

Minutes

Performance Management Scrutiny Committee 23rd November 2022



Present

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

Before the commencement of the meeting, the Chairman welcomed Members of the Cabinet who were in attendance to present the report and respond to questions in respect of Agenda Item 5, 'Scrutiny of the Budget Options and Proposals For 2023-2024'. The Chairman also welcomed Members who had joined the meeting and took the opportunity to welcome the newly elected Member, Councillor Martin Green.

15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There was one interests declared.

Councillor Schwier declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 5 - 'Scrutiny of the Budget Options and Proposals For 2023-2024' as a Member of Essex County Council.

16 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee held on 21st September 2022 were approved as a correct record.

17 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

18 **SCRUTINY OF THE BUDGET OPTIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR 2023-2024**

INFORMATION: The Chairman informed Members that they would receive a presentation from Members of the Cabinet on the financial challenges, options, and proposals for 2023-24 and to consider the latest Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-24 to 2026-27 which had been prepared by Mr Phil Myers, Head of Finance.

The presentation slides were available to view on the Council's website:

<https://braintree.cmis.uk.com/braintree/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1121/Committee/18/Default.aspx>

Further to the presentation, Members of the Committee, followed by other Members in attendance, were invited to ask their questions of Cabinet Members and Officers.

In response to questions raised by Members, the following information was provided: -

- With regards to the decision taken by Cabinet not to approve the recommendation put forward by the Committee to appoint a Commercialisation Manager it was explained that it was important to differentiate between the scales of District and Borough Councils and take in to consideration the increasing financial pressures and upon consultation with officers it was felt that because the number of commercial activities was spread over several departments it would be difficult for a single officer to oversee all projects and would be best practice for these to be managed by the individual Heads of Service.
- Members were advised that consideration had been given to the potential influence in footfall as a result of the of the '10p after 3' initiative, however it could not be confirmed that people visiting the Towns after 3pm were doing so because of the reduced parking rates or just personal convenience.
- In respect of Member allowances, Members were reminded that previous practice had seen a review of allowances being conducted every 4 years by the Independent Remuneration Panel who would then make recommendations to Council usually to make increases to the Members allowance scheme in line with the Local Government settlement. It was reported that this year had been slightly different due to the Local Government settlement being restructured which produced an average increase of 5.5 – 6%, however Members were advised that the Leader of the Council would be taking a paper to Full Council on 12th December recommending that there should be no increase to Member Allowances for 2022-23 and that the review of allowances should take place under the new administration post May 2023.
- It was confirmed that the collection of green bins was a non-statutory service, and that Braintree District Council was in the minority of authorities who provided this service for free and the possibility for savings had to be made somewhere. However, the Cabinet Member advised he would take away the proposal for free, four weekly collections for consideration.
- It was noted that one of the reasons for stopping the free garden waste collection was due to a substantial portion of residents living in the District who did not have gardens and up until now had been subsidising those who did. Members were advised that the proposed cost of £45 for an additional bin was yet to be confirmed, and for context Harlow Council charged £96 for an additional bin.
- In respect of office space and working arrangements, Members were advised that a review was currently being conducted by external consultants alongside officers around future working arrangements. It was expressed that the days of 'a person' having 'a desk' and coming into the office every day was outdated and that people had adjusted to new ways of working and it was important to explore this going forward and meet the demand for more flexible working. However, this did mean that a review of resources available and whether there was still a need for them should be conducted, but this was necessary across all Local Authorities.

- In response to a question raised around public toilets, Members were advised that discussions were due to take place with Town Councils to discuss whether it was more efficient and effective for public toilets to be managed locally by the Town Councils and it would be at the discretion of the individual Councils whether they wanted to take over these arrangements. If not, the management of public toilets would need to be reviewed as this was a very costly service in particular where refurbishments were required. It was reported that the toilets at Newland Street, Witham, would cost around £50,000 to refurbish.
- In response to a question raised in respect of a Capital Bid for Feering Community Centre being rejected the following information was provided. It was confirmed that the total of amount of funding requested from Capital bids was in excess of £1million, and the Leader advised that whilst this had been significantly reduced there was still a large amount of work to do, that did not however diminish the importance of the Capital Bid made by the Parish Council but it was thought that approving this bid would be unjust in respect of other Parish Councils making similar bids where the funding was just not available. The Leader did advise that the Council would explore other options to assist the Parish Council in accomplishing what it had set out to achieve.
- With regards to a Capital Bid that was submitted in respect of the Silver End bowls club it was reported that a determination had not been made and a request for a feasibility study had been made. Once this had been received the Cabinet would consider the application in its entirety and make a decision whether or not to proceed with the application which would be discussed with all relevant parties including the Ward Councillors.
- The Leader welcomed the proposal for volunteer community groups to take over the management and maintenance of the hanging baskets located at Causeway House however it was noted that the planting of the baskets was inexpensive in comparison to the cost of maintaining and watering and if responsibility was handed over to a community group they would need to consider whether they had the appropriate equipment, time and ability to sustain the hanging baskets.
- With regards to concerns raised around the condition of the athletics track, it was reported that the main issue in repairing the track was the repeated vandalism that had unfortunately taken place, however Members were advised that a the Cabinet Member was in the process of arranging a meeting with the Town Council, the Police, Fusion Lifestyle, the Hockey Club and any other interested parties to try and identify a reasonable solution. The Cabinet Member added that he would be reluctant to spend additional monies on refurbishing before looking at the infrastructure.

The full presentation and subsequent discussion with Members were available to view on the Council's YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=er5yxQVM8-A>

DECISION: That Members noted the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: To provide a summary of the progress to date on updating the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for the period 2023/24 to 202/27 (MTFS).

19 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO SECTION 106**

INFORMATION: The Chairman reminded Members that they had previously considered

the draft report and been invited to comment on it. The purpose of this evening was to review and approve the final draft prior to its submission to Cabinet who would receive and respond to the recommendations contained therein.

Members were reminded that they were not looking to add any additional content at this stage, but if Members had any concerns, then some revisions may be considered.

DECISION: That Members approved the draft report and recommendations and confirmed its submission to be considered by Cabinet.

20 **DECISION PLANNER 1ST DECEMBER 2022 TO 28TH FEBRUARY 2023**

DECISION: The Decision Planner for the period 1st December 2022 to 28th February 2023 was noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.23pm.

Councillor M Radley
(Chairman)