

Shadow Executive Minutes

Date: 8 October 2019

PRESENT: Councillor M Tett (Chairman)

Councillors K Wood, B Chapple OBE, J Chilver, A Cranmer, T Green, C Harriss, P Hogan, A Macpherson, D Martin, N Naylor, M Shaw, W Whyte, G Williams, F Wilson, J Rush and P Irwin

Also Present: Councillor R Stuchbury

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting 10 September, and the Confidential Minutes of the 20 August and 10 September were agreed as correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. QUESTION TIME

Question 1

The proposed new Vale of Aylesbury Plan does not include plans to adopt a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). CIL is in place for the Wycombe District, and Chiltern and South Bucks have been carrying out the necessary consultations to have CIL in place soon, however Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) have no plans to implement CIL. How does the Shadow Authority plan to mitigate for this inconsistency across Bucks, including the potential financial impact and devastating effects on building strong and sustainable partnerships within the historical Vale area because of the decision not to implement CIL by AVDC?

Response

The Shadow Portfolio Holder for Planning responded to the question. It was advised that Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils were yet to make a decision on the adoption of CIL.

The intention for AVDC, as set out in Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP), was to prepare and adopt CIL subsequent to the adoption of VALP. Due to the plan taking longer to prepare and progress through Examination, this has therefore not been

possible. Nevertheless, once VALP is adopted a CIL can be prepared and recent changes to the CIL Regulations mean that the preparation process has been significantly shortened. Therefore it will be for the new Buckinghamshire Council to decide whether it chooses to adopt the delivery of CIL in Aylesbury Vale ahead of any Bucks wide plan, but only once VALP is adopted.

Question 2

From the most recent accounts for the five Bucks Councils, total expenditure on services during 2018/19 was £375m approx. Appendix 1 of the consolidated position report shows the planned expenditure for 2019/20 as £368m. Where does the new council intend to cut services, and should we be planning for further service cuts in the following years?

Response

The Deputy Shadow Portfolio Holder for Resources responded to the question.

There are a number of differences between how the accounts for the Councils are produced compared to the amalgamated budget information. In this instance, the main reason for the reduced figure is the accounting for depreciation. Within the Accounts, depreciation is shown at Service level; however it is not included within the amalgamated budget as it is not a cost that is chargeable to Council Tax. Our work on amalgamation of revenue budget shows the total service budget in 18/19 across the 5 Councils excluding depreciation etc. was approx. £351m. The service budgets have actually increased from 18/19 to 19/20 by around 5%.

5. FORWARD PLAN (28 DAY NOTICE)

RESOLVED:

That the 28 Day Notice be noted.

6. COUNCIL ACCESS POINTS

The report set out a vision, approach and options appraisal for establishing Council and Community Access Points across Buckinghamshire. The Options Appraisal was attached at Appendix 1.

A letter had been received from the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 3 October 2019 which was tabled at the meeting, and provided helpful feedback on the Council and Community Access Points proposal. It was noted that a communications plan had been developed and would be put in place if Members were to agree to establish the access points. It was also advised that work undertaken on the proposed budget indicated the amount was sufficient, and that a further business case for the longer term would be considered by Members in due course.

It was asked that a further access point be considered for the North of the County, near Waddeston and the border of Oxford. Members agreed that flexible and

moveable access points were important, and that points should be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Members were assured that frontline staff would receive appropriate training to be able to answer the most common queries received from customers, as well as being able to signpost when required.

The Deputy Leader proposed that there should be one access point in Wycombe town centre instead of two, and that the access point should be located at the Council Offices. Members supported this proposal.

The rationale for the use of libraries was questioned. The Lead Member for Localism advised that the libraries were very accessible spaces, and that library staff were used to dealing with resident enquiries and signposting. It was noted that the use of libraries could increase the customer base for those libraries. Members also noted that the proposed access points would be located within existing buildings owned by the Councils.

It was suggested that the number of individual Planning queries be sought and circulated to Members.

In response to a question as to why two access points were proposed to be located in Aylesbury, it was noted that these sites were the existing County and District Council Offices. These sites were existing access points, with members of staff based at both sites, and so it was felt that there was a clear operational rationale for these proposed sites to continue as access points.

The Shadow Executive agreed that the Lead Members of the Localism Member Working Group will respond to the letter from the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Thanks were expressed to the Localism Policy Lead, the Workstream and the Localism Member Working Group for their commitment to localism and hard work to date.

RESOLVED:

- 1. To agree the vision for Council & Community Access Points as set out in Appendix 1.**
- 2. To note the phased approach to implementation as detailed in Appendix 1.**
 - **Phase 1—Council Access Points for 1 April 2020 focused on providing access for residents to council services.**
 - **Phase 2—Community Access Points focused on providing access for residents to community facilities and council & partner services.**
- 3. To agree to establish Council Access Points for 1 April 2020 in accordance with the design principles as set out below:**
 - **Use of the existing county and district buildings.**
 - **Open to all (drop-in access via advertised opening hours).**
 - **Self-service access to all council services.**

- Existing staff or volunteers available to help residents to self-serve and answer common enquiries.
- Potential for the site to be used for individual support (e.g. planning, housing advice, councillor surgeries).

4. To agree to set up 17 Council Access Points for 1 April 2020 in the locations set out in Appendix 1, with the removal of High Wycombe Library from the list of proposed sites, and with the option to add a further Council Access Point subject to the successful conclusion of discussions with a partner organisation.

5. To agree to work with partners to enable residents to get information and advice about Buckinghamshire Council services.

6. To agree to give delegated authority to the Chief Executive of Buckinghamshire Council to vary the locations of the Council Access Points, following consultation with Shadow Executive Members, if for any operational reasons there is a need for such a change.

7. To note that the operation of Council Access Points will be reviewed after 1 year, with an expectation that advertised sites may change in future years as part of the Council's phase 2 development of Community Access Points.

8. To agree that the Localism Member Working Group Lead Members will respond to the letter from the Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 3 October with a summary of the Shadow Executive discussion and decisions.

9. To agree that the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Shadow Executive be authorised to resolve operational issues with some of the specific sites.

7. INTERIM CIVIL CONTINGENCIES POLICY

Members considered a draft Interim Civil Contingencies Policy for approval. The overarching policy defined the legal obligations, set the framework for how subsequent plans would be developed and their applicability and scope during the transitional period. It also confirmed and clarified how a response would be handled in the event of a major incident both pre Vesting Day and once the Buckinghamshire Council was established. It was noted that if Members were to approve the policy, staff would undergo the relevant training.

Thanks were expressed to officers for preparing this important piece of work.

RESOLVED:

That the Interim Civil Contingencies Policy be agreed.

8. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Members received an updated Implementation Plan. The plan was at Appendix 1 and included a list of Shadow Executive Portfolio Holders that had recently been appointed. A list of critical 'must have' deliverables which had been identified by the programme was at Appendix A.

It was noted that many of the 'must haves' were planned for delivery in February and March 2020, and a concern was raised as to whether there would be significant implications for new Council if deadlines were missed. Members were advised that certain actions could not be carried out until 1 March 2020, that the plan was constantly being reviewed and any concerns would be raised.

It was suggested that more training sessions than usual should be offered to newly elected Members during the Member induction process due to the high number of Councillors that will be elected to the new authority. Further, that good attendance at training sessions was essential. Members were informed that the Member Induction Workstream were currently preparing a piece of work on this.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

9. WASTE PROCUREMENT

Members considered a report on the contractual spend on the proposed waste collection contract in accordance with the agreed spending protocol. Two minor amendments to the wording of the recommendations were made.

RESOLVED:

- a) To note the decisions taken by Wycombe and Chiltern District Councils that the existing procurement should continue, and also that the current contract be extended to September 2020, at which point the new service will be implemented.**
- b) To agree that an officer acting on behalf of the Shadow Executive be involved in the procurement exercise in an advisory capacity.**

Questions and responses

Question 1 – Community Infrastructure Levy

The proposed new Vale of Aylesbury Plan does not include plans to adopt a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). CIL is in place for the Wycombe District, and Chiltern and South Bucks have been carrying out the necessary consultations to have CIL in place soon, however Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) have no plans to implement CIL. How does the Shadow Authority plan to mitigate for this inconsistency across Bucks, including the potential financial impact and devastating effects on building strong and sustainable partnerships within the historical Vale area because of the decision not to implement CIL by AVDC?

Response

The Shadow Portfolio Holder for Planning responded to the question. It was advised that Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils were yet to make a decision on the adoption of CIL. The intention for AVDC, as set out in Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP), was to prepare and adopt CIL subsequent to the adoption of VALP. Due to the plan taking longer to prepare and progress through Examination, this has therefore not been possible. Nevertheless, once VALP is adopted a CIL can be prepared and recent changes to the CIL Regulations mean that the preparation process has been significantly shortened. Therefore it will be for the new Buckinghamshire Council to decide whether it chooses to adopt the delivery of CIL in Aylesbury Vale ahead of any Bucks wide plan, but only once VALP is adopted.

Question 2 – the future finances of Buckinghamshire Council

From the most recent accounts for the five Bucks Councils, total expenditure on services during 2018/19 was £375m approx. Appendix 1 of the consolidated position report shows the planned expenditure for 2019/20 as £368m. Where does the new council intend to cut services, and should we be planning for further service cuts in the following years?

Response

There are a number of differences between how the Accounts for the Councils are produced compared to the amalgamated budget information. In this instance, the main reason for the reduced figure is the accounting for depreciation. Within the Accounts, depreciation is shown at Service level; however it is not included within the amalgamated budget as it is not a cost that is chargeable to Council Tax. Our work on amalgamation of revenue budget shows the total service budget in 18/19 across the 5 Councils excluding depreciation etc. was approx. £351m. The service budgets have actually increased from 18/19 to 19/20 by around 5%.

Question 3 – Bucks Home Choice Policy

Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) currently operates a sub allocation policy which means that 50% of new builds are allocated to residents with a local connection, and that 25% of re lets are allocated in accordance with local connections. In light of the fact that the new Buckinghamshire Council will have to review and manage the Bucks Home Choice Policy, please can you advise as to whether a consultation would take place prior to any changes to the how the policy currently operates in AVDC?

Response

The current expectation is that from vesting day, the existing Bucks Home Choice Allocations policy would continue to operate in the same format with 'district zoning' pending the adoption of a new Buckinghamshire Council Allocations Policy within 2 years. To this end we would expect that this would also apply to all of the local lettings policies that are currently in place, of which the Aylesbury Vale – sub groups is one. A report will be presented to the shadow executive in the future outlining the process and the approximate timescales required to bring forward a new Housing Allocation Policy, which will of course be taken through the all of the required consultation processes.

Question 4 - future finances to be inherited by the Buckinghamshire Council

The combined operating deficit for the five councils during 2018/19 was £99M (from the most recent published accounts). Having compiled the consolidated financial position, what is the operating deficit for 2019/20 projected to be?

Response

The operating deficit included within the Council's accounts is prepared on an accounting basis and includes items that are not charged to Council tax (such as depreciation, asset valuations and pensions liabilities). As these are technical adjustments that do not impact on residents, they have not been included in our work to date on the consolidated financial position, and will only be considered at year end. The statement of accounts of the five Councils have not yet been signed off. The projection of the current year monitoring positions are reported separately by each existing authority.

Question 5 - future finances to be inherited by the Buckinghamshire Council

The accounts for the five Bucks Councils show that total useable reserves were £286M on March 31st this year. Having compiled the consolidated financial position, what do we expect useable reserves to be at the birth of the new Unitary Council?

Response

The consolidated reserves position is currently being reviewed and an updated position is due to be considered by Shadow Executive members over the coming months. Initial forecasts show a reduction in the consolidated position due to (in particular) reserves committed to the Unitary Implementation Programme (£12.8m) and reserves committed to the capital programme.

Question 6 - future finances to be inherited by the Buckinghamshire Council

From the most recent accounts for the five Bucks Councils, total capital expenditure 2018/19 was £216M. The last page of the Consolidated Position Report shows the planned capital expenditure for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 as £178M, £105M and £76M respectively. What impact does the Shadow Executive believe these savage cuts will have on the already crumbling infrastructure of the county?

Response

The capital programme includes both regular planned expenditure and one-off capital items. In 2018/19 there was some significant one-off spend within the County programme in particular, in relation to the acquisition of investment properties; plus one-off schools spend. The regular recurrent programme of capital spend remains stable (for example Strategic Highways maintenance at £21m p.a. for all 3 years). There are some significant one-off items in the early programme (such as Chiltern Lifestyle Centre); plus schools and roads funded schemes. We would expect that year 3 of the programme will have less expenditure as future business cases and bidding rounds for funding are still being developed; and we would anticipate that the programme will become further developed post vesting day. In particular we are progressing a number of HIF (Housing Infrastructure Fund) bids including around £180m for Aylesbury which is not currently reflected in the capital programme.

End of meeting 11.15am.