

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

Wednesday, 14 November 2018

Attendance:

Councillors

Weir (Chairman)

Ashton
Becker
Berry
Green
Hiscock
Hutchison

Learney
Mather
Murphy
Thompson
Tod

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Humby, Portfolio Holder for Business Partnerships

Officers in attendance

Richard Botham, Strategic Director: Services (Interim)

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors Scott and Burns

1. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Hiscock declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in relation to item 6 due to his role as County Councillor and some of his divisional area being subject to discussion.

The Chairman advised that members' interests in respect of item 7 would be taken under the relevant item below.

2. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman updated the Forum following the recent meeting of the Town Forum Engagement Informal Group. The group had met to discuss several issues concerning the funding of the evening bus service. Further work and dialogue with Stagecoach was to take place, and an update would be provided to the Forum in due course.

The Chairman advised that at the January 2019 meeting of the Forum, a separate session would be held for members to receive a briefing and discussion

concerning the Local Plan refresh.

3. **MINUTES**

The Forum were advised that a constructive meeting had taken place earlier today regarding St Maurice's Covert, and it was hoped that tenders would be ready to issue shortly.

In response to questions concerning the High Street Task Force Forum previously mentioned at Council, the Strategic Director: Services (Interim) clarified that work had begun on drafting Terms of Reference for this Forum.

Regarding the item on the previous minutes concerning the Environmental Services contract, the Chairman advised that a follow-up meeting was planned for the new year. The Strategic Director: Services (Interim) confirmed that member briefings would take place before the end of the year with dates to be advised.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 12 September 2018 be approved and adopted.

4. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Janet Berry (on behalf of Highcliffe Community Forum for Action) addressed the Forum in respect of Item 6 below (Annual Update on Play Area Improvements).

In summary, she made particular reference to the KGV Play area and Skate Park. She was pleased to see the site within the council's programme but was concerned about the potential lack of funding. She considered that the facilities were well used, valued and respected. She also believed the wider area was in need of improved facilities. She suggested that refurbishment of the site would help the Council achieve several of its own objectives in relation to Play, Obesity and Wellbeing. She acknowledged that the potential cost of refurbishment was a significant sum but sought support from the Forum for these improvements.

The Chairman thanked Janet Berry for her contribution and advised that her points would be reflected upon during the discussion of that report later on the agenda.

5. **WINCHESTER TOWN ACCOUNT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL POSITION**

Report WTF266 refers.

The Committee considered the report of the Finance Manager (Strategic Finance) which provided the Forum with an update on the current budget setting options/considerations for 2019/20 and the medium term plans and projections. It was noted that the Forum's Town Account Informal Group had met during October 2018 to discuss an early draft of this report. The key points highlighted

were:

It is expected that the overall referendum limit for the Council in 2019/20 will remain at either 3% or £5. The decision on the level of council tax for 2019/20 would be taken at Council in February.

In terms of the budget review for 2019/20, several issues detailed within paragraphs 11.11 through to 11.17 of the report were highlighted, including:

- the grants process,
- the environmental services contract,
- the maintenance costs for King George V playing fields,
- the play improvements capital budget,
- the night bus services,
- maintenance of public conveniences

In response to questions from Members, officers confirmed that:

- approximately 17% of the Town Funding was from Fees & Charges.
- that the income received through Sports pitch bookings was around £26,000.
- sports pitches, whilst generating income, carry a significant cost of approximately £240,000.
- following a review and benchmarking a report would be brought back to the Forum in 2019 detailing several options on this.

The Committee discussed the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) section of the report. The Finance Manager (Strategic Finance) advised that the total billed Town contributions amounted to £638,000. A one-off budget of £100,000 was available in 2018/19 and £50,000 budget was proposed for 2019/20. The Strategic Director: Services (Interim) informed the Forum that a recruitment exercise was underway for a CIL Implementation Officer and he would update members at the next meeting regarding this.

During debate Members sought clarity regarding the “special expenses” issue, particularly in relation to the Forums current, £80,000 annual grant budget. Councillor Learney informed the Forum that she had recently written to the Monitoring Officer concerning this issue and asked at this meeting for the following to be recorded: “I’d like to ask the Town Forum to ask the Cabinet to consider the nature of the Town Forum precept as being a special expense and to think about whether all the articles within the budget actually fall within the legislation regarding such expenses”

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted; and
2. That the issues set out above, be considered by Cabinet in relation to the wider budget consultation.

6. ANNUAL UPDATE ON PLAY AREA IMPROVEMENTS

Report WTF265 refers.

The Forum received a presentation (available on the council's website) from the Head of Landscapes and Open Spaces which provided members with an update on four play area sites: Winnall Manor Road, Marnhull Rise, Taplings Road and Gordon Avenue. Each site was described and an update on its current status and future plans was provided, as set out in paragraphs 11.2 through to 11.5 of the report.

The Head of Landscapes and Open Spaces advised that, from next year it is planned to improve the reporting and updating process back to the Forum. Annually a report would come to the Town Forum for approval which would include updates on the projects in the programme due for delivery in the current financial year. In addition, a 5-year rolling programme identifying the planned works including proposed costings and funding options would be presented.

The Forum received an update regarding the programme of works. It was explained that the long-term plan was indicative only and there was always movement on delivery due to a range of factors including priorities, costs and a need for flexibility. A revised, 5-year programme would be brought back to Town Forum in 12 months time.

During debate, Members raised several matters, set out below:

- At the consultation event for Taplings Road all options looked fantastic
- There was general support from the Forum to the importance of and refurbishment at KGV
- Specific issues relating to Priory Gardens and Winnall Manor Rd were raised which officers would review.
- In relation to North Walls Recreation Ground, the Head of Landscapes and Open Spaces advised that the Council was very keen to move forward on this development once the wider development work was understood.

In summary, Officers were thanked for their work, the Forum considered that the process was identifying the right priorities, the refurbishments were excellent and the outcomes were having the desired effect.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress on the play area improvement programme be noted; and
2. That the comments of the Forum be fed into the future programme of works.

7. COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS REVIEW

The following personal (but not prejudicial) interests were declared by members before consideration of this item:

- Councillor Berry as a member of the Town Forum (Town Account Grants) Informal Group.
- Councillor Mather as a member of the Trinity Advisory Committee
- Councillor Tod as a volunteer at the Night Shelter and due to his role as Hampshire County Councillor and his provision of community grants
- Councillor Murphy as a volunteer for Home-Start
- Councillor Green due to his involvement with the Rainbow Club
- Councillor Weir as a Trustee with WinACC
- Councillor Hiscock as a member of Hyde 900 and as a fundraiser for Trinity

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Head of Engagement which proposed changes to the current funding programme, which, if agreed will be introduced in 2019/20. The Grant Review, which started in June 2018, was instigated due to three key issues: the need to meet the financial challenges facing the Council; to work with partners on service provision that meet the needs of residents, businesses and visitors; and to simplify the various funding streams for different organisations.

The recommendations had been arrived at following extensive analysis, internal review and external benchmarking. A full programme of consultation and engagement with members, currently funded organisations and other interested parties was undertaken and the report was considered by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 15 October 2018. Details and results of the full engagement programme were included in the report, as set out from paragraph 11.16 and in Appendices 1 and 2.

The key findings from the engagement showed that organisations value the partnership of the Council, that processes need to be simpler and that organisations valued having a relationship with a lead officer within the Council. In addition, it was noted that there was a range of financial support that the Council made available to organisations. The revised new programme would comprise five elements; a strategic fund, a priority outcomes fund, small local grants, crowdfunding and a flexible grant pot. The Corporate Head of Engagement outlined each element of the framework and advised that further work was being undertaken on the processes that support these proposals.

Members of the Forum raised questions on a range of issues which were responded to as summarised below:

It was clarified that an online survey had been issued previously to all Ward Councillors and Parish Councils and that following the discussion at The Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the 15 October 2018, several issues were being worked on.

Following concerns that organisations may see large, sudden reductions in

funding, it was clarified that, where possible, step reductions in funding would be made. Where this happens, this would run in parallel to the Council supporting and advising organisations on how to seek funding from other sources.

Several questions were asked regarding the crowdfunding element of the scheme. The Forum was advised that organisations would place the project on the online platform to attract funding and that the City Council could match fund it within certain limits. If the purpose of the crowdfunding grant was not connected with any existing grant, then it should not affect an organisation's current grant.

In response to a question concerning funding to support organisations or projects involved with supporting mental health, the Corporate Head of Engagement confirmed that this would be a priority area.

The Forum debated at some length the issues connected to how funds from the Town Forum can be accountable and separate from District funding and also how the priorities of the Town Forum could best be reflected in the process. These issues had previously been raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Forum was advised that the matter had been highlighted formally with the Monitoring Officer and a response was awaited. Two potential proposals discussed could be to capture information from the grant application that would show the numbers and locations of residents to benefit from the grant. In addition, it could be possible for Town Forum members to be part of the decision-making process. The Corporate Head of Engagement advised that officers were working on the issues raised and that this issue would form part of the final report taken to Cabinet.

Councillor Humby provided an update regarding several points that had been raised and assured members that officers were working through the comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the feedback from the Forum. He stated that he understood the points raised and advised that the intention of the review was to provide a transparent, fair and equitable process that helped partners deliver on their objectives. He stated that all comments would be fed back into the preparation of the final report to be considered by Cabinet.

In conclusion, the Forum welcomed the clarity and consistency set out in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the views of the Town Forum set out above be taken to Cabinet for consideration.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.05 pm

Chairman