

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
15 SEPTEMBER 2020  
6.30 - 8.30 PM**



**Present:**

Councillors Angell (Chairman), Virgo (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Birch, Brossard, Gbadebo, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, Mrs Mattick, Porter, Temperton and Tullett

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Councillors Mossom

**Executive Member Present:** Councillor Bettison OBE

**Also Present:**

Councillors Brown, Ms Gaw and Kirke.

**In attendance:**

Kevin Gibbs, Executive Director: Delivery

Stuart McKellar, Director: Delivery

Ann Moore, Head of Democratic and Registration Services

**COUNCILLOR VIRGO IN THE CHAIR**

**22. Minutes**

Subject to the following amendment:

- *Minute 18:* 'Councillor Tullett declared a pecuniary interest in item 5' be amended to read 'an affected interest'.

**RESOLVED** that, subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the Commission held on 12 August 2020 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

**23. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest made.

There were no indications that members would be participating while under the party whip.

**24. Urgent Items of Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

**25. Public Participation**

No submissions had been made by members of the public under the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny. The Vice-Chairman encouraged members of the public to send questions on the agenda items to [committee@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:committee@bracknell-forest.gov.uk).

## 26. **Local Government Reorganisation**

The Chairman advised the meeting that he had reordered the agenda so that the first discussion item would be Local Government Reorganisation followed by Budget scrutiny - financial update.

Councillor Bettison OBE, Leader of the Council joined the meeting to update members on the potential implications for Bracknell Forest Council of speculative proposals for local government reorganisation. A number of announcements and press articles had discussed the government's intention to publish a white paper on devolution and local recovery. The publication had been deferred and was now anticipated in October.

The Leader highlighted that it had been indicated that an authority's minimum size would be determined by population and fluctuating estimates were significantly larger than Bracknell Forest's current population of 150,000. The Leader noted the possible economies of scale and greater efficiencies moving from two tier governance model.

The discussion touched on a number of concerns and considerations including:

- Overall reduction in Councillors representation
- Potential significant increase in number of residents supported by each remaining Councillor
- Potential loss of local knowledge
- Alternative solutions possible to create unitaries for the Berkshire area e.g. East and West
- Political implication for the area of merging smaller councils
- Possibility of an elected Mayor which would instead unify the separate council entities of an area
- Possible impact of elected Mayor role on current strategic functions such as the fire service and economic development

The Leader encouraged all councillors to take an interest in the proposals when they were released but not get distracted from current priorities.

## 27. **Budget scrutiny - financial update**

Councillor Heydon, Executive Member for Transformation and Finance and Stuart McKeller, Director of Resources were invited to attend the meeting. They were asked to discuss the Council's budget based on the update provided to the Executive on 25 August 2020 on the current year's financial position and future year projections.

Councillor Heydon was unable to attend in person but introduced the context for the session via a pre-recorded presentation.

Stuart McKeller, Director of Resources updated the report where the situation had changed and responded to members questions:

- the worst-case projected situation for 2020-21 had reduced from £5.5m to £3m overspend
- income loss until end of August was £7.6m
- biggest impacted areas within the budget were Adult Social Care at £1.2m, Children's Social Care at £1.2m, Leisure at £1m and savings which were unable to be delivered as expected totalling £1.4m
- for Adult Social Care the national priority was to move people out of hospital so there was an additional cost to block book spaces to avoid delays
- there was an anticipated rise in children social care referrals on return to education settings

- the process for developing best and worst-case scenarios was explained
- transformation programme had been put on pause while resources were redeployed to manage the covid situation; this lack of resources was impacting on the ability to drive through projected transformation savings and was a priority for the Corporate Management Team to consider
- scale of spend in Adult and Children's social care was acknowledged as having the most impact on the Council; being the areas that were most complex with elements outside of the Council's control
- the Council had a relatively low level of external debt but big infrastructure requirements were not feasible without borrowing
- restricting the scale of future capital proposals would help manage the level of debt so it did not increase
- the Council had £18m in its future funding reserve, £2m available in general reserves and further funds to manage the costs of transformation and structural changes
- details of income compensation scheme had been released and only income that was non-recoverable in the current year could be claimed e.g. Everyone Active management fee
- sensitivity analysis for proposed increases to fees and charges was more complex than ever and is undertaken service by service
- reinstatement of car parking fees had not resulted in a change in footfall
- Council services have largely been reinstated but where this was not possible it was due to safety rather than financial reasons
- discussion whether council tax capping may be relaxed to help fund current situation
- explanation that one of the key principles aimed to consolidate the recent growth in social care costs by containing any further increases, seeking real term reductions in order to manage below the level of inflation rather than try to reverse them
- work was continuing on the detailed service specifications and requirements from providers for the Heathlands project in partnership with the NHS and Clinical Commissioning Group and a report would be considered by the Executive in November
- Council may need to borrow more money for the joint venture but this was different from the debt around the capital spend as it would be based on business cases to fund development on a one or two year basis, after which the debt would be repaid from those opportunities
- some Coopers Hill occupants could be relocated to reuse the space in Time Square but this would not be suitable those requiring specialist premises such as large halls
- the unit costs for adult social care had increased; although there were 90 fewer clients since March those remaining were those with complex requirements
- it was explained that since the budget was set the environment had become exceptional and this required a re-evaluation of the planning and focus on only the most essential pressures
- financial risks were higher than ever before and this was reflected in the risk register but the Council had built up reserves making it a medium or long term risk and work was ongoing
- confirmation that the Council was very reliant on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions for infrastructure projects to go ahead

The Chairman thanked Stuart McKeller, Director of Resources for answering questions thoroughly and noted that Councillors had further queries relating to the

support provided to Everyone Active which could not be discussed in the public meeting due to commercial sensitivity.

28. **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

**RESOLVED** that pursuant to section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and having regard to the public interest, members of the public and press be excluded from the meeting for consideration of item 8 which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information under category 1 of Schedule 12A of that Act:

- (3) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

29. **Work Programme Update**

The Panel Chairmen provided an update on their Panel activity and proposals for the revised work programme. Though supported in principle, each review would be considered by the Commission once they were scoped.

**CHAIR**