

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 1st February, 2018.

Present:- Councillors Chaudhry, Parmar, Rana, A Sandhu, R Sandhu and Sarfraz.

Also present under Rule 30:- None.

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Chahal and N Holledge.

PART I

58. Election of Chair

In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, the Senior Democratic Services Officer sought nominations for Election of Chair for the duration of the meeting. Councillor Chaudhry was proposed by Councillor A.Sandhu and seconded by Councillor Rana to chair the meeting.

Resolved – That Councillor Chaudhry be elected Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

(Councillor Chaudhry in the Chair)

59. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

60. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 11th January 2018

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2018 be approved as a correct record.

61. Action Progress Report

The Committee were provided with an update on the current status of the actions agreed.

Resolved – That details of the Action Progress Report be noted.

62. Member Questions

None received.

63. Treasury Management Strategy 2018-19

Details of the Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) for 2018/19 were outlined, which included the financing and investment activity for the forthcoming financial year. It was highlighted that the Chartered Institute of

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Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice recommended that a local authority's total debt should be lower than its highest forecast for Capital Financing Requirement over the next three years. It was noted that the highest forecast of CFR during the next three years for Slough was £584m and the total debt for 2018/19 was forecast to be £424m and the Council would therefore comply with the recommendation.

Responding to an increase of £32m in the borrowing strategy during 2017/18, the Service Lead, Finance informed the meeting that although income from capital receipts, grants and Section 106 Agreements contributed towards the capital programme, the shortfall was made up from the borrowing strategy.

A Member asked to what the potential impact of Brexit was likely to have on interest rates. It was noted that no major changes were anticipated to interest level rates until 2020 although a degree of uncertainty would always remain with capital investments.

Members were reminded that the TMS would be considered by Cabinet on the 5th February with a view to recommending it to Council meeting on 22nd February 2018.

Resolved – That details of the Treasury Management Strategy 2018/19 be noted.

64. Capital Strategy 2018/24

The Service Lead, Finance summarised the Capital Strategy 2018/24 and the capital programme for 2018/19. The Cabinet would be considering the strategy on 5th February 2018 and would be recommending it to full Council on 22nd February.

There would be investment of £285m to 2024 including £40.5m to expand local schools, £13.1m on leisure facilities, £75.3m on Council housing through the Housing Revenue Account, £66.7m on James Elliman Homes and £54.1m on major two centre regeneration schemes. The programme was funded from various sources including grants and capital receipts with a majority funded through borrowing. The links to the Treasury Management Strategy in supporting the significant programme of investment was noted.

The Committee discussed the revenue contributions to capital schemes which were used in limited and specific circumstances. It was noted that the Government had introduced new flexibilities for local authorities to use capital receipts which the Council would utilise for appropriate schemes. At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee noted the Capital Strategy 2018/24.

Resolved – That details of the Capital Strategy 2018/24 as set out in the report, be noted.

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65. Revenue Budget 2018-19

The Service Lead Finance outlined details of the Revenue Budget for 2018/19 and the decisions required for the Council to achieve a balanced budget for the year ahead. 2018/19 was set to be another difficult year financially for the Council, with a continued reduction in Government funding, as well as an increased demand for Council services. It was outlined that the Council had successfully delivered a number of change projects in recent years, with a number of the Council's services being delivered by private sector partners. An income of over £6.4 million had been generated by Slough Urban Renewal, which allowed the Council to protect frontline services whilst continuing with investment for key projects across the Borough.

The Committee were informed that a 4.5% increase in Council Tax was being proposed. 3% increase was due to the Government's Adult Social Care precept and 1.5% for the Council to fund all other services. It was noted that funds would be used to address the homelessness issues in the Borough. Members were advised that the increase in Council Tax was the lowest when compared with other Berkshire Local Authorities. Details of the anticipated Fire Authority and Thames Valley Police precept levels were outlined.

A number of issues were raised by Members commenting on the proposed budget, including queries regarding the assessment and determination of fee levels for Burials & Cremations and Sex Establishments. It was agreed that an explanation relating to these would be circulated to the Committee. A Member queried the increase in Development Management Pre-Application Fee for a 1 dwelling property from £55 in 2017/18 to a proposed fee of £275 in 2018/19. It was explained that this was due to the fact that the Council had not been charging what it should have been and the proposed fees were in line with those currently being charged by neighbouring local authorities. It was agreed that further details would also be circulated to Members relating to what information was included in requests for confirmation of compliance with an Enforcement Notice, Breach of Condition Notice or similar notice.

Responding to whether the planned savings target of £450k in 2018/19 for a reduction in agency staff were realistic and achievable, the Service Lead Finance assured explained that there would be a greater degree of control over agency staff as all would have to be processed through the new HR matrix system. The figures were also monitored on a monthly basis and the Committee were assured that the anticipated savings would be achieved.

Resolved – That details of the Revenue Budget 2018/19, as outlined in the report and appendices, be noted.

66. Work Programme 2017-18

Resolved – That details of the Forward Work Programme be noted.

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67. Members' Attendance Record 2017-18

Resolved – That details of the Members' Attendance Record 2017/18 be noted.

68. Date of Next Meeting - 15th March 2018

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 15th March 2018.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.36 pm and closed at 7.32 pm)