded that the scoring criteria in the two projects were different. It was confirmed that there had been no stakeholder involvement in the scoring or recommendation stages of the process.

Councillor Forster declared a non-pecuniary interest as the Hampshire County Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for schools.

Members raised questions in relation to:

- the number of applications given to organisations based in Yateley
- consideration of affordability to the individual organisations
- exclusion of areas of high deprivation if in an area of wider affluence
- subjectivity of the scoring, requesting clarity of what each score meant
- catchment areas of the applications
- the capping of awards or offering funds for just one phase
- the level of applications in some areas had been low, was this linked to poor publicity of the fund
- the spread of funds across the whole district.

It was explained that:

- the area of Yateley had two of the 4 deprivation areas in Hart and that within the scoring criteria deprivation levels had been considered.
- no assessment had been undertaken of organisations' accounts, however the projects had to be able to show they were self-sustaining once the funding ended.
- applicants had been informed that they have been recommended for funding, subject to approval.
- support would be given to non-successful applicants.
- the consideration of partial awards had been made but applicants had to have a completed project to meet UKSPF requirements.
- The team had publicised the bidding process across the whole district and had worked with Town and Parish Councils, stakeholder organisations, Here for Hart Forum and had also launched an early expression of interest period to publicise the opportunity for fundraising.

Cllr Thomas left at 20.35.

The Chairman summarised the views of many Members of the committee as having concerns about the scoring criteria, the way it had been applied and therefore the outcomes of it. Additionally significant concerns were voiced about the shift in the boundary between the two work streams after the event. The rejection of the consideration of match -funding.

A Motion was proposed by Councillor Dorn and seconded by Councillor Butcher.

At this time, we do not recommend this paper for approval at Cabinet for the reasons of, concern for the scoring system, the change to funding boundaries and the lack of matched funding.

The vote was not unanimous.

A recorded vote was held on the Motion:

For: Butcher, Butler, Davies, Dorn, Farmer, Smith, Worlock
Abstentions: Engström, Harward, Vernon
Against: None.

The Motion was CARRIED.

103 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet work programme was noted.

104 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

It was agreed that the following changes be made to the work programme:

- Approval of the Gypsy and Traveller Task and Finish Group terms of reference should be added for April 2024.
- The Quarters 2 and 3 Complaints report should be added for February 2024.
- The on-street parking item should be removed.

The meeting closed at 8.48 pm