

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

31st January 2018



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
P Barlow (Chairman)	Yes	G Maclure	Apologies
Mrs. M Cunningham	Yes	Mrs. I Parker	Yes
Mrs. D Garrod	Yes	R Ramage	Yes
J Goodman	Apologies	B Rose	Yes
A Hensman	Yes	P Schwier	Yes
P Horner	Yes	C Siddall (Vice Chairman)	Yes

At the beginning of the meeting Councillor Barlow thanked Councillor Siddall, the outgoing Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and acknowledged his support for the scrutiny review into Employment Sites and Premises which was nearing its completion.

30 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interest was declared:-

Councillor Siddall declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5 – ‘Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2018-19 Update’ as a non-financial Director Ignite Business Enterprise.

Councillor Pell declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5 – ‘Scrutiny of the Council Budget for 2018-19 Update’ as a member of the Halstead Community Centre Charity Company.

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.

31 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

32 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the Minutes of the 6th December 2017 of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2018-19

INFORMATION: Members received a presentation from Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council on an update of the proposed Council's Budget for 2018-19.

The presentation can be viewed at:

<http://braintree.cmis.uk.com/braintree/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/702/Committee/4/Default.aspx>

Members were advised that Councillor McKee, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Asset Management and Councillor Tattersley, Cabinet Member for Health and Communities had passed their apologies and therefore their Deputy Cabinet Members would answer any questions from Members on their behalf.

Members were reminded that the Initial Budget proposals were agreed at Cabinet on 27th November 2017, these proposals had been considered prior to that meeting by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22nd November 2017.

Members were updated on a number of changes and confirmations that had been received on the budget proposals.

Members were reminded that Braintree District Council had accepted the Government's offer of a four year finance settlement agreement. The Revenue Support Grant figures for the third and fourth years, 2018/19 and 2019/20, were confirmed at £0.27m and nil respectively and the Business Rate Baseline were also confirmed at £3.35m and £3.43m. It was reported that in order to avoid a referendum, the Council Tax increase must be either less than 3% or £5 whichever is higher for 2018/19 and 2019/20.

The Council had agreed to be part of an all-Essex bid to be a Business Rate Pilot for 2018/19. It was however reported that the bid had been unsuccessful. The Council is however to participate in an Essex Business Rate Pool for 2018/19, which could generate a potential share of growth of £560,000 to the Council.

The Government intends that Business Rate Retention and the Fair Funding Review would be implemented in 2020/21. The Council waits for the outcome of these two important and potentially significant changes to local government funding.

With regard to the New Homes Bonus there were no changes to the scheme criteria for 2018/19. The Council's allocation for year eight was confirmed at £16,240, making the total amount receivable in 2018/19 of £1,272,624.

The estimated amount of Business Rates to be retained had been updated for 2017/18 and 2018/19 and this resulted in additional resources of £224,000 and £232,000, respectively more than that stated in the November report.

Members were provided with an update on discretionary fees and charges. It was reported that Government had issued Regulations on 20th December 2017 enabling Planning Application Fees to be increased by 20% from 17th January 2018 and it had been agreed to implement this increase from that date. The additional income raised from the increase must be ring-fenced for Planning Services. With respect to Car Park

charges, the proposed increases were as reported in November. The levels of all other discretionary fees and charges were set to recover cost or increase by 3%.

Members received an update on Budget assumptions. With regard to the Pay Award, an offer had been by the Employers Organisation, on 5th December 2017, of a 2% increase per annum on the majority of pay points for 2 years, as well as higher increases at the lower pay points. This added £195,000 in 2018/19 and £210,000 in 2019/20 compared to the original provision of 1%, however this offer was yet to be agreed. With regards to Community Transport Funding, Essex County Council had confirmed their contribution would be frozen at the 2017/18 level for 2018/19 and 2019/20.

Members were advised that the Councillor Grant Scheme had been very successful and was to continue at £1,500 per Councillor per annum. It had also been confirmed that following discussion and strong support, the Council would continue to provide the refuse/recycling collection calendars.

The Projected Financial Profile for 2018/19 was a surplus of £246,000 which would be transferred to balances in 2018/19. This however provides a contribution towards reducing the shortfalls in the following three years to £603,000, £258,000 and £48,000 respectively. Members were informed that the anticipated level of earmarked reserves as of 31st March 2019 was £19.25m, and the anticipated unallocated balance as of the same date was £3.88m.

In terms of the Capital Programme there were no changes from the November 2017 report.

In terms of timeline for approval of the Budget, the next stages were Cabinet on 5th February 2018 and Council on 19th February 2018.

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

- The additional income that could be generated from the increase in Planning Applications Fees, estimated at £170,000, was to be ring fenced for Planning Services. A business case for change had already been produced, identifying that the extra resource to be brought in would boost the Team; approval was to be sought at Management Board and recruitment would follow after. Members had agreed, in December 2017, to allocate a further sum of £300,000 for potential Planning Appeal costs. Members were also advised that the Council was competing with an extremely strong private sector. It was also confirmed that the new appointments to the Planning Team would be made on a permanent basis.
- Issues regarding bus routes would need to be directed to Essex County Council.
- The estimated capital receipt of £6.78million anticipated from the sale of property would come from the sales of three significant sites: the former Bramston Sports Centre site, Land assembled to the East of High Street in Halstead and Gimson Land in Witham. The sales of these sites would be subject to planning permission.
- The new Homelessness Reduction Act would come into force in April 2018. This places new responsibilities on Councils to prevent and relieve homelessness which could have a significant impact on staffing. The work Officers had been carrying

out both at District and County level had been very constructive. A grant from the Local Government Association had been used to engage help in identifying the potential impact on the Service and on the availability and access to accommodation. Members were advised that it was difficult to predict the exact impact the new Act would have on resources and the best course of action was to utilise the specific grant funding from Government in the first instance but to monitor the situation following implementation of the Act as to whether these resources are sufficient. Members were reminded that Council was working closely with the Foyer in Braintree and were in regular contact.

- Members were advised that the Council had expected a decrease in funding from Essex County Council with regards to the Community Transport allocation, but were satisfied with the proposals.
- The Council Tax Collection surplus of £33,170 allocated for Parish/Town Councils for 2018/19 was to be distributed pro-rata to the Parish/Town Council precepts levied for 2017/18.
- Members were advised that the allocation of £720,000 per annum included in the proposed Capital Programme for future years was an estimate of the likely budget requirements, based on previous years' spend, on items such as maintaining Council assets and Disabled Facility Grants.

The Chairman thanked Cabinet Members for their attendance and expressed his gratitude for their contribution to the meeting.

34 **SEVENTH EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION FOR THE SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO EMPLOYMENT SITES AND PREMISES**

INFORMATION: Members were reminded that following their suggestion to create a survey for business, Officers had produced and circulated a survey to over 3,000 business in the District.

Members were advised that 16 responses had been received which had supported the findings of the other evidence gathering sessions. The responses received covered a large and diverse section of businesses and was a good illustration of the types of business in the District. Of the surveys received, seven were from small businesses and the remaining from larger organisations with one of the businesses being in the District for 250 years. It was relayed to members that this was good independent data, to corroborate what had been found in previous evidence gathering sessions, and was a credible piece of evidence that could be included in the Committee's report.

Members were advised that the report contained an acknowledgment section to thank all of those who had contributed and participated in the Scrutiny Review.

It was agreed by Members to take Items 6 and 7 as one Item and Members put forward the following suggestions and comments on these Items:

- Even though only a small number of businesses completed the survey all the responses that were received were very constructive with sole aim of being helpful and Members passed on their thanks to the Governance Team for producing and circulating the survey.

- It was recognised that the Council needed to look at issues being raised regarding transport access and discussions had been held with a view of introducing another exit at the Springwood Industrial Estate onto Panfield Lane. It was suggested that these improvements should be included in the final report along with the evidence gathered from local business.
- It was reported that whilst the Springwood Industrial Estate was particularly renowned for issues with traffic, this needed to be a blanket policy to look at all traffic bottlenecks across the District and what could be done to aid this.
- It was important that all new employment premises was fitted with fibre broadband as this was essential in attracting businesses to the area.
- Members were advised that Officers had already received some recommendations submitted by Councillors and were working to include these in the final report. Officers advised that they would work closely with the Chairman and Vice Chairman to finalise the report.
- In response to a question, Members were advised that whilst lorry transport was difficult, accommodating these by widening roads was equally difficult.
- It was recognised that something needed to be done to accommodate growth on premises in the District as referenced by the findings of the survey, without the adequate facilities business would move out of the area.
- If the Council were to look at a new development then parking for lorries should be a priority as currently lorries were parking in areas where they were blocking other road users purely for safety reasons.
- It was proposed that a new employee would be joining the Council to liaise with business in the District this was endorsed by Members and it was suggested that they should consider going outside of the District in order to attract business into the area, and to make sure they are aware of the features and advantages of the area.
- It was suggested to contact transport businesses and ask for specific issues that had been faced in order to gauge an idea of exactly which areas needed to be improved and what the Council could do to accommodate this.

35. **TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE**

INFORMATION: Members were updated on the progress of the Task and Finish Group.

Members were advised that the Task and Finish Group Scrutiny Review into Tourism had held its fourth meeting on 14th December 2017 where they were joined by representatives from A&T Ventures. The Group had also held its fifth and final evidence gathering session on 11th January 2018 where they were joined by representatives from Maldon District Council and Witham Town Council.

Members were advised that on 8th February the Task and Finish Group would have its final meeting where Members would discuss the final report and potential recommendations to be contained therein. The Group were on track and the final report was due to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7th March 2018.

36 **Decision Planner**

DECISION: That the Decision Planner for the period 1st February 2018 to 31st May 2018 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9:20pm

Councillor P Barlow
(Chairman)