

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting - 26 January 2015

Present: Dr. Pope (Chairman)
Mr Harding, Mr Anthony, Mr Chhokar, Mr Griffin, Mrs Plant and
The Earl of Stockton

Absent: Mrs Burrows

19. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 October 2014 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

20. SOUTH CENTRAL AMBULANCE SERVICE NHS TRUST

The Committee received a verbal briefing by Andy Battye (Area Manager, Chiltern, SCAS). The Committee also received a copy of the SCAS Annual Health Scrutiny Committee report for information.

Mr Battye explained that there had been an unprecedented increase in demand over the Christmas period resulting in the service having to declare a major incident as it was so busy. The demand affected not only the ambulance service, but the hospitals as well. The increased levels of demand and the challenges faced with staffing levels meant that the service had to utilise private providers. The SCAS released a press statement over the Christmas period urging the public to use their services appropriately and only call 999 if absolutely essential.

During the discussion, Mr Battye responded to a number of questions and issues as follows:

- The SCAS coped with the increased demand over the Christmas period as well as any of the other ambulance service trusts.
- Queuing at Wexham Park Hospital: some major refurbishments have taken place at the hospital which have helped to reduce queuing. The hospital did experience issues over the Christmas period following the increase in demand, but were able to cope better than some hospitals did.
- Handover times at Wexham Park Hospital: the discharge process can take time and the freeing up of bed spaces in the hospital can be an issue. SCAS, through winter resilience funding, has introduced a Hospital Ambulance Liaison Officer to work with the hospital to manage issues and assist with patient flow.
- Frequent callers: SCAS had procedures in place to analyse the needs of frequent callers and to work with partner agencies to put the necessary plans and services in place.
- Initiatives being used to reduce the number of patients needing to go to A&E included the early bird GP scheme and the SOS bus.
- The Committee were updated on the progress of the co-responding scheme, including the fact that Fire and Rescue Service had received training in December to be able to respond on blue lights.
- To address the issue of recruitment problems in the ambulance service, the SCAS had recently recruited paramedics from Poland. The Committee were assured that these paramedics were experienced and that they all had a good level of English.

After the discussion, the Chairman thanked Mr Battye for his attendance and the briefing he provided.

21. CONSULTATION OF 2015/16 BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Cabinet on 9 February 2015 would be receiving a report on the Council's Budget Proposals and Council Tax for 2015/2016 and, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Committee was invited to comment on the proposals.

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

- The proposed budget requirement is £7,651k, which will result in a District council tax of £143.00 for a Band D property, unchanged from the current year.
- By freezing the council tax the authority would receive a grant of £48k, which would be equivalent to a 1% increase in council tax. There is the option of increasing the council tax by 1.99% without triggering a local council tax referendum, which would generate an additional £96k of council tax income per annum but the Council would not receive a one off grant of £48k in 2015/16.
- The draft budget proposes using reserves as follows:
 - Local Development Document (LDD) reserve £98k
 - Funding for the May District Elections £70k
 - Transformation reserve for support of shared service work £62k
 - Government funding change reserve £76k
- It is being proposed that an earmarked reserve for the impact of major national infrastructure projects of £80,000 be established.
- The suggested prudent level of general reserves for 2015/16 is £770k. As there is no planned use of General Reserve in 2015/16 the prudent level of reserves will be achieved and also would keep reserves above the £1,250k aimed for within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- The Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2015/16 which is being recommended to Cabinet following consideration by the Resources PAG, sets out the approach aiming to deliver investment income for 2015/16 of £400k, which is £150k less than the current year. This reflects a view of a continuing low level of interest rates during 2015/16, and the declining level of cash balances as a result of the significant capital expenditure on waste last year.

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

Members asked a number of questions and sought clarification and explanation of certain issues surrounding the revenue budget and use of reserves.

The Committee noted that whilst the proposed budget would not result in an increase in council tax, a 1.99% increase in council tax might help support the Council's medium term position.

Whilst discussing Section B of the Cabinet report on Investment Income, a view was raised that the approach being taken by the Council to deliver investment income for 2015/16 was too cautious and that in view of the fact that current market returns on cash investments are historically low with the likelihood that this will continue for years to come, the Cabinet should be more proactive in exploiting other investment opportunities based around using the funding on projects to generate income e.g. increasing car parking spaces and investing in property in the district. With regards to investing in property, the Committee recognised that

the speed of decision making usually required when acquiring commercial property would need to be addressed as the normal Council processes in most cases would be too long and a disincentive to vendors.

With regard to the Farnham Park budget, the Committee highlighted the importance of the business plan for the operation to be successful and to move the service into a surplus as soon as possible.

With regard to planning decisions, whilst understanding the need for Officers to point out the potential financial consequences to the Council of refusing a planning application contrary to the recommendations in the report and risking appeals which the Council might lose, Members felt that it was important that these consequences were not over-emphasised to the detriment of the decision making process which requires Members to make a balanced judgement based on all the relevant planning issues involved.

Following the discussion, the Committee agreed that Cabinet be informed that, apart from the comments over the approach to investments, the Farnham Park business plan and planning decisions it had no other comments to make on the 2015/16 budget proposals.

22. JOINT WORKING ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee noted the Joint Working Annual Report which went to the Chiltern and South Bucks Joint Committee on 16 October 2014. The report set out the progress of the joint working between Chiltern and South Bucks in 2014 and was divided into the following sections:

- Shared Services Reviews
- Harmonisation
- Joint ICT
- Other Shared Service Working
- Issues and Learning Points

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

23. THAMES VALLEY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL GENERAL ISSUES REPORT

The Committee noted a general issues report which was submitted to the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel on 21 November 2014.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

24. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

The Committee noted the minutes of the meetings of the Select Committee held on 16 September and 28 October 2014.

25. MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In response to a question which had been submitted by Cllr Hollis, the Committee were advised that a report on the issues related to the Pension Fund Deficit would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee and that this was reflected in the work programme.

26. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received the work programme.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

27. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust

The governance arrangements of the new trust were still unclear. The Chair stated that she would try to find out some more information regarding the governance arrangements and would report back to the next meeting.

The meeting terminated at 7.30 pm