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THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 23 November 2022

Attendance:

Councillors
Brook (Chairperson)

Horrill
Cook
Cramoysan

Cutler
Westwood

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors Craske and Laming

Deputy Members:

Councillor Rutter (as deputy for Councillor Laming)

Other members in attendance:

Councillors Bolton, Ferguson, Power, Thompson 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**

None.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairperson advised that Councillor Caroline Horrill, Councillor Neil Cutler, and herself had met to further discuss the issues that had been raised at the Performance Panel meeting regarding the review of corporate risks. It was noted that the Executive Leadership Board (ELB) had responsibility for the oversight of corporate risks, and do regularly review and update the risk register, particularly when conditions were unpredictable or major decisions were being taken.

The Audit & Governance Committee (A&GC) received regular governance monitoring reports and the latest corporate risk register, and it was within their remit to request in-depth reviews of risks where required. The Chairperson added that if concerns were identified by the Scrutiny Committee or Performance Panel during their work, these should be raised with A&GC for additional work to be considered and where appropriate commissioned.

This information would be communicated to the Performance Panel at its next meeting.

4. **MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON THE 7 SEPTEMBER 2022 AND 29 SEPTEMBER 2022**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 September 2022 and 29 September 2022 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

David Light, on behalf of Tenants and Council Together (TACT), addressed the committee regarding agenda item 6, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and Budget Options. Mr Light advised that it was important that residents' future needs for affordable housing were considered when setting the budget. He also confirmed that TACT would need to discuss and agree on its position regarding the level of future rent rises that it felt was appropriate.

Councillor Malcolm Wallace addressed the committee regarding agenda item 8, Q2 Finance & Performance Monitoring and raised the following matters:

1. The timescales between the end of the data period and the subsequent reporting of it.
2. Regarding KPI "TCE02, Waste and recycling", why was this marked green but was both lower than Q1 2022 and Q2 2021?
3. Regarding KPI "TCE08, The Winchester district to be carbon neutral by 2030", why was the 2020/21 data not part of the report despite being available?
4. Regarding the Carbon Neutral Programme and Commercial Energy, what proportion of the council's electricity was self-generated and what other opportunities were available to increase this?
5. Regarding the Winchester Movement Strategy and bus provision. How would Winchester City Council and Hampshire County Council be using the Government's commitment to cap bus fares at £2 per journey from January to March next year to encourage increased bus usage in the district?

An initial response was provided to these points from Councillor Martin Tod, Councillor Caroline Horrill, and Laura Taylor, Chief Executive who indicated that the officer team were available to work through these points of detail.

Councillor Malcolm Wallace further advised that he had several other detailed points which would be provided to Councillor Horrill so that they and the points above could be actioned with the other Performance Panel issues. The time scales relating to the next meeting of the performance panel would be circulated to Councillor Wallace.

6. **HRA BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET OPTIONS**

Councillor Paula Ferguson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community and Housing; introduced the report, ref SC078, and CAB3365 which set out proposals for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan And Budget Options, (available here). Councillor Ferguson updated the committee regarding the following:

1. The latest position regarding the Government's position on the rent setting ceiling.
2. The current and future cost pressures within the HRA and the impact on tenants from the cost-of-living rises
3. Clarification that section 7.4 on page 28 should read that all new homes should be built to high energy efficiency standards and not to "high energy Passivhaus Plus standard"

The committee was recommended to comment on the proposals within the attached cabinet report whilst noting that they would be presented with the detailed Housing Revenue Account report at its meeting on 7 February 2023 before Full Council on 23 February 2023.

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

1. Would the potential additional staffing resource referred to on page 27, be agency staff or directly employed by the council, and would these be full-time or part-time roles?
2. What was the impact on the council's ambition of building 1,000 homes over the 10-year period from the need to mitigate the impact of phosphates and were there other agencies that could assist in resolving the issue that weren't already engaged?
3. Could the meeting calendar for 2023/24 be adjusted to allow scrutiny of this paper before it was agreed by the cabinet?
4. Now that the details of the rent ceiling were known, would there be significant changes to the proposals in the paper? If additional modelling did take place, would members be further engaged in the discussions and future proposals?
5. Was there a need to allocate more funds in the budget to the retrofit programme
6. Was there an inconsistency in the numbers used in the general assumptions within this paper and the General Fund report, ref CAB 3374
7. Would a 6% rise in rents enable the council to expand the retrofitting programme?
8. Could a discussion be held on the retrofit programme and new build standards at a future meeting of the Cabinet Housing Committee?
9. Regarding the reserves within the HRA, what was the right approach to the use of these reserves during this unsettled period to maintain the level of activity required?
10. If there was a desire for a greater level of energy efficiency measures and/or higher quality standards, could reserves be used to bring this forward?

These points were responded to by Councillor Paula Ferguson, Councillor Martin Tod, Gillian Knight, Corporate Head of Housing, Richard Botham, Strategic Director and Laura Taylor, Chief Executive accordingly and were noted by Councillor Ferguson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community and Housing.

RESOLVED:

1. That officers review the draft 2023/24 calendar of meetings to determine whether in future years this paper could be subject to cross-party review before the cabinet meeting.
2. That members be further engaged once the outputs from the further modelling of rent setting scenarios were known.
3. That further discussion is held at an appropriate forum, for example, the Cabinet Housing Committee regarding the retrofit programme.
4. That the cabinet member and officers note the comments of the committee.

7. GENERAL FUND BUDGET OPTIONS & MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Margot Power, Cabinet Member for Finance and Value, introduced the report, ref SC080, and CAB3374 which set out proposals for the General Fund Budget Options And Medium Term Financial Strategy, (available here).

The committee was recommended to comment on the proposals within the attached cabinet report, which could then be considered by the cabinet before its meeting on the 9th of February 2023 whilst noting that the committee would be presented with an updated General Fund Budget report at its meeting on the 7th February 2023.

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

1. Regarding page 57, clarification was sought concerning:
 - the vacancy management provision of £200k,
 - the £130k to fund staffing “to support the move into delivery phase” for major regeneration projects
 - the additional £80k to address the impact of the on-street parking agency ending in 2023.
2. Regarding page 65, paragraph 16.3 concerning the use of £450k to support invest to save reviews of key services, Clarification was sought on what this money would be used for and the range of expected outcomes.
3. Would the council, where required, look to employ officers on short-term contracts rather than recruiting consultants for short-term, specific pieces of work?
4. Following the recent Government announcement concerning council tax limits, was the council's position on the setting of council tax for 2023/2024 established?
5. Regarding earlier comments concerning the council's CCTV system and whether an update could be given regarding plans for its improvement.

6. Were the results of the 2022 residents' survey available to be shared with all councillors?
7. Clarification regarding the proposals for the garden waste concessionary discount amounts
8. Whether there was any indication of a future 2 or 3-year Government Funding settlement.
9. Whether further details could be provided concerning the possible solar farm referenced on page 78.
10. Whether further details could be provided concerning the possible sale of assets, referenced on page 79.

These points were responded to by Councillor Margot Power, Councillor Martin Tod, Laura Taylor, Chief Executive, Richard Botham, Strategic Director and Liz Keys, Corporate Head of Finance accordingly.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member and officers note the comments of the committee.

8. **Q2 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

Councillor Caroline Horrill, Chairperson of the Performance Panel introduced the agenda item including report reference CAB3367 which set out the Quarter 2 Finance & Performance Monitoring report, ([available here](#)).

Councillor Horrill gave an overview of the following matters:

1. The questions that had been pre-submitted by panel members.
2. The outstanding issues as detailed within the minutes in Appendix 5 of the report.
3. The ongoing discussions regarding the management and review of risk.
4. The future Strategic Key Performance Indicator (KPI) review as part of the council plan refresh.

RESOLVED:

The committee:

1. Noted that the performance panel met on 7 November 2022 to scrutinise the report, CAB3367, and its associated appendices.
2. Noted the draft minutes of the panel's meeting and the verbal update provided by the Chairperson.
3. Agreed that the detailed questions raised at the meeting be added to the list of outstanding issues and be progressed and circulated.

9. **TO NOTE THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022/23**

RESOLVED:

That the latest version of the work programme was noted.

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

The forward plan of key decisions for December was noted.

The meeting commenced at 6:30pm and concluded at 8:15pm

Chairperson