Public Document Pack

THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 15 November 2021

Attendance:

Councillors
Brook (Chairperson)

Lumby	Ferguson
Becker	Horrill
Cook	Power
Craske	

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors Weir and Williams

Deputy Members:

Councillor Cramoysan (as deputy for Councillor Weir)

Other members in attendance:

Councillors Clear, Cutler, Learney and Tod

Audio and video recording of this meeting

---

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**
None.

4. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE 9 SEPTEMBER 2021.**
RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 September 2021 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no comments or questions made during public participation, but the Chairperson advised that members of Tenants and Council Together (TACT) had been invited to attend tonight's meeting regarding the agenda item "Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and Budget Options". Unfortunately, members of TACT had not been able to attend this meeting but Mr Light, the Chair asked if the following statement could be read out to the committee "*Richard Botham presented the HRA Budget to the TACT Support Group and the majority of the group went for rent option 2 - 3.1 per cent rise*."

6. **GENERAL FUND BUDGET OPTIONS AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Service Quality and the Strategic Director introduced the report which set out the options for the 2022/23 budget, including anticipated changes and budget proposals.

The report also included the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and set out the Council's strategic approach to the use and management of its financial resources. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Service Quality updated the committee following the cabinet meeting on 21 October 2021 and specifically drew members attention to amended recommendations 9A and 9C and referred members to the minutes of the cabinet meeting which had been provided at the meeting. The report recommended that the scrutiny committee comment on the proposals within it.

The committee asked questions and made comments on a range of subjects which included: increases to the fees and charges, the wording regarding the ambition of encouraging parking on the perimeter of the city, the permanency of the grant to the Hampshire Cultural Trust, the use of income from car park charges, the expenditure identified for climate emergency work, whether a strategic spending review could have been undertaken prior to this exercise and when one would, the financial provision for digital engagement with customers, the financial impact of greater parking on the perimeter of the city instead of within the central area, potential, additional leisure centre income and if the council benefits financially, the garden waste concessions package, IT equipment provision for staff working from home, the costs associated with collecting unused garden waste bins, staff numbers in the Planning team, the predicted inflation rate and the impacts of it not being accurate, utilising the accumulated CIL funds and the levels of community grants

The questions were responded to by the Strategic Director and Councillors Cutler, Tod, Learney and Clear.

RESOLVED:

The committee agreed to the following:

1. that the comments of the committee be noted by cabinet
2. that the following be considered:

    - that alternative wording be explored regarding the aim of encouraging parking on the perimeter of the city
    - that the Health & Environment Policy committee be recommended to review the changes in community grants
    - that subject to any future spending review, that proposed significant decreases in grants be reconsidered
    - that any future surpluses generated by the garden waste service be used to increase that service's discounts.
    - that future budget consultations should ask specific questions to residents regarding council charges and how changes to these charges impact them.

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET OPTIONS

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Asset Management and the Strategic Director introduced the report which provided the committee with an overview of the current HRA 30-year Business Plan. The report provided several budget options for members to consider and recommended a rent increase for 2022/23 of 4.1% in line with the national rent policy of Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1%.

In addition, the Strategic Director brought members up to date regarding his recent meeting with members of TACT who broadly supported the proposals within the report and supported a rent increase based on CPI.

The report recommended that the scrutiny committee comment on the proposals within the attached cabinet report, ref CAB3325 which was to be considered by the cabinet at its meeting on 23 November 2021.

The committee asked questions and made comments on a range of subjects which included; the number of tenants receiving support via Universal Credit or other similar benefits, given the general healthy condition of the HRA budget why an above inflation increase this year, whether an assessment had been made of savings that residents may achieve through energy-saving measures, the impact of new homes delivery if rent increases were limited to CPI, if there was more that we can do to increase the number of new homes delivered, the key constraints of building new council homes, the impact to residents' available income for essential spending, the impact to the 30-year plan of limiting the rent increase this year particularly in relation to debt finance costs, assessing the likely housing deficit, the impact of land acquisition costs, trends with right to buy transactions, the council's future approach to void properties, the council's future

approach to rent arrears, establishing an all-member group for reviewing and proposing standards for re-fitting of council homes, whether the +1% increase from this year be clawed back in future years and the relationship of the draft Asset Management Strategy with this plan.

The questions were responded to by Councillor Learney, the Strategic Director and the Finance & Resource Manager.

RESOLVED:

The committee agreed that:

1. that the comments of the committee be noted by cabinet
2. that cabinet considers the following:

- that considering the information presented that the case had not been made to progress with a rent increase of CPI+1 and urged the cabinet to consider the matter further.
- that for future years to establish criteria to model future housing needs which could be used as a contributory factor towards the justification of a CPI+1 proposal
- that a member-led review of housing stock to agree standards of refurbishment be undertaken

8. FEES AND CHARGES 2022/23

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Service Quality and the Strategic Director introduced the report which sought the committee's comments on the proposed fees and charges for 2022/23 which had been prepared based on an average 3% increase (other than for parking and garden waste service subscriptions where separate arrangements were agreed in cabinet report, ref CAB3318):

The report recommended that the scrutiny committee comment on the proposals within the attached cabinet report, ref CAB3326 which was to be considered by the cabinet at its meeting on 23 November 2021.

The committee asked questions and made comments on a range of subjects which included; garage voids, the current status of negotiations with Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) regarding the Guildhall, electricity provision in rented garages, reviewing and benchmarking of the Lifeline charges, the impact of above-inflation increases in garage charges both generally and in specific areas, the controls in place to regulate the supply of residential parking permits, the numbers of discounted residential permits, the proposals concerning an air quality parking surcharge, the differences in sports pitch fees, the comparison of charges with other local authorities, the services provided from the Park Homes annual charges, the reason for no increase to fixed penalty notices, the reason for no increase in garage charges in the central

Winchester area, the definition of an event incurring “Special Event” charges, the differential in cemetery fee charges across the district, fly-tipping fixed penalty charges, market stall charges and the use of Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders and associated fees relating to neighbourhood or Parish Platinum Jubilee celebrations,

The questions were responded to by the Strategic Director and Councillors Cutler and Tod.

RESOLVED:

The committee agreed:

1. that the comments of the committee be noted by cabinet
2. to ask that further examination be undertaken to promote the availability of garages and reduce voids
3. to ask that if the uplift in first-night guestroom charges would mean some people would no longer get visitors
4. to ask that officers respond to members regarding previous issues with the holding of charitable or community events requiring a temporary traffic regulation order.

9. **Q2 FINANCE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING INCLUDING A VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE PERFORMANCE PANEL**

The Chairperson of the Performance Panel introduced the report and informed that the panel had met on 8 November to scrutinise the cabinet report, ref CAB3320. Councillor Horrill confirmed that all members had received the draft cabinet report, the questions which had been pre-submitted ahead of the Performance Panel and the minutes of the meeting. The committee was also advised that an update on any outstanding actions would be circulated to all members by the end of November.

RESOLVED:

The committee:

1. noted that the performance panel met on 8 November 2021 to scrutinise the report, CAB3320 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.

10. **TO NOTE THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22**

Following an earlier submitted work request form, the Chief Executive outlined a proposal of holding a series of sessions with a small group of members exploring the council's activities regarding mental health support for its staff, tenants, and the wider community. Following these sessions, a report would be brought to the March 2022 Scrutiny committee. It was agreed that the group be made of 5 members and that group managers be approached to provide nominations.

RESOLVED:

1. that the work programme was noted
   that the work programme be amended to reflect the mental health support work outlined above.

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

RESOLVED:

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

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 10.00 pm

Chairperson