

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

23rd November 2016



Present

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

Cabinet Members Councillors Mrs W Schmitt, Mitchell, Lady Newton, T Cunningham, Rose, Tattersley, Bebb and McKee were invited to attend the meeting under Agenda Item 5, Scrutiny of the Council's Priorities for 2017-18 and Initial Budget Position.

Also in attendance were Councillors Banthorpe, Barlow, Baugh, Mrs Beavis, Dunn, Mrs Garrod, Hensman, Mrs Kilmartin, Kirby, Mrs Money, O'Reilly-Cicconi, Mrs Parker, Mrs Pell, Mrs Scattergood, Mrs Spray and van Dulken.

38 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interest was declared:-

Councillor T Cunningham declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5 – 'Scrutiny of the Priorities for 2017-18 and Initial Budget Position.' as a non-paid Director of Ignite Business Enterprise.

Councillor G Maclure declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 6 – 'Overview of Broadband Provision' as an employee of British Telecom (BT).

Councillor J McKee declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5 – 'Scrutiny of the Priorities for 2017-18 and Initial Budget Position.' as a Director and the Chairman of Trustees for the Warner Textiles Archive and the Braintree District Museum Trust.

Councillor Mrs J Pell declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5 – 'Scrutiny of the Priorities for 2017-18 and Initial Budget Position.' as the Chairman of the Halsted Community Centre Charitable Company.

Councillor C Siddall declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 5 – 'Scrutiny of the Priorities for 2017-18 and Initial Budget Position.' as a non-paid Director of Ignite Business Enterprise and as a non-paid Director of Warner Textiles Archive Trading.

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

39 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

40 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd November 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

41 **SCRUTINY OF THE PRIORITIES FOR 2017-18 AND INITIAL BUDGET POSITION.**

INFORMATION: Members received a presentation from Councillor Bebb, Cabinet Member, Performance and Efficiency and Councillor McKee, Cabinet Member, Corporate Services and Asset Management on the Council's Priorities for 2017-18 and Budget Position.

The presentation slides can be viewed at:

<http://braintree.cmis.uk.com/braintree/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/569/Committee/4/Default.aspx>

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

- It had been confirmed that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had accepted the Council's efficiency plan and therefore the Council had secured a four year settlement.
- Members were advised that an assumption of 2% inflation rate increase had been made for next year and for planning purposes only at this stage an increase in council tax of 1.97%
- There continued to be a significant degree of uncertainty around the ongoing impacts in respect of housing issues and welfare reform. The past few years had seen various changes to welfare payments, of which it was considered the Council had managed these transitions well. The changes that were coming through included the reduction to the level of the benefits cap which would have a significant effect on a number of families; the Council was continuing to communicate with these families which for some would see a considerable reduction in income. In the case of larger families it was expected that the payment of rent would be compromised, and decisions would have to be made on how best to deal with these situations. Those in receipt of benefits who were under 35 years of age and had previously been able to claim sufficient benefit for a one bedroom flat would, in future, only be able to claim for a shared accommodation benefit, this was likely to have a significant impact due to the lack of availability of single rooms to rent in the District. There was also uncertainty regarding Essex County Council making changes to supported housing, which had the potential to impact on a number of schemes in the District. The budget proposals include the creation of a provision of £150,000 to assist with any issues that arise as a result of changes from the welfare reform.

- The Housing staff resources were clarified as adding two posts to the base budget; these were not additional staff.
- The £15,000 saving that was to be made from Environmental Services was as a result of a staff restructure and the capacity of staff would not be affected.
- The discretionary business rate relief scheme open to charitable and not for profit organisations was under consideration and would be brought to Members in the New Year in the form of an updated policy. Officers were still working out details with the emphasis on ensuring a clearer and more transparent scheme with no corporate savings expected to be made from the new approach.
- The proposed purchase of office space at Century Drive has an anticipated return of 7% and this matter was due to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 29th November 2016.
- In respect of the Council paying 3 years' pension deficit contributions in a single payment, the Council would be utilising monies held in balances and reserves and would be forgoing around £20,000 of interest over the period. This money would not have been used for any medium term or longer term investments and it was therefore considered best practice to use this money to pay off the pension contributions generating a saving of circa £200,000.
- In terms of the deferred payment for gate fees for recycling, a commercial arrangement had been negotiated with Viridor and it was agreed that the full amount could be paid over a two year period.
- The Council was undertaking a car park review across the district, looking at the need for car parking for commuters and to support retail and how this could be fulfilled. Recommendations would be put forward to Members in the New Year.
- A flexible approach was being taken to acquire the right staff skills and resources at the right time to develop and deliver key capital projects... If the Council's Investment Strategy was successful, there would be a continuous need for a specialised skills set. The Council was looking at developments on a larger scale, in respect of the proposed Housing Development Company and the Town Centre Development in Braintree, which would require additional skills.
- The staff turnover at Braintree District Council was at 3% this was considerably lower than many organisations. This demonstrated employee satisfaction and the way the Council invested in their staff, in particular young people as apprentices who come in to the organisation and are developed to move on to more senior roles.
- The budget for the Pool Pods at Braintree and Halstead pools was scheduled for 2017/18 and the timescale on the delivery was not yet known, however it was expected that once the budget had been approved there would be a quick turn around on the delivery of the Pool Pods.
- It was not yet known what the contribution from Essex County Council would be in respect of the Community Transport budget. Currently the Council is reviewing the service with a consultant who was considering the options available depending on

the amount of reduction that was likely to be received, how the service could be delivered in future and whether additional funding would need to be sourced.

- In respect of supported housing schemes, Essex County Council provided additional funding to provide extra support for young people. These services included training and development; specialist advice and support on mental health issues. Essex County Council was changing the way it commissioned these services and was focusing more on its statutory responsibilities which could create significant gaps for such schemes. The Council is engaging with Essex County Council on these matters.
- The Braintree District had a very low number of rough sleepers. The Council always sought to work very closely with any individuals who had been brought to their attention and in most cases accommodation was secured. It was recognised that there would always be a minority of people who would not accept help, however rough sleeping was not a significant problem in the district at present.
- The commitment of £250,000 for business broadband which had been referred to in the report was the original sum that had been agreed in a previous budget. In respect of broadband provision, there were certain areas where additional subsidy could not be added where other commercial operators had ring fenced subsidy, in terms of delivering service. Investment in broadband in the District was in the pipeline to be considered by Cabinet. In the autumn statement, it was announced that Government was investing more money in to digital services and access to high fibre broadband and would be rolling out national schemes. It would therefore be sensible for the Council to wait for further details on the anticipated national schemes and how the district may benefit from these.
- The opportunity for the Council's investment in the new medical centre at the College at Braintree came as a result of the Asset Management team spotting the availability of the property in the market, with the College's desire to reduce their footprint and therefore had a free asset to sell. Virgin healthcare who are the operator were more comfortable in taking a long lease with a landlord which has a very low risk of going into liquidation.

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

DECISION: That the report be noted.

42 **OVERVIEW OF BROADBAND PROVISION**

INFORMATION: Members were asked to consider the Scrutiny Report and the recommendations to Cabinet contained therein.

Members voiced concerns around applying a time restriction for the completion of 100% coverage in the District, which had been reflected in recommendation 3. It was therefore agreed that an amendment be made to recommendation 3 so that it read;

“That O&S should monitor and report BDC progress/implementation every six months to Committee & Cabinet until 100% coverage is achieved, highlighting success stories from the local area.”

Members agreed also that throughout the report, all references to connection speeds in terms of megabytes per second should reflect the correct abbreviation of 'mbps'.

The Committee thanked officers for their support and contributions to the Scrutiny Review. The Chairman considered that the report was a comprehensive record of the work carried out by the Committee and presented a number of recommendations which was supportive of the Council's position on broadband provision.

DECISION: That Members approved the recommendations set out below, subject to amendments, and referred the report to Full Council for reference to Cabinet.

1. Braintree District Council to support and encourage Superfast Essex to achieve 100% superfast (30Mbs) broadband coverage by 2019
2. That Braintree District Council's website should include easy to understand and visual information about the District only, with alphabetically listed Town/Parish information, showing areas already enabled, and areas to be enabled with dates & superfast broadband information.
3. That O&S should monitor and report BDC progress/implementation every six months to Committee & Cabinet until 100% coverage is achieved, highlighting success stories from the local area."
4. Braintree District Council (in conjunction with Superfast Essex) to tender for companies to deliver the most suitable and appropriate broadband solutions to rural areas of the Braintree District. (Least cost - Fastest to deploy - upgradable)
5. Braintree District Council should consider the funding of 100% of superfast broadband coverage from New Homes Bonus and/or Capital Projects Funding

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committees' report to be referred to Full Council and Cabinet in accordance with the Procedure Rules for Scrutiny.

43 **UPDATE ON TASK AND FINISH GROUPS**

INFORMATION: The Task and Finish Group Scrutiny Review into Obesity in the Braintree District had held its first two meetings with representatives from Braintree District Council, Essex County Council and Slimming World. The Group were due to hold their next meeting on 8th December 2016 where representatives from schools in the District and the Healthy Schools programme had been invited.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.03pm.

Councillor C Siddall
(Chairman)