

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
25 JANUARY 2018
7.30 - 8.20 PM**



Present:

Councillors Leake (Chairman), Angell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Angell, Mrs Birch, Brossard, Finnie, Harrison, Mrs McCracken, Peacey, Mrs Temperton, Virgo and Mrs Mattick (Substitute)

Executive Members:

Councillors McCracken and Heydon

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Allen and Porter and Tullett

In Attendance:

Timothy Wheadon, Chief Executive
Alison Sanders, Director of Resources
Stuart McKellar, Borough Treasurer
Nikki Gibbons, Chief Officer: Human Resources

36. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

Apologies were received from Councillors Allen, Porter and Tullett.

Councillor Mrs Mattick was acting as a substitute for Councillor Tullett.

37. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 17 November 2017 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

38. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor Mrs Birch declared a personal interest as the spouse of the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing.

During item 7 Councillor Virgo declared an affected interest as an independent board member of South Hill Park Trust.

39. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

40. Public Participation

No submissions had been made by members of the public under the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

41. **Executive Forward Plan**

Members received and noted the scheduled Key and Non-Key Executive Decisions of a corporate nature.

It was noted that the first six items should not have been included as they had already been considered by the Executive.

In relation to item reference 1073356 – Bracknell Forest Lottery the Chairman advised the meeting that the Executive had agreed to form a working group to consider if a local lottery for Bracknell Forest should be established.

42. **The Council's Budget Consultation**

Councillor Virgo had declared an affected interest in the item as he was an independent board member of South Hill Park Trust.

The Commission considered a report that set out draft budget proposals for 2018/19. It was reported that the Executive would be considering all representations made at its meeting on 13 February 2018, before recommending the budget to Council.

The Borough Treasurer updated the Commission and made the following points:

- The draft budget proposals for 2018/19 had been agreed by the Executive at its meeting on the 19 December 2017, before the Government had released details on the provisional settlement. The Secretary of State had listened to local government concerns about Children's Services pressures and had given flexibility for local Council's to increase Council Tax by an additional 1% above the 3% general increase and 2% increase for Adult Social Care pressures. This meant a possible 6% increase.
- Overview and Scrutiny's contribution to the consultation process was a key element in the budget setting process.
- No changes had been announced to the New Homes Bonus.
- The Berkshire bid to participate in a business rates pilot has been accepted with Bracknell Forest acting as the lead Council. This was good news as additional funding would be available.
- In order to respond to the pressures in Children, Young People and Learning and Adult Social Care there was a reliance on the delivery of transformation projects.
- In 2018/19 there was a modest capital budget under £9million and there would be no need for additional borrowing and no new capital demands.

The Director of Corporate Services reported that within her directorate there were pressures which underpinned the ability to transform and to keep up with legislative changes. The proposed savings were genuine efficiency savings generated by shifts in operations such as savings related to working in the Microsoft environment.

The Members noted the supplementary report which included the relevant budget minute extract from each Panel meeting.

Concerns were raised about the implementation of the £35k saving proposal to provide all agendas electronically. The Commission queried the details of when the decision was made, who by, together with what consultation had taken place with Members. The Director of Resources explained that this proposal was in response to the Council's difficult financial situation and reflected the whole Council's approach to reducing paper. It was explained that relevant IT kit, support and training would be

provided so that Members could use the Mod.Gov application to access information and ensure that all Members were confident in using electronic screens. It was confirmed that adaptations would be made to respond to individual's needs. The Director stated that it had been recognised that some reports would require printing and examples were discussed such as the Local Plan, site visits, budget papers. It was confirmed that some paper copies would be available for public meetings however these would be the rarity. In response to concerns around difficulties using the software it was acknowledged that it would take time to learn this new skill and Members would have the option to print their own copy at their own cost as required. It was suggested that this would restrict the number of people who would stand as candidates but surveys had shown that the local population as a whole were more digitally enabled and the Residents Survey had indicated a growing request for more digitised communication by Bracknell Forest residents. Residents expected their council to be as cost effective as it could. It was suggested that the structure of reports should be reviewed as it was challenging to find vital information in the existing report format. The Vice Chairman asked for clarity on the statutory requirements on the Council for supporting members in this respect. The Chairman concluded that there was deep unease about the implementation of this proposal and concerns would be raised outside of the meeting.

In response to the Members' questions, the following points were made:

- In relation to investments and borrowing the Council would take a mix of borrowing maturities as the best value was being offered on long-term borrowing maturities of 40 to 50 years but needed to create a balanced portfolio to be able to respond to changing markets.
- The additional 1% pressure in relation to the pay award for staff was due to the offer made to Unions being 1% above the assumed 1%.
- The Schools section of the budget paper had been rewritten in response to comments at the CYPLO&S Panel meeting as members had found the wording very confusing.

The Chairman revisited the concerns raised at the ECC O&S Panel about the increases to fees and charges in some areas but a lack of increase in others. The hourly rate of £55 for professional planning fees was highlighted as a concern as this was considered to be too low for a commercial charge and there was a risk that the Council was subsidising third parties who would pass this on as a recharge. It was explained that the cost of services would be covered and that legally the Council could not deliberately raise charges to make a profit. However the Borough Treasurer agreed to look at this again and report back on how the rate was assessed and what factors were taken into account.

It was raised that there had been a significant number of queries at each of the Panel meetings, there had been no budget papers relating to Health and Members were disappointed that officers attending the meetings had been unable to answer the detailed questions.

Councillor Virgo sought clarification on the length of the grant settlement to be offered to South Hill Park as the Activist report had recommended a three year agreement. The Borough Treasurer advised that South Hill Park Trust had indicated that they would not be able to deliver the grant reduction target and they would be working towards a two year agreement.

In relation to the proposed fees and charges for the Appeals Service offered by Democratic Services it was queried whether the fees covered the cost of delivering the service. It was explained that these fees were introduced to respond to Academy and Voluntary Aided Schools requesting this service and had been calculated based

on recent experience. It was queried whether higher charges would prohibit the appeals process. The Chairman requested further information on how the Appeals Service charging was assessed.

The £7k proposed saving on staff benefits related to the ceasing of free Sports Centre membership which was taken up by 200 members of staff, 100 of which are in schools, but would be money leaving the organisation once the Sports Centre was outsourced.

The Chairman reiterated concerns regarding the performance targets being reached in relation to transformation savings for both Children, Young People and Learning and Adult Social Care, Health and Housing but the Borough Treasurer reassured Members present that close monitoring was in place to ensure that this would be delivered.

The Commission endorsed the comments made in the minute extracts from Overview & Scrutiny Panels and would incorporate these into the overall feedback.

43. Work Programme and Panel Activity Update

The Commission noted progress against the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for 2017-18 and the reports from Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairmen on each Panel's progress against the work programme (where provided). It was agreed that a number of the indicators should be changed to Amber to reflect their delayed completion due to lack of officer resource. In particular the review on Houses in Multiple Occupation which had not met since July 2017. The Chairman noted that steps were in hand to recruit to the Overview and Scrutiny team.

Councillor Mrs Birch, Chairman of Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel provided a verbal update that they had had a good meeting considering the budget and the next meeting would be focused on schools performance as the results had been ratified.

CHAIRMAN