

THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 15 February 2022

Attendance:

Councillors
Brook (Chairperson)

Becker
Cook
Cramoysan
Craske

Ferguson
Horrill
Power
Weir

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Lumby

Deputy Members:

Councillor Godfrey (as deputy for Councillor Lumby)

Other members in attendance:

Councillors Clear, Cutler, Learney, Thompson, Tod, Westwood, Gemmell and Rutter

[Audio and video recording of this meeting](#)

1. **APOLOGIES AND DEPUTY MEMBERS**

Apologies for the meeting were noted as above.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

None.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairperson confirmed a date change for the March meeting of the committee and advised that this was so the committee could scrutinise the outcome of the disposal of open space advertisement and associated report in respect of the University of Southampton proposal for the former River Park Leisure Centre site before it was considered by cabinet. The Chairperson thanked everyone in accommodating the date change.

4. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE 6 DECEMBER 2021**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 December 2021 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr Martin Wilson addressed the meeting regarding agenda item 10, "Determination of Call-In Request". Mr Wilson referred to a question he had raised at a meeting of full council on 12 January 2022 regarding recent Judicial Review (JR) proceedings involving the council. Mr Wilson was concerned of the use of council resources in defending these proceedings and felt that the council was not making adequate changes that would protect itself from future legal challenges. Specifically, regarding the River Park Leisure Centre site, Mr Wilson urged members to pause its decision and to consider undertaking public consultation regarding future proposals for the site. The Chairperson thanked Mr Wilson for his contribution and advised that the matters raised would be considered at the Scrutiny committee meeting on 3rd March 2022.

6. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET 2022/23**

Councillor Learney, Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management and the Corporate Head of Housing introduced the report, ref CAB3334 which set out proposals for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2022/23 which was available on the councils [website here](#).

The committee was recommended to comment on the proposals within the attached cabinet report, ref CAB3334 which was to be considered by the cabinet at its meeting on 17 February 2022.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report, in summary, the following matters were raised.

- the communication, and engagement of the welfare initiatives
- hard to let properties and the contributing factors
- voids and if there was an opportunity to rework these into larger properties and communicating the new standards voids to members and tenants
- the Housing white paper and what changes may we see
- ensuring sufficient resource in the neighbourhood team
- if rents were not increased by 4.1%, what would the HRA not be able to do
- the sensitivity analysis of inflation rises and its impact upon services.
- alternatives to the investment in sewerage treatment works
- welfare support - would unspent monies be carried over
- the % cost of overall repairs and could this be benchmarked
- was there sufficient funding to tackle homelessness
- was CALA on track to bring forward the extra care provision at Kings Barton?
- If housebuilding costs increase, was this plan inflation proof?

These points were responded to by Councillor Learney and officers accordingly and were noted by the cabinet members present at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted
2. That the committee wished to highlight the importance of Homelessness Prevention and that it did not specifically feature in this or the General Fund report.
3. That cabinet consider all the committee's comments raised during the discussion of the agenda item.

7. **GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2022/23**

Councillor Cutler, Cabinet Member for Finance and Service Quality and the Strategic Director introduced the report which set out the detailed general fund budget for 2022/23 and was available on the councils [website here](#).

The report recommended that the committee comment on the proposals within the cabinet report, ref, CAB3335 which was to be considered by the cabinet at its meeting on 17 February 2022.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report and in summary, questions relating to the following matters were raised.

- the halving of business rates
- the timing of works to the historic assets
- the funding of trials of low carbon bin lorries and/or buses operating existing Council services
- the funding of the feasibility work to prepare for the implementation of a food waste trial collection system in 2023.
- the timeline for the Strategic Budget review,
- the effect of the 3% increase in charges to the operators of those facilities?
- the Local Council Tax Support, £100,000 additional one-off provision to the Council's Hardship Fund and ensuring those potentially eligible were aware of it
- whether any of the additional proposals be funded through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)
- the reasons for the relatively few respondents to the consultation
- the impact of higher inflation on councils' costs.
- Ensuring that the Guildhall is financially viable
- the rationale of implementing a food waste trial in 2022
- the unexpected New Homes Bonus money being spent on council services as opposed to one-off projects
- the council's administration costs of the Council tax energy rebate
- the transparency of the recharge of staffing costs for Winchester Town Forum

These points were responded to by Councillor Cutler, Councillor Tod, and officers accordingly and were noted by the cabinet members present at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted
that the spend proposals in the section headed Additional New Homes Bonus in Appendix B– Spending Plans should read the same as the recommendations as to the table in 13.6 of the report, as follows:
 - Historic Asset Monuments - £450k
 - Promoting Cycling Walking - £40k
 - Fly-tipping/Street Scene - £185k
2. that members be informed of proposals for promoting the availability of the Hardship Fund as recommended in the report
3. that officers consider how the report could reflect staff costs recharged to Town Services.
4. That cabinet consider all the committee's comments raised during the discussion of the agenda item.

8. **CAPITAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2022-2032**

Councillor Cutler, Cabinet Member for Finance and Service Quality and the Strategic Director introduced the report, ref CAB3332 which set out the council's capital investment strategy 2022-2032 and was available on the councils [website here](#).

The report recommended that the committee comment on the proposals within the attached cabinet report, ref CAB3332 which was to be considered by the cabinet at its meeting on 17 February 2022.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report in detail. In summary, questions relating to the following matters were raised.

- the strategic asset purchase scheme
- the assumptions about financial returns being realised
- The inclusion of assets relating to the broader Central Winchester Regeneration (CWR) scheme
- The anticipated returns relating to the Goods Shed site
- The demolition of Friarsgate medical centre and any impact upon future planning permission
- North Walls Pavilion work
- the relationship between the Asset Management Strategy (AMS) and the strategic budget review
- the demolition of buildings and the reuse of materials

- the outputs for the Housing Company expenditure
- the expenditure on West Wing refurbishment
- should there be an allocation of funds for the Winchester Movement Strategy
- why assets such as Station Approach or Cattle Market do not appear on the list.

These points were responded to by Councillor Cutler, Councillor Tod, and officers accordingly and were noted by the cabinet members present at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted
2. That officers feedback regarding the demolition and interim open space proposals for the Friarsgate Medical Centre.
3. That cabinet consider all the committee's comments raised during the discussion of the agenda item.

9. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022/23**

Councillor Cutler, Cabinet Member for Finance and Service Quality and the Strategic Director introduced the report, ref CAB3333 which set out the proposed treasury management strategy statement and the annual investment strategy for 2022/23 and was available on the councils [website here](#).

The report recommended that the committee comment on the proposals within the attached cabinet report, ref CAB3333 which was to be considered by the cabinet at its meeting on 17 February 2022.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report in detail. In summary, questions relating to the following matters were raised.

- the pooled property fund
- the budget for Strategic Asset Purchase (SAP) scheme
- the borrow for investment for yields,
- the assumption regarding the prediction in only 1 increase in base rates

These points were responded to by Councillor Cutler, Councillor Tod, and officers accordingly, and were noted by the cabinet members present at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted
2. That cabinet consider all the committee's comments raised during the discussion of the agenda item.

10. **TO NOTE THE DETERMINATION OF THE MONITORING OFFICER FOLLOWING A CALL-IN REQUEST.**

The Chairperson introduced the agenda item and referred the committee to report, ref SC062 regarding the determination of the Monitoring Officer following a call-in request, which was available on the councils [website here](#).

The report recommended that the scrutiny committee noted the contents of the report. The committee proceeded to ask questions and in summary, the following points were raised.

- Whether changes were required to the council's decision-making processes that could prevent concerns over significant decisions from being raised?
- The importance of members considering to call-in a decision to engage with the cabinet member before its submission

These points were responded to by the Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

11. **TO NOTE THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 21/22**

RESOLVED:

That the work programme was noted

12. **TO NOTE THE LATEST FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS (MARCH 2022)**

RESOLVED:

The forward plan of key decisions for March 2022 was noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 9.35 pm

Chairperson