

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting - 1 February 2016

Present: Mr Hollis (Chairman)
Mr Harding, Mr Bastiman, Mrs Lowen-Cooper, Mr Sangster,
Mr Vincent and Mr Walters MBE

Apologies for absence: Mr Read

26. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 November 2015 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

27. BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2016/2017

The Cabinet on 9 February 2016 would be receiving a report on the Council's Budget Proposals and Council Tax for 2016/2017, and in accordance with the Council's Constitution the Committee were invited to comment on the proposals.

The report contained the following sections:

Section A	Financial Context and Base Budget position
Section B	Investment Income and Grants
Section C	Budget Requirement and Council Tax Issues
Section D	Medium Term Financial Strategy Update
Section E	Advice of Director of Resources

The Committee's attention was drawn to the following key points:

- The proposed budget requirement is £8,154k, which will result in a District council tax of £148.00 for a Band D property, a change of £5 from the current year.
- The table in 5.4 - as explained in 5.5 - sets out the ongoing material reduction in funding to the Council, which although anticipated, is now persisting at an accelerated rate. Funding reductions will continue until at least 2019/20 and South Bucks District Council will no longer receive the Revenue Support Grant after 2017/18. This is due to the fact that South Bucks is seen as a low needs and high resource authority.
- The draft budget proposes using reserves as follows:
 - Local Development Document (LDD) reserve, £163k.
 - Transformation Reserve for support of shared service work, £18k.
- It is also proposed that £50k is added to a reserve for economic development and infrastructure projects impacting on the District (e.g HS2, WRATH).
- The recommended prudent level of general reserves for 2016/17 is £870k. As there is no planned use of the General Reserve in 2016/17, the prudent level of reserves will be achieved, and would also maintain reserves above the £1,250k aimed for within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- The Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2016/17 - recommended to Cabinet following consideration by the Resources PAG - sets out the approach aiming to deliver investment income for 2016/17 of £430k.

The Committee were also made aware of the key risks and the main issues facing the authority in the medium term, and that budget decisions needed to be mindful of the medium term situation facing the Council.

In response to questions a number of issues were clarified including the following:

- Not all the savings options were being progressed in 2016/17 as a number required further work, and some initial investment
- The deficit in the Pension Fund would be addressed once the report from the Actuaries had been received in his coming autumn,
- Income received from the government's proposal for Councils to retain business rates would be added as an income stream for use at the Council's discretion. The use of reserves in 2019/20 was included the need to fund the District Elections

Following the discussion, the Committee **agreed** that the Cabinet be informed it had no comments to make on the 2016/17 budget proposals save for the fact that it was pleased to note that its savings and revenue generating schemes hitherto proposed are supposed to be progressing, and that it will begin to closely scrutinise such progress at future meetings.

28. **WELFARE REFORM /UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPDATE**

The Committee received an oral update regarding the Welfare Reform and Universal Credit Update.

In terms of the implementation of Universal Credit, this has had very little impact so far on South Bucks. The digital service will be rolled out from May 2016, and will be able to handle complex claims – South Bucks are not included in the roll-out that covers the period up until December 2016.

Although Housing Benefit caseload will be migrated, local authorities will still require a benefits function that will include:

- Housing benefit for people of pension age;
- Housing support for people that require specialist support;
- Local Council Tax support; and
- Discretionary housing payments.

The Committee noted that Local Authorities will be consulted on the possibility of taking over responsibility for the administration of Attendance Allowance from the DWP.

With regard to Welfare Reform changes, the proposed Tax Credits change is no longer going ahead. The benefit cap of 20k (£13.4k for singles) – a reduction of 6k – will effect more residents than the previous cap. No date had been set for roll out but it was likely to be summer/autumn 2016.

Social sector Housing Benefit is to be capped to Local Housing Allowance rates for tenancies commencing April 2016 onwards, and will take effect in April 2018. The impact from this should be minimal for some groups as social rent tends to be lower than LHA, however this change will impact single people under 35, who will be subject to the room rate of £75 per week, and those in supported accommodation, where it is thought that DHPs will be applied for to cover the shortfall. Social rents will be reduced by 1% (not including supported accommodation in the first year), and the absence rules around Housing Benefit has been reduced from 13 weeks to 4 weeks.

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The Court of appeal found that legislation around social size criteria was discriminatory against those disabled people, and those fleeing domestic violence, requiring a panic room. The DWP were appealing to the Supreme Court.

The Committee thanked the officers for the briefing and requested further updates at the appropriate time in the future.

29. **SAFE PLACE SCHEME**

The PAG received a report providing an overview of the Safe Place Scheme, currently established in parts of South Bucks.

The Safe Place Scheme was introduced in 2012 to provide reassurance to and assist vulnerable people to live more independently and obtain help when in the community. The scheme helps a vulnerable person to deal with incidents which could include confusion or harassment.

A 'safe place' sticker identifies the premises, with The Community Safety Partnership working to identify safe places and raise awareness of the scheme in the community. If a vulnerable person seeks help, members of staff would be expected to make a phone call if necessary, reassure them and provide a temporary safe haven until help and support arrives.

The Community Safety team has recently been approached by libraries and GPs surgeries requesting to join the scheme after successful and very positive engagement with a vulnerable resident who asked for support after seeing the Safe Place logo on the door.

Members found the update interesting, and suggested that the scheme be introduced to venues including dentists and pharmacies.

30. **LOCAL PLAN UPDATE**

The Committee received an oral update regarding the progress of the Local Plan.

Currently, the Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan is in the consultation stage, closing on the 14 March 2016. The websites contain large quantities of accessible information, with a substantial evidence base.

In response to a question by a Member regarding the process used for identifying sites, the Committee was advised that the relevant information was available on the website. The officer concerned offered to respond to the member via email.

31. **HS2/WRATH UPDATE**

An oral update was presented to the Committee, with regard to HS2/ Western Rail Access/ Heathrow.

HS2

Colne Valley

The Committee noted that the Colne Valley Park Panel was now meeting monthly with Michael Hurn as Chairman. A budget has been set, comprising £3 million for mitigation costs and £300k for expenses to cover officer costs, project officer and consultant's fees

HS2 had agreed to relocate HOAC to Denham Quarry, at a cost of £15m.

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Regarding the Iver HEX Depot, members heard that the submissions from petitioners have been examined by the Select Committee, with the report due in mid-February. South Bucks District Council was reliant upon Bucks County Council to give evidence on the highways issues for Iver. Assurances received from HS2 include provision of highway safety measures at sensitive junctions and roundabouts although there was some scepticism that these would be delivered.

A provision of £1420k had been offered for a relief road/crossing the railway line to compensate for the additional tracks into the new depot. The use of Bangors Road as a construction route is subject to additional environmental assessment, and the business case for reconnecting the Wycombe single rail line to allow the Chiltern Railways service to Old Oak Common is to be re-examined.

WRATH

In terms of the construction of the Western Rail Link, Hollow Hill Lane will be required to close, with traffic being diverted via Langley Park Road and/or Thorney Lane. Community engagement regarding a package of improvements being offered by Network Rail will be starting on 22 February, with a view to submitting the DCO in 2017 and starting construction in 2019.

Heathrow Expansion

The decision regarding the third runway for the Heathrow Expansion has been delayed until later in 2016, with the issues to be re-examined including: noise, air quality and carbon.

32. **SOUTH BUCKS DISTRICT COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 2 2015-16**

The Committee considered a report showing the performance of Council services against performance indicators during the period July to September 2015, and in particular performance in relation to:

- Performance and Service objectives across the Council; and
- The Leader's Portfolio and the Portfolios of other Cabinet Members.

The following appendices were attached to the report:

- Appendix A – Providing an overview of priority indicators; 2014/15; and
- Appendix B – Quarterly corporate performance Indicators 2014/15

The Committee noted that of the six off-target PIs, three are priority PIs. Of the PIs which failed to meet targets, 4 related to housing, with individual reasons given in the appendices to the report. The Committee's attention was drawn to the fact that three of the off-target housing PIs are linked to the national increase in demand for temporary accommodation, which a government briefing paper stated to be 11% nationally year on year at March 2015, with a further 3% increase by June 2015.

Members further noted that the PI regarding voluntary leavers as a percentage of the workforce, along with working days lost due to sickness remains were being closely monitored by the Personnel Committee.

RESOLVED that the Performance Management Quarterly Report for the period July to September 2015 be noted.

33. **BUCKS HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SELECT COMMITTEE**

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The minutes of the meetings of the Select Committee held on 24 September, 20 October and 24 November 2015 were noted.

34. **BUCKS CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE**

The minutes of the meetings of the Select Committee held on 22 September 2015 were noted.

35. **MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

None.

36. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received the work programme.

37. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

38. **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC**

39. **MINUTES**

The Part II minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 November 2015 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting terminated at 7.32 pm