

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1st February 2017



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs M Cunningham	Yes	D Mann (Vice-Chairman)	Yes
D Garrod	Yes	R Ramage	Yes
J Goodman	Apologies	F Ricci	Yes
P Horner	No	Miss V Santomauro	No
D Hufton-Rees	Yes	P Schwier	Yes
G Maclure	Yes	C Siddall (Chairman)	Yes

Cabinet Members Councillors G Butland, Mrs W Schmitt, R Mitchell, Lady Newton, T Cunningham, P Tattersley, D Bebb and J McKee were invited to attend the meeting under Agenda Item 5, Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2017-18 Update.

Also in attendance were Councillors Abbott, Barlow, Mrs Beavis, Bowers, Mrs Bowers-Flint, Dunn, Hensman, Mrs Money, O'Reilly-Cicconi, Mrs Parker, Mrs Pell and Mrs Wilson

49 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interest was declared:-

Councillor T Cunningham declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5 – ‘Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2017-18 Update’ as a non-paid Financial Director of Ignite Business Enterprise.

Councillor J McKee declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5 – ‘Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2017-18 Update’ as the Chairman of the Braintree District Museum Trust.

Councillor C Siddall declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5 – ‘Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2017-18 Update’ as a non-paid Financial Director of Ignite Business Enterprise.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, all Councillors remained in the meeting and took part in the debate and decision when the Item was considered.

50 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

51 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th December 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

52 **SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2017-18 UPDATE**

INFORMATION: Members received a presentation from Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council and Councillor Bebb, Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance on the Council's Budget Position for 2017-18 update.

The presentation slides can be viewed at:

<http://braintree.cmis.uk.com/braintree/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/571/Committee/4/Default.aspx>

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

- In respect of Government proposals to potentially withhold the New Homes Bonus, Jon Hayden, Corporate Director, had attended a conference with Housing Ministers which sought clarity on the five year supply issue and what affect this would have on the New Homes Bonus. Members would be updated accordingly.
- It was difficult to predict the amount of pressure the Council may be under over the next two years in respect of homelessness. The homelessness reduction bill which had made its way through Parliament and was awaiting final sign off included additional pressures on the Council in terms of homeless assessments and the obligation to take reasonable steps to secure accommodation for a period of six months. There was no available standing accommodation to house additional numbers of homeless people and B&B accommodation may need to be used where necessary. There were also additional pressures in terms of the single room allowance due to a lack of single room accommodation in the District.
- A meeting had taken place with Essex County Council in respect of required office space at Causeway House; however it was not yet clear which services would remain at Causeway House. Once this had been established the Council would go to market with the newly available office space.
- In relation to Community Transport, the Council had been assured by ECC that the importance of the Community Transport Scheme was recognised and that any reductions in funding would be as low as possible, however the amount of reduction was still not known, and options could not be considered until funding had been allocated. A report considering potential options to meet the funding gap would be brought to the Cabinet in March 2017.
- The allocation of £3.5 million for Panfield Lane was around regeneration of the site including road improvements.
- The shared business rate pooling arrangements were determined by the amount growth that each of the billing authorities had achieved. For the first year Braintree District Council were the largest in terms of growth compared to other local authorities and therefore received the largest proportion out of the billing authorities. ECC were

not a billing authority but did receive some of the monies as part of the pooling arrangements and were an essential part of the pool. Being the largest authority in the pool, ECC were the leading authority and the growth monies were held by ECC during the course of the year until a settlement is made. Any interest goes back in to the pot and is redistributed.

- At the meeting of Full Council in December 2016 Members agreed to make the full contribution to the Pension Scheme deficit as a one-off payment, this is a more cost-effective way of dealing with this deficit than annual payments. A payment of £4.2 million for the full three years was made using monies from reserves and as a result caused balances to come close to the margin of £1.5 million, however for the following two years monies would be repaid and the balance would be restored.
- Funding had been allocated for the Witham Enterprise Centre; however there was still a significant funding gap that needed to be reached. In respect of timescales, the funding gap would firstly need to be addressed. In addition an economic study is being commissioned in order to understand the sectors that were likely to use the Enterprise Centre to ensure such a facility meets current and future needs.
- The Council had carried out numerous projects with fast food restaurants to reduce the amount of litter produced. The fast food restaurants had also carried out litter picks throughout the District. It was recognised that whilst fast food restaurants need to do all they can to prevent people from littering, they could not be held responsible for customers who drop litter.
- The postponement of green waste throughout the winter months was first introduced as a trial. The Council would look at figures following the trial and consider whether or not to continue with the service change and a decision was yet to be made.
- Members may feel under additional pressure as a result of the changes in Government policy in respect of New Homes Bonus payments and planning application appeals, however it was noted that planning applications were determined in line with Government policy, planning policy framework and sustainability principles as well as keeping in line with the Council's Local Plan whilst having regard to the five year supply.
- Witham Health was an active project within the Asset Management team to help identify a site in Witham. It was expected that a report would be produced by end of March 2017; however the report would then have to go through a long process to secure funding from the NHS before any potential developments were looked at.
- With regard to the site of the old Bramston Sports Centre in Witham, two purchasers had been identified, external solicitors had been appointed and negotiations were currently underway.

DECISION: That the report be noted.

53 **FIRST EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION FOR THE SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO EMPLOYMENT SITES AND PREMISES**

INFORMATION: This was the first evidence gathering session of the work programme for the Committee's Scrutiny Review into employment sites and premises.

The session would provide Members with an introduction to Haven Gateway Partnership, the work they have carried out and future projects. Anita Thornberry, Executive Director of Haven Gateway Partnership, had kindly agreed to participate in the scrutiny review and she attended the meeting to present information and to answer Members' questions:-

The presentation slides can be viewed at:

<http://braintree.cmis.uk.com/braintree/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/571/Committee/4/Default.aspx>

- The Haven Gateway Partnership (HGP) attempts to influence Schools through its work with Essex County Council, this had proved to be progressively difficult as a result of the increasing number of academies. It was recognised that it was increasingly challenging to influence education providers in schools where there was no longer overall strategic responsibility within the County Council. HGP works very closely with the Colchester Institute who is one of their partners and a leading provider of apprenticeships and HGP sought to encourage the introduction of businesses in to schools to encourage interest in STEM subjects, in particular in primary schools.
- The Haven Gateway Partnership is working with Braintree District Council on the Braintree District Economic and Skills Board. Part of this work includes engaging with schools and proposing to create workshops for the Head teachers in order to pinpoint what assistance could be provided in respect of engaging schools with businesses and the Braintree District Employment and Skills Board.
- It has been identified that there was a gap in the market for commercial grow-on space and HGP has been working with the Council to identify opportunities in the market. It was essential to build units that were fit for purpose and adapted for the types of businesses that would occupy the space. Part of the work that has been commissioned by HGP is to provide Braintree with more in-depth information on its sectors which would inform the work of the Economic Development team on, for example, the type of space the Enterprise Centre needed in Witham.
- The displacement of skilled people working in London and moving into the District resolving the issue of the lack qualification attainment would only be a short term solution at best. There still needs to be a continuous supply of a skilled workforce and therefore their children would need access to a good quality education. The nature of work was changing and increasing numbers of people were now working from home. Having a good infrastructure and broadband supply was essential for companies wishing to place their back offices outside of major cities, e.g. London.
- The gross value added (GVA) is calculated by combining the cost of goods, the cost of producing the goods and the cost of materials. There was a big differential between the average wage of someone who lived in the District but worked in London and the median wage of someone who lived and worked within the District.
- It was vital to look beyond the political boundaries when identifying grow-on space and work collectively with neighbouring authorities across boundaries.
- The development of the A120 was crucial as it acted as a resilience road for the A12 and the A14 and would be essential to the wider economy, however it is always important to consider that any infrastructure improvements may put constraints on other aspects of infrastructure and it is important to look at things holistically as Braintree District Council does.

- It was reported that Stansted is considering creating a business park to which one of the biggest attractors could be logistics. HGP has submitted an Outline Business Case for a £6 million ERDF bid for the logistics sector to improve the supply chain, efficiency and competitiveness through data analytics and algorithms that made use of data to enable SMEs to communicate better amongst themselves and their supply chain. Approval for the Outline Business Case has been given and now the Full Business Case is being developed for submission in spring 2017. HGP is also Producing a prospectus for the entire logistics industry with a view to improving the competitiveness of the sectors across both the South East and New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- HGP hosted the launch to businesses of the A120 consultation at the House of Commons where the Roads Minister was in attendance. The Roads Minister strongly supported the new A120 developments and pledged to be the scheme's 'champion' through Whitehall. HGP has engaged with businesses and secured the support of 650 businesses as well as gaining over 500 signatures from businesses for a petition in support of a new A120 which was passed on to the Roads Minister at the launch.
- In respect of the result of the UK Referendum means that there is a lot of potential and opportunity for businesses. It is important for the whole of Essex to work collaboratively in order to be recognised on a global stage. The result of the referendum brought with it the opportunity to do things differently.
- There are a number of world leading, research intensive Universities across the Country who are discovering new science as well as global companies wanting to locate to the UK due to the quality higher education base, however the commercialisation of said ideas where non-existent mainly due to lack of capital available.
- Land and land value are normally a barrier for manufacturers, and they tend to favour the Midlands and the North of the Country as land is cheaper and the nature of their businesses means they need to occupy a greater expanse of area. This could potentially be overcome by the Local Authority building a warehouse on the company's behalf and recouping the costs by other means but it is not straightforward.
- HGP is linking in with the Cambridge Network in order to bring the expertise and talents from Cambridge to the Haven Gateway. The business rationale and plan for the Cambridge Science Park was first initiated by the University of Cambridge. The University of Cambridge is a £2bn a year enterprise and owns vast areas of land across Cambridge. The University was, therefore, able to build the Science Parks and not require an immediate return on investment. The University of Essex is looking to do something similar at its Knowledge Gateway development however the University does not own large areas of land, as was the case in Cambridge, and would therefore be faced with several challenges. The development of Garden Communities was potentially a way forward and would bring in new smart technology and infrastructure which would power economic growth. There would be the opportunity in the next 2 – 5 years to bring some of the businesses out of Cambridge and it was vital that the issue of business sites was addressed now.
- HGP is working with Abellio, Local Authorities, Essex County Council and businesses to create a business case for Abellio to put in to Network Rail.

The Chairman thanked Anita for her contribution to the Scrutiny Review and invited her to attend a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a further evidence gathering session.

54 **TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE**

INFORMATION: Members were advised that the Task and Finish Group Scrutiny Review into Obesity had held its third meeting on 8th December 2016, where the group focused on obesity in schools and Members were joined by representatives from the County School Meals Service, Healthy Schools and Physical Activity in Schools. The group were due to hold their next meeting in March 2017 and were well on track.

55 **DECISION PLANNER**

DECISION: That the Decision Planner for the period 1st February 2017 to 30th June 2017 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.41pm.

Councillor C Siddall
(Chairman)