

# Minutes

## Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

24<sup>th</sup> November 2021



### Present

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

Before the commencement of the meeting, the Chairman welcomed Councillor T Cunningham, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Councillor J McKee, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation, and Mr P Myers, Head of Finance, to the meeting. Councillor Cunningham, Councillor McKee and Mr Myers were in attendance in respect of Agenda Item 5, 'Scrutiny of the Priorities for 2022/23 and Initial Budget Position.'

### 19 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**INFORMATION:** There were no interests declared.

### 20 **MINUTES**

**DECISION:** The Minutes of the meeting of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021 were approved as a correct record.

### 21 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

### 22 **SCRUTINY OF THE PRIORITIES FOR 2022-2023 AND INITIAL BUDGET POSITION**

**INFORMATION:** The Chairman informed Members that a short presentation on the progress of the developing budget position for 2022/23 and an update on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2022/23 to 2025/26 had been prepared by Mr P Myers, Head of Finance. The presentation was presented jointly by Councillor T Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Councillor J McKee, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation.

Prior to the presentation, Members were advised that the timeline for the Council's budget process had been amended slightly from previous years due to the uncertainty of announcements from Central Government around the Local Government Finance Settlement.

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/1041/Committee/18/Default.aspx>

Further to the presentation, Members of the Committee were invited to ask their questions of the Cabinet Members and Officers. During the discussion, the Chairman extended his compliments to all that had been involved with the Investment and Development Programme (IDP) for the effectiveness of its structure and resulting success.

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

- In respect of the provisional changes listed in the presentation, the budget gap for 2022/23 had not changed significantly. Members were advised that once the projects under the IDP had progressed to further stages in their development, they would contribute towards meeting the budget gap. The upcoming Cabinet Strategy Workshop would provide further clarification as to what the baseline budget position would be for 2022/23.
- It was confirmed that the savings of £354k and £157k listed as part of the IDP also formed part of the combined management and Member proposed savings listed under the MTFs profile.
- Members were advised that in respect of the provisional budget demand for vehicle financing that this did not include proposed funding for replacements with electric vehicles.
- A review of the Essex Pension Fund will be undertaken as at 31 March 2022, with the financial impact to be reflected in employers' contributions from April 2023. The funding strategy agreed in the past had sought to maintain stability for employers in terms of the overall level of contribution they were required to make. Further detail on the issue would emerge over the course of 2022/23.
- It was stressed that as far as is possible service levels would not be reduced for the District's residents. The Council possessed financial reserves which it was currently examining as to how best to utilise these in a sustainable and efficient way over the duration of the MTFs period. Although there was a budget gap, Members were advised to view this in the context of a four-year programme and financial strategy, which would allow time for shortfalls to be addressed.
- The Council had the option to increase Council Tax although this has not yet been decided. It was expected that the maximum amount that Council Tax could be raised in 2022/23 under the Government's referendum principles would be 2% or £5, whichever is the greater, but this had yet to be confirmed.
- One of the key priorities of the IDP was to generate additional income for the Council and thus reinvigorate the wider commercialisation programme of the Authority. It was added that the commercial activity of the Authority had accelerated over recent years; for example, it was reported that the Council Chamber at Causeway House, was now rented out at weekends.
- From the ideas currently submitted as part of the '£1.6 million budget challenge', approximately 33 had been acted on so far, with seven of these being given serious

consideration in terms of their potential income generation. Feedback was to be provided to all employees who would be encouraged to continue submitting ideas.

- It was acknowledged there were inflationary pressures being faced by the Authority; and that appropriate advice was being taken to enable the Council to plan accordingly.
- With regard to Planning Enforcement and the associated provisional budgetary demand, the Cabinet would need to formally consider the report of the Member Reference Group (MRG), including the options and benefits from increasing resources, which would then need to be considered alongside the Council's overall budgetary position. It was acknowledged that an increase in capacity for the Planning Enforcement team was necessary for it to perform in line with the Council's expected standard of customer service delivery.
- Agency staff were needed within the Operations team in order to compliment the current staffing levels. There were some additional cost pressures identified due to a shortage of HGV drivers and requirements for pay parity with the use of agency staff.

The full presentation and subsequent discussion with Members was available to view on the Council's YouTube Channel: <http://www.braintree.gov.uk/youtube>

**DECISION:** That Members:

- 1) Noted the provisional updates to the General Fund Financial Profile and MTFs, and;
- 2) Noted the revised approach and timetable for the 2022/23 Budget process.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To provide a summary of the progress to date on updating the General Fund Financial Profile and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for the period 2022/23 to 2025/26 (MTFS).

The report also outlined a change in approach to the budget consultation process conducted through the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee, including a revised timetable.

## 23 **DECISION PLANNER**

**DECISION:** The Decision Planner for the period 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022 was noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.09pm.

Councillor M Radley  
(Chairman)