

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 NOVEMBER 2019 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.16 PM

### **Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Ken Miall (Vice-Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Abdul Loyes, Barrie Patman and Rachelle Shepherd DuBey (Substitute)

### **Officers Present**

Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Corporate Services)) and Sarah Hollamby (Director of Customer and Localities)

### **Executive and Deputy Executive Members Present**

Michael Firmager (Deputy Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport) and John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing)

### **31. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Paul Fishwick. Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey attended the meeting as a substitute.

### **32. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 September 2019, the Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Committee held on 24 September 2019 and the Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Committee held on 30 October 2019 were confirmed as a correct records and signed by the Chairman.

### **33. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **34. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

### **35. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

### **36. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2020-23 - REVENUE BUDGET AND SPECIAL ITEMS**

The Committee received and reviewed a report, set out in agenda pages 23 to 42, which detailed all revenue growth and savings bids over £50k for Corporate Services and Customer and Localities Services. In addition, special items and bids for all service areas under £50k were also provided.

Michael Firmager (Deputy Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), Sarah Hollamby (Director of Customer and Localities), Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive – Director of Corporate Services) and John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

Graham Ebers stated that including the papers received for this meeting, the Committee had effectively seen the entire suite of the proposed draft revenue budget to date. Graham added that the capital budget would be provided to the Committee at a future meeting. Graham stated that the main change to items previously seen by the Committee were related to the revenue monitoring of the ongoing financial pressures present within Children's Services.

During the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points and queries:

- Relating to agenda page 28, could more detail be given as to this income (saving)? Officer response – These figures were residual income over and above the income achieved within the 2019/20 budget. A 2 percent return on investment was expected, which was in line with policy. Officers would derive the exact amount of the £100m that had already been invested and feedback to the Committee.
- Relating to agenda page 29, when was this additional £100m scheduled to be approved? Officer response – This would form a part of the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to be presented to Council in February 2020.
- In relation to the investment strategy, what contingency was in place to prepare for any potential downturn in the economy? Officer response – In undertaking work on the investment portfolio, both internal and external specialists had devised a scheme that worked within policy (i.e. achieving a 2 percent return) whilst making use of safe investments with contingency plans available. Each investment was evaluated and scrutinised by specialists on an investment by investment basis. The primary focus of each investment was a strong covenant, with proper due diligence carried out for each specific investment.
- Relating to agenda page 29, how would any income derived from investments be used? Officer response – New income streams would be used as a credit towards other Council services.
- Relating to agenda page 31, were there plans for additional funding over and above the proposed £50k to tackle the climate emergency? Officer response – There was currently a 20 strong team of Officers across the Council developing strategies and policy to tackle the climate emergency. This specific bid was for an Officer to coordinate the Council's effort to tackle the climate emergency. There were a host of proposed capital projects to help tackle the climate emergency, and this specific post was designed to mobilise and coordinate the Council's response. The Executive Member for Climate Emergency had been fully briefed and was supportive of this strategy.
- How comfortable were Officers regarding the proposed level of the reserves? Officer response – Officers were as confident as they could be that the Local Government settlement received this financial year would be replicated for the next financial year. Subject to a fair settlement, general reserve levels would sit at approximately £10m after special items had been accounted for. Subject to the above, Officers were comfortable with the expected reserve levels.
- Should Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) not win the argument regarding the negative revenue support grant, what changes would be made to the proposed MTFP? Officer response – Officers were expecting to win this argument with Central

Government, as they did last year. In the event that a negative revenue support grant was imposed, Officers would have to make the budget balanced by means of reducing revenue bids and deleting some special items.

- Relating to agenda page 34, what was the purpose of the additional £111k expenditure regarding WBC's street cleansing contract? Officer response – There was strong feedback that stated that the existing contract was too strongly weighted towards value. This additional cost would weigh the contract further towards the quality of the service provided for an additional expense. This contract was awarded via tender process within an agreed product specification for a six year contract. The Deputy Executive Member for Environment and Leisure added that the increase was all geared towards improving the quality of the service offered.
- Would the increased expenditure relating to the street cleansing contract effectively cope with the increased housing numbers going forwards? Officer response – The contract was geared to accommodate the increase in housing number within the Borough. The Executive Member for Finance and Housing added that the Borough had likely seen the peak of new housing numbers within the Borough, and the SDL programme was back loaded and we had now likely seen the peak on new housing delivery.
- Relating to agenda page 36, were Officers confident that this efficiency saving of £50k could be achieved within Highways and Transport? Officer response – Yes, since publication of the agenda further discussion had been undertaken between the Director and the Assistant Director and the service was now confident that this saving could be achieved.
- Relating to agenda page 37, was the £500k sufficient to enable the deliver the highways capital investment scheme? Officer response – Some further work needed to be done with regards to the phasing of the funding, however this ongoing £500k would cover the revenue cost of the capital expenditure.
- Relating to agenda page 32, could more information be provided regarding the estimated income of £100k from the enhancement of Cantley Park? Executive Member for Finance and Housing response – The income would be created from the existing 3G pitch and the proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> 3G pitch which was dependant on a Football Foundation Grant. Additional income would be received from the on-site Café.
- Relating to agenda page 30, why were only two years of savings proposed for a four year project of Wokingham Owned Housing delivery? Officer response – This was a very cautious estimate. Various numbers of this housing sat within different areas of the organisation and it related to how those figures were then translated into direct revenue income. The Executive Member for Finance and Housing added that this delivery plan would deliver social housing across the Borough, whilst providing the Council with some money to feed back into its services.
- Had the relevant Lead Member been briefed on all proposals? Executive Member for Finance and Housing response – All proposals had been agreed between the relevant Directors and Executive Members.
- Relating to agenda page 40, how was the launch of Council Tax E-billing developing? Officer response – This was a great system which made it easier for residents and

WBC to manage Council Tax payments. WBC could not force residents to switch to this service, and a big push to publicise this new service was underway.

- Relating to agenda page 39, how was the £4.5m to be spent on the continuous improvement programme? Officer response – Currently, 80% of the programme was dedicated towards Adult Social Care and Children’s Services, with the remaining 20% focussing on Corporate Services and Customer and Localities Services. WBC needed to bring the Children’s Services up to a Good standard, and this money would provide the infrastructure (e.g. digitisation, process engineering and programme management) needed to provide savings within the service.
- Relating to £112k special item relating to SEND Written Statement of Action Implementation, could more information be provided with regards to this? Officer response – This was a one off resource to respond to the recent SEND inspection. The Director of Children’s Services would be asked to provide the Committee with further details on this special item.
- Was the proposed £100k to assist with Planning and Enforcement sufficient? Officer response – This special item would assist in providing a more robust resource to deal with unwanted development within the Borough, and the special item was deemed sufficient to meet this target.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Michael Firmager, Sarah Hollamby, Pauline Jorgensen, Graham Ebers and John Kaiser be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The proposed capital programme be taken to the extraordinary meeting of the Committee on 6 January;
- 3) The Committee be provided with information regarding how much of the initial £100m investment fund that had been invested to date;
- 4) The Committee be provided with additional information regarding the £112k special item relating to SEND Written Statement of Action Implementation.

### **37. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered a report about its work programme, set out in agenda pages 43 to 50, which outlined the proposed forward programme for the Committee for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The extraordinary meeting of the Committee scheduled for 6 January include items relating to the proposed capital programme, and an update on the Council’s property investment group;
- 2) The meeting of the Committee scheduled for 13 January include items relating to the review of burial grounds, and an update on the upcoming Borough Design Guide.