

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
11 JANUARY 2024
6.32 - 7.46 PM**



Present:

Councillors Pickering (Chair), Welch (Vice-Chair), C Eberle, M Forster, Haffeggee, McLean, C Thompson, Watts and Webb and Victoria Hill, Parent Governor Representative

Present Virtually:

Councillors Barnard, Egglestone and McKenzie-Boyle

Also Present:

Councillor Mary Temperton, Leader of the Council

Chief Executive, Susan Halliwell

Executive Director: Resources, Stuart McKellar

Executive Director: Delivery, Kevin Gibbs

Assistant Director: Democratic and Registration Services, Ann Moore

Also Present Virtually:

Executive Director: Place and Planning, Andrew Hunter

Executive Director: People, Grainne Siggins

38. Minutes of previous meeting

Previous minutes of the meeting of the Commission will be added to the agenda for 29th February 2024.

39. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or indications that members would be participating while under the party whip.

40. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

41. Public Participation

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

42. Budget Consultation

The Leader of the Council - Councillor Mary Temperton, the Chief Executive - Susan Halliwell and the Executive Director: Resources - Stuart McKellar provided an overview of the draft capital and revenue budgets 2024/25. Details were also provided about the budget consultation this year which had included Councillors attending 'surgeries' to consult the public. 135 responses had been received so far. This was thought to be a much larger response than usual and face to face meetings with residents had also provided a good opportunity for Councillors to challenge misinformation, especially about a proposal to merge the library service with customer services, which was not planned. It was noted there had been a huge

investment in the library infrastructure over the past few years. Other ways of engaging residents with the budget consultation process in the future were discussed, including the use of personas. For example, a persona could be created for someone who was a library service user and questions and answers about 'how might changes to the library service affect me' could be posed and answered to help people relate to the budget.

Broad questions about the budget were raised including the amount of money raised from service charges within the Councils' discretion. Councillors were informed it was the intention of the Council to increase fees by 5% across the board although this would vary according to the market. An estimated income of an additional £2.1million was expected through fees and charges. Councillors queried the amount of funding the Council would receive from business rates and Mr McKellar explained about the complexity of the Business Rates Retention System. A loss of business rates from, primarily the Lexicon businesses, had resulted in a £4million deficit in the business rates for the current year. Also, central government would be introducing a different rates multiplier for small business rate payers, compared to standard business rate payers, which meant it was difficult to calculate the impact but the approximate £4million deficit, which was forecast in the collection budget this year, had impacted the overall budget for 2024/25. Mitigations were being considered including the use of reserve monies.

A number of questions were asked regarding the capital part of the budget including the maintenance of Council buildings in the borough. Councillors also asked a broad range of questions on the revenue part of the budget including investment in repairing potholes; cutting grass verges; changes to waste disposal; dimming of streetlights; changes to Forestcare service provision; the number of people using the mobile library and its impact environmentally, value for money in regard to leisure service contracts; investment in continuing professional development for staff and lessons learnt regarding the write off of unrecoverable rent arrears.

Following a discussion four recommendations were proposed by Councillor McLean be put forward to the Executive for consideration as part of the budget consultation exercise and were seconded by the Chair, Councillor Pickering.

Recommendations:

- 1) To reconsider dimming streetlights; not cutting grass verges as frequently and reducing the number of litter bins available around the borough.
- 2) To consider providing additional funding to maintain, and potentially increase, CCTV to deter fly tipping in the borough.
- 3) To make an agreement with Silva Homes to allow for a consistent approach to the cutting of grass verges throughout the borough.
- 4) To adopt a set of representative 'personas' to better explain to residents the impact of the proposals in future budget consultations.

It was noted Councillor Haffegge did not agree with all of the proposed recommendations. Therefore, this has been noted as a formal objection to recommendation 1.

It was noted the members of the Conservative Group would be submitting a separate response to the Council in relation to the draft budget.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Mary Temperton, committed to ensuring the Executive would give full consideration to the four recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

RESOLVED that the four recommendations be sent to the Executive to consider at its meeting on 23 January.

43. **Work Programme Update**

An update on the work programme was provided by each of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairs which included:

- The Chair of the Environment and Communities, Councillor Christoph Eberle, informed members of the Commission that all investigative work into the Thames Water review had been undertaken. Members of the Panel had agreed recommendations at a public meeting and the review report was being drafted and would be presented at the next meeting of the Commission.
- The Chair of the Health and Care Panel, Councillor Egglestone, informed members of the Commission that she had attended a meeting regarding the rebuilding of Frimley Park Hospital and a Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be required between Bracknell Forest Council and other local authorities affected. Also, a meeting of the Panel had been scheduled for 23rd January to discuss a review into Sexual Health and the scope would be brought to the next Commission meeting for approval.
- The Chair of the Children, Skills and Growth Panel, Councillor Cath Thompson, informed members of the Commission she was meeting with the Executive Director: People next week to discuss potential review topics ahead of a Panel meeting on 25th January at which members of the Panel would identify their first review topic.