

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

29th January 2014



Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
P R Barlow	Yes	F Ricci	Yes
C A Cadman	Yes	W J Rose	Yes
Dr R L Evans (Chairman)	Yes	A F Shelton	Yes
P Horner	Yes	J S Sutton	Yes
S A Howell	Yes	J R Swift	Yes
R P Ramage	Yes		

All Cabinet Members were also in attendance for Agenda item 5, Scrutiny of the Council Budget and Council Tax 2014-15 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014-15 to 2017-18 as follows:

Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council;
Councillor Beavis, Cabinet Member, People and Participation
Councillor Bebb, Cabinet Member, Performance and Efficiency;
Councillor Lady Newton, Cabinet Member, Planning and Property;
Councillor Schmitt, Cabinet Member, Place;
Councillor Siddall, Cabinet Member, Prosperity and Growth.

The following members were also present: Councillors Abbott, Banthorpe, Bowers-Flint, Cunningham, Elliott, Finbow, Fincken, Galione, Kirby, Lager, Mitchell, Money, Shute, Spray, Tattersley, Wright.

31. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared:

- Councillor Abbott declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda item 5, Scrutiny of the Council Budget and Council Tax 2014-15 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014-15 to 2017-18, as Chairman of Rivenhall Parish Council regarding a question he asked on the Localism Grant to Town and Parish Councils;
- Councillors Cadman and Shelton declared non-pecuniary interests in Agenda item 5, Scrutiny of the Council Budget and Council Tax 2014-15 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014-15 to 2017-18 as Council appointees to the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Advisory Committee.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, all councillors remained in the meeting for all items and took part in the debate and decision thereon.

32. **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There was one statement made relating to proposals to increase rents on allotments sites. Details of the person speaking are contained in the Appendix to these Minutes.

Councillor Schmitt, Cabinet Member, Place; agreed to write to the speaker and to copy her response to all members.

33. **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4th December 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34. **SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2014-15 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2014-15 TO 2017-18**

INFORMATION: Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council, and Councillor Bebb, Cabinet Member, Performance and Efficiency, presented the Council's Budget proposals for 2014-15.

The presentation slides can be viewed at: <http://www.braintree.gov.uk/meetings>

Cabinet members provided the following information in response to questions raised by Committee members and other members present:

- The Council does not run its allotment sites for profit and has recently invested around £150,000 in improvements to the sites over the last 3 years. The Council is running the sites at a loss and even with the proposed increase set out in the report, the sites will still not breakeven;
- A final proposal on allotments site rents would be taken by Cabinet at its meeting on 3rd February;
- Provision has been made in the budget for remedial works at Braintree Swimming Centre. The Council is working to recover the costs of the remedial work;
- The proposed budget does not contain any provision in respect of the announcement by Government that authorities could retain 100% of rates in respect of renewable schemes;
- The Council is considering how best to use the funds from the New Homes Bonus. Rather than thinking just within the district, with the aim of informing how the funds are used, the Council is holding discussions with Essex County Council and surrounding City, Borough and District Councils to consider the future needs of Mid Essex to around 2030 (e.g. housing provision). Members will be informed as soon as more information is available;
- Councillor Lager raised a capital scheme which he had bid for in the Members' Capital Scheme to replace the bridges on the Witham Riverside Walk. He said Witham Town Council only had a leasehold interest in the Walk which expires in about 16 years. At the end of the lease, Braintree District Council would take back

the River Walk and the commitment to renew the bridges unless another arrangement was reached. He suggested that it could be a good investment for the District Council to make the investment in the bridges now and avoid an increased burden at the end of the lease. The Leader advised that Cabinet would respond on the issue at the meeting of Cabinet on 3rd February;

- When arrangements for the funding of CCTV were put in place several years ago, Witham Town Council was offered the opportunity to join a scheme with Halstead Town Council but chose a different funding arrangement. This has resulted in the anomaly of funding from the Council for Halstead Town Council but not for Witham Town Council for the CCTVs;
- The Council is not aware of any events in the district commemorating the Centenary of the First World War in 2014. The Council is not envisaging much by way of sponsorship for commemorations but is not ruling it out;
- Cabinet is not minded to review the Council's policy of coupling the Localism Grant to Town and Parish Councils with the Government grant system to local authorities. It was noted that Town and Parish Councils have the opportunity to raise precepts for specific local issues. Members were also reminded that there are funds for very small parish councils to support capital projects;
- It is proposed that employee contributions to the Essex Pension Fund increase from between 5.5% to 9.9% depending on the annual salary of the employee;
- Councillor Lady Newton, Cabinet Member, Planning and Property, agreed to circulate by email and place on the Members' Portal indicative details on the superfast broadband rollout in the district received from Essex County Council;
- Proposals from Members for small capital projects will become established within the capital bidding process in future years with proposals from Members expected to be sought in the autumn;
- There is no proposed reduction in the Council's contribution to the Dedham Valley AONB and Stour Valley Project in 2014-15. Other authorities had already reduced their contributions to the Project. As the proposed reduction in the Council's contribution does not take effect until 2015-16, those running the Project time to plan for change. The decision could be revisited next year if necessary as a result of decisions taken by DEFRA.
- A report on the Mi Community Scheme would be presented by the Chairman of the Scheme at the meeting of Council on 17th February;
- Provision of £10,000 has been made in 2014-15 for the Tour de France which will enter the district in July 2014;
- Proposals to charge blue badge holders for car parking are based on the fact that a blue badge recognises a physical disability and not a financial disability. It was agreed that details on membership of the Access Group would be circulated to all Members;

- The Settlement Funding Assessment from Government contains an element of recognition for the rural aspect of some parts of the district through the provision of efficiency support for services in sparse areas of £2,595.

There were also discussions on the clarity of Government grants to local authorities over many years and continuing the operation of the council's council tax support scheme.

The Leader also thanked Council officers for their support in developing the proposed budget.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and Cabinet Members for their presentation and responses to questions asked by Members. The Chairman also thanked Members for their questions and officers for their support.

35. **TASK AND FINISH GROUP – PROVISION OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS**

INFORMATION: Councillor Bowers-Flint, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group presented the progress report on the work of the group.

DECISION: That the progress of the Task and Finish Group scrutinising Provision of Public Services in Rural Areas be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To monitor progress of the work of the Task and Finish Group scrutinising Provision of Public Services in Rural Areas be noted.

36. **TASK AND FINISH GROUP – OPERATION OF THE COUNCIL'S COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

INFORMATION: Councillor Cunningham, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group presented the progress report on the work of the group.

DECISION: That the progress of the Task and Finish Group scrutinising the Operation of the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To monitor progress of the work of the Task and Finish Group scrutinising the Operation of the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme.

37. **DECISION PLANNER FOR THE PERIOD 1ST DECEMBER 2013 TO 31ST MARCH 2014**

DECISION: That the Decision Planner for the period 1st February 2014 to 31st May 2014 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.50pm.

Dr R L Evans
Chairman

Appendix

Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 29th January 2014, Questions Asked/Statements Made

Speaker	Subject
Richard Playle Chairman, Witham Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Association.	Increase in Allotment Rents.