

Minutes

Performance Management Board

27th November 2019



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J Coleridge	Apologies	S Rehman	Yes
G Courtauld	Yes	B Rose	Apologies
Mrs C Dervish	Yes	P Schwier (Vice-Chairman)	Yes
T Everard	Yes	N Unsworth (Chairman)	Yes
M Radley	Yes		

The following Councillors were also in attendance at the meeting: J Abbott, D Bebb, K Bowers, T Cunningham, P Euesden, Mrs D Garrod, A Hensman, D Mann, J McKee, A Munday, Mrs I Parker, F Ricci, Mrs J Sandum, Mrs W Schmitt, Mrs G Spray, P Tattersley, R van Dulken, T Walsh, Mrs L Walters, Mrs S Wilson, J Wrench and B Wright.

7 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared:-

Councillor J Abbott declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, "Scrutiny of the Priorities for 2020-2021 and Initial Budget Position" as he was an Elected Member at Essex County Council and a Parish Councillor at Rivenhall Parish Council.

Councillor T Everard declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, "Scrutiny of the Priorities for 2020-2021 and Initial Budget Position" as he was a member of the Bocking Windmill Committee.

Councillor M Radley declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5, "Scrutiny of the Priorities for 2020-2021 and Initial Budget Position" as he was a representative of the Halstead Community Facility Trust.

8 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

9 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Performance Management Board on 3rd September 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

INFORMATION: Councillor T Cunningham, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Infrastructure, introduced the report and the Council's priorities for the 2020-21 period. Members received a joint presentation on the budget position and proposals from Councillor D Bebb, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance Management, and Councillor J McKee, Cabinet Member for Corporate Transformation.

The presentation slides can be viewed at:

<https://braintree.cmis.uk.com/braintree/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/913/Committee/18/Default.aspx>

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

- In respect of the assumption there would be a pay increase for staff in the budget of 2%, Members were advised that this would be finalised when the agreement is made between the Employer's Organisation and the unions in the New Year., with any resulting adjustments considered at that point.
- Members were advised that the Council Tax Base had not yet been finalised. The current assumption of a 1% increase or less stemmed from the return that the Council had been obliged to provide for Central Government in October 2019. The current assessment by the Council did not incorporate properties within the District that still awaited banding by the Valuation Office Agency. Once the properties were banded and taken into account, it was possible that the assumption on the Council Tax Base would increase marginally. The actual Council Tax Base figure for 2020/21 would be determined by 30th November.
- Members were encouraged that the continued allocation under the Capital Programme towards the Halstead Community Facility was positive, as assurances had been received from the Trustees that the project was moving forwards.
- Members were informed that the priorities of the Council were based on the current Corporate Strategy. There was an emerging Corporate Strategy which was due to commence in 2020 that would encompass the next four-year period; the Council's priorities will be set by the Council and issues such as the recent Climate Emergency Declaration, would be reflected within this.
- In response to a question raised about the possible restoration of the Local Highways Panel (LHP) budget through match funding to Essex County Council (ECC), it was advised that the Council would give due consideration to this once the full details of any proposals from ECC had become clear.
- In relation to the proposed 2% increase in Council Tax, it was explained that the Council was required to address the financial shortfalls caused by the annual reduction in Government grant, as well as inflationary pressures, increases in service standards and investments. A sum of £13m had been secured since 2010 through income generation and savings.

- Further to a query raised about the possible restoration of the Planning Enforcement Monitoring Officer's report, it was advised that a written response would be provided.
- In respect of Silver End Surgery, it was reiterated that although the Council was the landlord for the premises, it was not the health provider. An enquiry would therefore be raised with the Mid-Essex CCG as to whether it wished to expand its services at the surgery, and what the potential income generation for the Council would be from this.
- On the subject of green waste collections over the Christmas period, Members were advised that it was too late to alter the schedule for the current year; however, a comprehensive review of the service was underway and, following the results of the Government's consultation, a number of changes could be implemented, which included the operation of bring banks. With regard to Tetra Packaging, it was announced that approximately 186 tonnes of Tetra Packaging had been collected in the District between April 2017 and March 2019 which equated to 0.93% of the total material recycled. The difficulties that surround the recycling of mixed material products was emphasised and it was hoped that following the Government's consultation, producers would start to reconsider their approach towards using such materials.
- Members were informed that although the parking at Church Lane Surgery had been examined in conjunction with Braintree College, the scope of the current budget meant that it was not appropriate to extend the parking scheme at this time.
- The increase in the employer contribution rate under the pension scheme from 16.5% to 20.3% was attributed to the changes to the Actuary's financial assumptions. The key elements were the rate of inflation from 2.4% to 2.6%, and a reduction in the discount rate from 5.1% to 4.5%. There were no changes proposed in respect of employee contributions.
- Further to a query raised regarding the footpath at Rivenhall Village Hall, it was advised that a written response would be provided as to the extent of the work that was to take place along the pathway.
- In response to several queries raised about long-term investments in the North Essex Garden Communities (NEGC) and the additional funding reserve proposed, Members were advised that if Section 1 of the Draft Local Plan was approved by the Planning Inspector, the Council would need to invest a significant sum of money in order to fund the next phase required in the delivery of the Garden Communities. This would be divided across the four Local Authorities involved (Braintree, Colchester, Tendring and ECC). In respect of the liability that was to be funded, the Council would need to determine the exact nature of the expenditure that NEGC would likely incur and ascertain whether this would be revenue or capital based. If capital based, the Council could borrow the money to lend to NEGC with a view that the sum would be repaid within three to four years via refinancing. If the expenditure was deemed to be revenue based, this could result in a revenue advance from the cash balances, the balances of which were estimated to be £5.6million as at the end of 2020-21; however, it was expected that this figure would increase as the pension fund deficit contribution was repaid over the following two years. It was added that the Council also possessed earmarked reserves that were normally intended for specific purposes but could be reviewed and utilised if necessary.

- The proposed allocation of £500k to the Local Plan Growth reserve is to replenish the reserve as £350k of the original £500k to create the reserve has been committed to fund the NEGC in 2019/20.
- Members were advised that Page 40 of the Agenda for the evening (Sections 21.4 and 21.5) identified where the Council intended to address the anticipated shortfalls in relation to the potential NEGC investments. The justification for the funding was to be provided in the Outline Business Case for the project, which was now expected to be received in the 2020/21 financial year.
- Members were informed that the Council had been involved in trials on the eradication of glyphosate over the last year. The trials would continue over the next few years to determine the overall effectiveness of more organic and bio-degradable herbicides being used as an alternative to glyphosate.
- Following a question requesting additional tree planting in response to the Council's Climate Emergency declaration. It was stressed that tree planting was not a new initiative being undertaken by the Council as the Authority actively sought to do this wherever there was land available in the District for it to do so. It was mentioned that ECC had recently announced the level of tree planting that it would undertake across the County over next 10 years, the first trees of which were due to be planted at the Great Notley Discovery Park on 28th November 2019.
- For clarification, Members were reminded that there were two upcoming meetings of the Cabinet due to take place on 2nd December 2019 and 18th December 2019. The meeting to be held on 18th December would include an item on the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

11 **FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT 2019/20**

INFORMATION: Members considered a report on the performance of the Council as at the end of the first quarter (April 2019 to June 2019) which had been presented at the meeting of the Cabinet on 9th September 2019.

As at the end of June, two projects had been completed and 50 projects were on target. Two projects had an amber status which were in respect of the Local Plan and the project to develop a digital platform for health. The two projects that had been completed were in respect of the development of the Rough Sleeping Strategy and the implementation of the Council's discretionary Business Rate relief scheme.

With regard to performance indicators, Members were informed that 10 had met or exceeded target and four had missed their target, of which three had missed by less than 5% and one had been missed by more than 5%. The areas where the target had been missed by less than 5% were in relation to the collection of Council Tax (which achieved 30.46% against a target of 31.06%), the collection of Business Rates (31.13% against target of 31.4%) and the percentage of invoices paid within 30 days (98.82% against a target of 99.25%). The area where the target had been missed by more than 5% was in respect of the rate of recycling (achieved 52.26% against a target of 60%). Members were reminded that the annual recycling target of 60% was adopted by the Essex Waste Partnership to be accomplished by March 2020, at which time it would be reviewed. It was emphasised that the Council continued to implement a number of recycling campaigns and initiatives to help encourage increased rates of recycling across the District, such as

through the promotion of 'Freegle' and the issuing of new waste collection calendars that were more pictorial in design.

It was also reported that the Council had received 121 complaints in the first quarter of the year, which represented a decrease in the number of complaints received when compared with previous years. In terms of the Council's financial performance, Members were informed that there was an overall positive variance against the budget as at the end of June.

The Chairman raised a query in respect of a significant change in the current report with that of the fourth quarter report, which regarded the target date for the Local Plan. Members were advised that the fourth quarter performance report reflected the Annual Plan for 2018, whereas the current report was based on the Annual Plan for 2019; as such, the target date for the Local Plan that was originally set had been reviewed and amended accordingly.

DECISION: Members of the Performance Management Board noted the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: To inform Members of the performance of the Council.

12 **LOCAL PLAN PROJECT AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

INFORMATION: Members considered a report which provided them with an overview of the project planning, risk identification and management and contingency planning approaches that had been adopted by the Council in respect of the Local Plan.

In response to a number of queries that were raised by Members further to the report, the following information was provided:

- Members were informed that the Council had allocated an appeals budget of £300,000 which helped to ensure that the appropriate resource was in place for the Planning Department in such instances for the provision of outside expertise was needed (e.g. from landscape or heritage consultants, as well as the necessary legal advice). It was added that the appeals budget reserve had been allocated as a continuous fund that would be reviewed when required by the Planning Department.
- It was confirmed that the Local Plan comprised three separate Plans that had been submitted by three separate Local Authorities; if one of those Authorities was to withdraw from the Local Plan, it would then be for the discretion of the Planning Inspector to decide whether the Local Plans for the other Authorities could continue as they are, although it was highlighted that all of the Authorities involved would still be subject to the examination costs. In respect of the North Essex Garden Communities project, it was advised that it was also the decision of the individual Authorities involved as to whether they wished to withdraw their funding. It was noted that were alternative options available for the delivery of garden communities other than through a New Town Development Corporation (e.g. through private sector partnerships).
- With regard to 'inappropriate' planning applications, it was reported that the Council was continuously challenged in respect of its five-year housing supply position. Some allocations of housing supply were confirmed within the Local Plan but it was stressed that such allocations would not necessarily be included within the five-year housing supply calculation, as not all sites possessed planning permission. The Council's five-year housing supply position was published on an annual basis, although during

appeals, Planning officers are able to provide the latest figures in respect of the monitoring of housing supply when this is required.

DECISION: Members noted the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: To provide details of risk identification and management to the Performance Management Board.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.06pm.

Councillor N Unsworth
(Chairman)