THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 9 September 2021

Attendance:

Councillors
Brook (Chairperson)

Lumby	Horrill
Becker	Power
Cook	Weir
Ferguson	Williams

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Craske

Deputy Members:

Councillor Laming (as deputy for Councillor Craske)

Other members in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillors Clear and Murphy

Audio and video recording of this meeting

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1. APOLOGIES AND DEPUTY MEMBERS

Apologies for the meeting were noted as above.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Lumby declared a non-pecuniary interest concerning items upon the agenda that may be related to his role as a County Councillor.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairperson advised that at the last meeting in July the committee agreed to adjourn and carry over its remaining business to either a new date in August or to this meeting. It hadn’t been possible to find a suitable date in August, so the outstanding agenda items had been carried over to this meeting.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE 19TH JULY 2021

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 19th July 2021 be approved and adopted.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no comments or questions made during public participation, but members were reminded that Mr David Light, Chair of Tenants and Council Together (TACT) had spoken at the previous meeting regarding the agenda item "Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Outturn 20/21" which had been adjourned to this meeting. Mr Botham confirmed that following the previous meeting he had spoken with Mr Light concerning the points that he had raised.

6. GENERAL FUND OUTTURN 20/21

Scrutiny report reference: SC048
Cabinet report reference: CAB3309

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Service Quality and the Strategic Director provided the committee with an overview of the contents of the report. In addition, Mr Botham brought members up to date with the current budget position and explained that the current forecasts were in line with the budget agreed in February 2021. Mr Botham also reported that he had informally met with most members of the committee recently to discuss this report and that the notes of that meeting would be included with these minutes.

The committee asked several questions concerning; bad debts, homelessness resourcing and cost comparisons, Bishops Waltham depot rent levels, the major investment reserve, electric vehicle charging points, the investment to the former Guildhall café and the charging of staffing costs for the Winchester Town account. The questions were responded to by officers, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Service Quality and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management. Mr Botham agreed to circulate the written response to the question regarding the former Guildhall Café to all committee members.

RESOLVED:

The committee agreed to the following:

- that the comments of the committee be noted by cabinet
- that information concerning officer costs attributable to the Winchester Town account be included in future outturn reports.
- that the committee noted the recent hard work of the finance team

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) OUTTURN 20/21

Scrutiny report reference: SC047
Cabinet report reference: CAB3308

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management and the Strategic Director provided the committee with an overview of the contents of the report. Mr Botham also confirmed that the report had been presented in detail to TACT where several questions had been raised and that he had informally met with most members of the committee recently to discuss this report and that the notes of that meeting would be included with these minutes.

The committee asked several questions concerning; tenant consultation during the pandemic, the use of digital surveys, overcoming issues of digital exclusion, void property trends, private rental property availability, welfare fund funding arrangements, bathroom and kitchen replacement policy, external envelope works budget and the Barton Farm extra care scheme. The questions were responded to by officers and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management.

RESOLVED:

The committee agreed to the following:

- that the comments of the committee be noted by cabinet
- that the committee request that the City Council continue to be a party to the discussions with CALA and Hampshire County Council regarding the extra care scheme within the Kings Barton development
- that in the first instance officers consider how an assessment could be undertaken into the availability of private rented accommodation and its impact on residents.

8. Q4 PERFORMANCE MONITORING INCLUDING A VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE PERFORMANCE PANEL

Report Reference SC050
Report Reference CAB3297

The Senior Policy and Programme Manager introduced the report and advised that the panel had met on 14 June 2021 to scrutinise the cabinet report, ref CAB3297. Mr Howson drew the committee’s attention to the record of questions, associated action points and updates.

RESOLVED:

The scrutiny committee:

1. Noted that the performance panel met on 14 June 2021 to scrutinise the report, CAB3297 and its associated appendices.

2. Noted that at the meeting of the performance panel, no items of further work were requested to be undertaken by the performance panel or referred to the scrutiny committee.

9. **ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT - DRAFT ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2020/21**

Report Reference SC051

The committee noted that the report represented a succinct summary of the main work it had carried out during the previous municipal year.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

That Council note the Annual Scrutiny Report for 2020/21

10. **SCRUTINY REPORT - EXCEPTIONS TO FORWARD PLAN 2020/21**

Report ref SC023

The committee considered the annual monitoring report which set out the number of key decisions that came forward for a decision, which had not been included in the forward plan.

RESOLVED:

That the report was noted.

11. **TO NOTE THE LATEST FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

RESOLVED:

The forward plan of key decisions for August 2021 was noted.

12. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22**

RESOLVED:

1. That the work programme was noted
2. That the work programme be amended to reflect the following:

   - an additional meeting scheduled for the 15th November regarding Central Winchester Regeneration
   - the February 2022 meeting to receive budget papers
   - that officers report back on options for the committee to take forward the work item regarding mental health service provision in the district.

13. **TO NOTE - MEMBERSHIP OF THE PERFORMANCE PANEL**

RESOLVED:

The committee noted that the following would form the Performance Panel for 2021/22, Councillors; Cook, Craske, Ferguson, Horrill (Chairperson) and Williams.

14. **TO NOTE THE DATE AND TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE & PERFORMANCE PANEL**

RESOLVED:

The committee noted the following dates:

Scrutiny Committee
9 Sep 2021 6.30pm
15 Nov 2021 6.30pm
24 Nov 2021 6.30pm
1 Feb 2022 6.30pm
10 Mar 2022 6.30pm

Performance Panel
23 August 2021, 4.00pm
8 November 2021, 4.00pm
24 February 2022, 4.00pm

15. **Q1 FINANCE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING INCLUDING A VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE PERFORMANCE PANEL**

Report Reference SC052
Report Reference CAB3312

The Senior Policy and Programme Manager introduced the report and advised that the panel had met on 23 August 2021 to scrutinise the cabinet report, ref

CAB3312. Mr Howson and the Chairperson of the Performance Panel drew the committee's attention to the record of questions, associated action points and updates.

The committee asked several questions concerning; the biodiversity action plan (specifically reference to concerns over water quality and the health of, Swifts, House Martins, chalk streams and Crayfish), the prospect of achieving Carbon Literacy silver or gold level and the red status given to the local plan process. The questions were responded to by officers and the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency.

RESOLVED:

The scrutiny committee:

1. Noted that the performance panel met on 23 August 2021 to scrutinise the report, CAB3312 and its associated appendices.

2. Noted that at the meeting of the performance panel, no items of further work were requested to be undertaken by the performance panel or referred to the scrutiny committee.

3. Noted the concerns expressed regarding water quality and biodiversity as outlined above.

16. **TO NOTE THE LATEST FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

RESOLVED:

The forward plan of key decisions for October 2021 was noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 7.40 pm

Chairperson

REF ITEMS 6 AND 7 OF THE MINUTES ABOVE.

12th July 2021, 6 pm

Notes of an informal meeting of Scrutiny members.
Present: Councillors: Brook, Lumby, Becker, Cook, Craske, Ferguson, Horrill, Weir, Cramoysan, Laming & Cutler.
Officers: Laura Taylor, Richard Botham, Matthew Watson
Apologies: Councillors Power, Williams

Issues raised and responses.

General Outturn

1. Several points raised regarding the detail on para 15, page 163 re Government grants and financial support for COVID measures and what appeared to be a £0.5m variance. Richard Botham advised that there were different types of grants within this section and would provide a fuller response to members. A member raised further points regarding; interest on government grants and that cash balances appeared higher. Richard Botham acknowledged that cash balances were higher in part as a result of grants received but also relating to lower capital programme spend and increased receipts.
2. It was noted that major projects were showing as being under budget and it was asked why this was? Richard Botham replied that currently, project teams were being advised to take a cautious approach but were continuing to deliver against milestones.
3. A question was asked regarding page 200, para 12.7 (a) - that major repairs were described as £600k under budget - and specifically which major repairs had not been actioned. Richard Botham advised that he would provide a response to members on this – see q14 below.
4. A question was asked regarding delays in capital expenditure for example the car park at the Dean, Alresford. Richard Botham advised that officers were waiting on the Landowner in this specific example.
5. Following questions regarding the housing company, members were advised that as per the previous cabinet report, that recommendations will be coming back in the next committee cycle.
6. A general question was asked regarding CIL projects, it appeared that the council wasn't using all its available funds and was there a processing issue? Richard Botham advised that a future report would be going to cabinet providing an update on CIL, the paper may need to consider whether extensions are appropriate or not.
7. It was suggested that a future item of work for the scrutiny committee could be to look at processes and procedures regarding CIL. Richard Botham advised that if members wished then the cabinet report could be tabled at scrutiny in September.
8. A question was asked regarding the leisure centre and had the council got to a final financial position? Richard Botham advised that the claim was subject to negotiation.

9. At a recent business and housing policy meeting, a total cost comparison was requested of homelessness officers. Richard Botham advised that he would follow that up with Gilly Knight.
10. A question regarding rent levels at the Bishops Waltham depot - Richard Botham advised that he would follow this up with Geoff Coe.
11. A question was asked regarding savings achieved and whether planned cuts could be reversed. Richard Botham advised that the savings made meant that the call on reserves was a little less than originally expected.
12. Further information was requested regarding the details on page 162 section 14 regarding the £2 million COVID business grants which was spent in 2020/21. Richard Botham advised that some grants were provided upfront but intended to support recovery work throughout 2021/22.
13. A question was asked regarding page 166 paragraph 18.8 - homelessness staffing resource comparison. Richard Botham to clarify with Gilly Knight.

HRA outturn

14. Following a question regarding major repairs, Richard Botham advised that this is a 30-year programme (this is the preventative programme) and that not all the planned work was achieved last year. The largest element of this being the re-roofing programme. The programme has been re-forecast to ensure the Decent Homes standard is maintained.
15. Regarding a question concerning 1-4-1 receipts, Richard Botham advised that there is a three-year deadline to spend an individual receipt.
16. Regarding the table on page 211, a question was asked re why was there were no revised budget figures against the lines for homes England grant and new build sales? Richard Botham agreed to clarify this with Housing officers.

Matthew Watson
16th July 2021

From: Richard Botham <RBotham@WINCHESTER.GOV.UK>
Sent: 16 July 2021 16:40
To: Caroline Brook (Cllr) <CBrook@winchester.gov.uk>; Caroline Horrill (Cllr) <CHorrill@winchester.gov.uk>; Susan Cook (Cllr) <susancook@winchester.gov.uk>; Hugh Lumby (Cllr) <HLumby@winchester.gov.uk>; Kathleen Becker (Cllr) <KBecker@winchester.gov.uk>; Susan Cook (Cllr) <susancook@winchester.gov.uk>; Mike Craske (Cllr) <MCraske@winchester.gov.uk>; Paula Ferguson (Cllr) <PFerguson@winchester.gov.uk>; Caroline Horrill (Cllr) <CHorrill@winchester.gov.uk>; Margot Power (Cllr) <MPower@winchester.gov.uk>; Anne Weir (Cllr) <aweir@winchester.gov.uk>; Hannah Williams (Cllr) <HWilliams@winchester.gov.uk>; Steve Cramoysan (Cllr) <SCramoysan@winchester.gov.uk>; Brian Laming (Cllr) <blaming@winchester.gov.uk>; Linda Gemmell (Cllr) <LGemmell@winchester.gov.uk>; Stephen Godfrey (Cllr) <SGodfrey@winchester.gov.uk>
Cc: Laura Taylor <LTaylor@winchester.gov.uk>; Neil Cutler (Cllr) <NCutler@winchester.gov.uk>; Matthew Watson <MWatson@winchester.gov.uk>; Liz

Keys <LKeys@winchester.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Scrutiny Committee

Dear members,

Further to Matthew Watson's email regarding the pre-meeting on Monday and summarising responses given to questions on the Outturn reports raised on the night , I did say to members present that I would follow up on a couple of points raised. Further responses to these are given below for information.

I appreciate that there is a relatively full agenda on Monday and the time available to scrutinise the outturn reports may be limited. I do hope the clarifications provided on Monday and below will assist with this. I will be at the meeting on Monday and able to follow up on additional points. However, if members have an additional questions or need any additional clarification on any points in the reports, please don't hesitate to contact me ahead of the meeting in order to allow as much time as possible to focus on the recommendations to Cabinet.

Additional questions from Monday:

Question - Covid Grants (CAB3309 para 14.9 and Appendix 1) – Members asked for clarification regarding the grants highlighted in para 15.1 and the totals for grants in Appendix 1, which are different.

Response - The council receives a number of government grants and detailed guidance determines where these grants should appear in the accounts. Generally speaking grants appear under 'Funding' in Appendix 1 if they are non-specific / un-ring-fenced – this does not mean they were not given for any purpose but it does mean that the Council has a degree of flexibility of how the grant funding is used. An example of this is the general covid tranche funding totalling £1.5m.

A number of covid related grants received in 2020/21 were for specific / ring-fenced purposes and were therefore coded within 'Net Service Expenditure', such as the Park & Ride bus subsidy.

The table in 15.1 is intended to show the key covid related grants received in 2020/21 irrespective of where they appear within the accounts and therefore provides a high level summary of the grant funding awarded to the council.

Question - Bishops Waltham Depot (CAB3309 para 20.1 vi) – Members asked if the rents achieved for the let unit were as projected.

Response - Geoff Coe has confirmed that the first letting has achieved the rents projected and demand for the other units is strong.

Question - Homelessness Prevention (CAB3309 para 20.8) – Members asked how the Winchester service benchmarked against councils overall costs.

Response – Gilly Knight is reviewing cost comparisons with neighbouring districts. General CIPFA benchmarking would suggest that operating costs per case in Winchester are higher than average. However, this is as a direct result of the Council's focus on prevention, which keeps formal case numbers (individuals to whom the Council has a formal statutory duty) low. This is reflected in the national "Gold Standard" award for this service. Total Homelessness service costs for other Hampshire councils were not available in time for this note but Gilly will update members on this as soon as possible.

Question - New Build variance (CAB3308 app 4 - £4,526,000) – Members asked for an explanation for the New Homes programme variance

Response – A revised programme with re-profiled budgeted spend was agreed by Council in Sept 2020. It contained an unallocated and unidentified budget funding envelope of £5.041m in case any opportunities arose in 2020-21 that required funding. Although we spent £0.817k of this, some £4,224m remained unallocated and unspent at year end.

Whilst funding exists within the HRA Business plan and 10 year indicative Capital programme to deliver the Council's 1000 homes target, there are a limited number of identified sites at any point for new home development. However having the budget envelope available allows new sites and opportunities to be fast tracked when identified and gives the new homes team a degree of headroom and flexibility in delivering this challenging target (the Whiteley proposal discussed at Council is an example of this)..

Question - HE Grant and Sales – (CAB3308 - App 5) – Members asked for an explanation as to why the original budget included reference to Homes England grant and sales income but none was realised in 2020/21.

Response =- Following a review of schemes in September 2020, it was clear that schemes would not be completed in the year and this income was therefore moved to 2021. The 2021 budget for Homes England grant is now over £2m.

Richard Botham
Strategic Director

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