

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 5th February 2018

Present: Cllr Lythgoe (in the Chair)
Cllrs Bromley, Janet Eaton, Johnson, Kempson, McMahon,
Morris, Robertson and Stansfield

In Attendance: Phil Seddon, Head of Finance
Carolyn Sharples, Committee & Member Services Manager
Jenni Cook, Committee & Member Services Officer
Rachel Whippy, Citizens Advice
Nick Pilling, Citizens Advice

Also Present: Cllrs Essex, Haworth and Walmsley
2 public
0 press

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Zieda Ali (Co-opted Member) and Councillor Kenyon.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd January 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

In respect of the last meeting, it was noted that the domestic violence support in Rossendale was provided by Victim Support.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 Councillor Robertson declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 7 as she was a trustee of the Citizens Advice.
- 3.2 Councillor Morris declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 9 as he was a member of the Leisure Trust Board.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

- 4.1 There were no urgent items of business.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

- 5.1 The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow members of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

- 6.1 A Scoping meeting had taken place and a Task and Finish Group would be established to look into the 2016/17 winter death figures. The Committee and Member Services Officer would be in touch regarding the Task and Finish Group membership and dates.

7. CITIZENS ADVICE UPDATE

- 7.1 The Citizens Advice (CA) circulated statistics for Quarter 3 (October-December 2017) and presented an update to the Committee as follows:--

- The CA had been operating in Rossendale for 78 years and was an independent charity offering free, impartial and confidential advice in 8 locations in Rossendale.
- CA funding was outlined and it was noted that the £35,000 core funding provided by the Council enabled the CA to pursue other grants and funding sources.
- Local projects were outlined, in particular Heads up Rossendale, Rossendale Crisis Support, Money Mentoring, Welfare Reform and Prevention/Transformation Project, Age of Opportunity and Investment in Youth, Energy Best Deal Extra and Reach IT.
- The areas of deprivation in Rossendale were also the areas in which the CA was providing the most assistance.
- Over 2,000 people had been helped by the CA each year and for every £1 that the Council invested in the service, an average of £1,338 was achieved in financial gain/debts written off per client helped. 28% of all enquiries were regarding debt.
- In addition to assisting with debt, a holistic approach was used which looked at all the factors which may have placed someone in a crisis situation.
- There were 30 volunteers and training generally took between 3-6 months, depending on the role.
- Work was undertaken on research and national campaigns.
- Information disclosed to the CA remained confidential, unless there was a safeguarding issue.

- 7.2 Members and members of the public discussed the update as follows:-

- Assistance was provided with completing PIP forms.
- The impact of Universal Credit was discussed and the Reach IT project would go some way to assisting with this.
- There was no typical profile of a volunteer and more volunteers were always needed.
- The process once a person was in council tax arrears was outlined.
- The importance of projects to assist those with mental health problems was noted.

Resolved:

1. The update was noted.
2. The Citizens Advice was thanked for their work and the Chair would follow this up with a letter.

8. COMMUNITY RIGHT TO BID POLICY AND GUIDANCE REVIEW

- 8.1 The Committee and Member Services Manager updated members on updates to the policy and guidance of the Community Right to Bid process. The Community Right to Bid Policy and Guidance was initially developed following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011. Cabinet agreed the policy in October 2013 and it's now due for review.
- 8.2 The policy had been in place for four years and since its introduction several changes that needed to be made have been identified in addition to taking on board suggestions provided by members of the Consultation Working Group. The changes were outlined as follows:-
- Minor amendments have been made to the document including some re-wording to make it easier to understand.
 - Contact details have been updated.
 - The sample forms such as the nomination form and asset register have been removed, as these are now separate documents which sit alongside the policy as people do not want to download the entire document if they only want the nomination form.
 - The flowchart has been kept at the back to show the process but this has been amended also and there was a stage missing from the stage 3 flowchart which has been added to explain what happens if a claim is rejected.
- 8.3 In addition to the changes identified from working with the policy, there have also been changes made following feedback from members. At the last meeting of the Consultation Working Group in May members suggested that the Monitoring Officer should make the decision on future nominations since the criteria in the legislation is specific (criteria outlined at 5.6 of the report). This would also enable a decision to be made in a timelier manner.
- 8.4 Since the policy was introduced in 2013 there have been 4 nominations and these were outlined at in section 5.7 of the report.
- 8.5 Members and members of the public discussed the report as follows:-
- The membership numbers of the Consultation Working Group was clarified.
 - The criteria and legislation was very specific and clear and the Monitoring Officer would work to the legislation.
 - A list of the assets was publically available.
 - There would be a breakdown of changes added to the recommendation going to Cabinet.

Resolved:

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that Cabinet accepts the amendments to the policy and guidance for the Community Right to Bid Process.
2. That all minor amendments to the policy and guidance are delegated to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

9. 2018/19 CORPORATE PRIORITIES, BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

- 9.1 The Head of Finance and Property Services presented the report which outlined the proposed 2018/19 budget, fees and charges and the medium term financial strategy. The risk assessment implications of the budget were outlined, in particular the NNDR pooling arrangements, funding gap, reserves and the pay award.
- 9.2 The proposed budget was summarised and the key assumptions were outlined, being a council tax increase of 1.99%, year on year revenue support grant reduction, pay award, increase in future years Band D equivalent, taking in account the Local Plan and NHB assumptions, loss of cost-share arrangements and potential savings.
- 9.3 All Councils now had the option to increase Council Tax to a maximum of 3% without triggering the right to a referendum.
- 9.4 The main savings changes were outlined to members along with the key volume and technical changes. In particular attention was drawn to the green waste collection charges which had been projected at £88k, but was actually £110k due to the high level of take-up. Licensing fee income was decreasing due to policy changes and this had been reflected in the budget.
- 9.5 Fees and charges were noted and these were rising by around 3% (inflation) save for services where market forces would affect this, such as Land Charges.
- 9.6 Members and members of the public discussed the report as follows:-
 - The Capita contract was discussed and it was noted that the contract expired in September 2019 and the tender process was expected to commence in May 2018.
 - Discussion took place regarding PCSO support and it was noted that nationally the police had been given the opportunity to increase its council tax for 2018/19 by £12.
 - The outcome of the Rosso sale was referred to in the Capital Programme report.
 - It was noted that there was a small surplus of £140k forecast for 2017/18.
 - Funding cuts and the public perception of the cuts was discussed.
 - Councils were required to be more commercial and entrepreneurial.
 - It was noted that capital could only be used for revenue in exceptional circumstances and the sale of Rosso did not fall under the criteria.

Councillor Bromley left the meeting.

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the recommendations in the report as follows:-

1. That the Cabinet recommend to Council a 2018/19 Council Tax rate for Band D.
2. That Cabinet recommends to Council the use of £803,00 (subject to final member decisions) from the transitional reserve, £80,000 from the council tax collection fund and £800,000 from the business rates retention reserve to support the 2018/19 annual budget.
3. That Cabinet recommends to Council a net revenue budget for 2017/18 of £10,037,000 (subject to final approval of costs and savings).
4. That Cabinet recommends to Council the fees outlined in Appendix 1 to Cabinet and Council.
5. That Cabinet recommends to Council that the withdrawal of financial support to the Police and Crime Commissioner regarding PCSOs is considered.
6. That the Head of Finance and Property Services be instructed to prepare the technical resolutions necessary to give effect to these proposals.

Councillor Bromley returned to the meeting.

10. CAPITAL STRATEGY AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2018/19 TO 2020/21

- 10.1 The Head of Finance and Property Services introduced the report which provided a capital strategy for the next three years. The strategy was similar to that presented in previous years and set out the use of the Council's capital programme, resources and proposed plans for future developments.

Councillor Stansfield left the meeting.

- 10.2 Members attention was drawn to paragraph 5.7 of the report which outlined the plans for cash-backed reserves.

Councillor Stansfield returned to the meeting.

- 10.3 The capital financing requirements were highlighted and it was noted that consideration may be given going forward to borrowing from external sources such as the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB).

- 10.4 Members and members of the public discussed the report as follows:-

- The report was an honest appraisal of the financial situation and plans going forward.
- Clarity was given regarding the PWLB which was for capital investment, not to support reserves.
- Discussion took place on the costs of the Empty Homes Scheme and it was noted that the Council retained the repairing responsibility on c.12 properties. An exercise was being undertaken with the HCA to establish the grant to be retained by the Council.
- Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) was discussed and the situation with regards to waiting for these to be processed had improved.

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the recommendations in the report as follows:-

1. That Cabinet recommends the Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 1 of the report including new capital expenditure projects totalling £1,443k to Council for approval.
2. That any minor amendments to the capital programme throughout the 2018/19 financial year as a result of new grant-funded community projects are delegated to the Head of Finance and Property Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder. Amendments will then be reported to Cabinet through the regular financial monitoring reports.

11. THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee and Member Services Officer noted that the Equalities Strategy had moved back to March O&S and March Cabinet.

Resolved:

The information was noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and finished at 8.45pm