

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

3 DECEMBER 2019

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Adeleke (for Cllr
Rogers)
Barrett
Beauchamp
Birnie (Chairman)
Hobson
Ransley
Riddick
Silwal (Vice-
Chairman)
Stevens
Taylor

Officers:	Sharon Burr	Corporate and Democratic Support Officer
	James Deane	Corporate Director - Finance and Operations
	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration
	Caroline Souto	Financial Planning & Analysis Team Leader
	Chris Taylor	Group Manager - Strategic Planning and Regeneration
	Craig Thorpe	Group Manager - Environmental Services
	Emma Walker	Group Manager - Environmental and Community Protection
	Sara Whelan	Group Manager - Development Management and Planning

Also in Attendance: Cllr Graham Sutton Portfolio Holder – Planning and Infrastructure

The meeting began at 9.00 pm

59 **MINUTES**

60 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Hearn, Rogers, Timmis and Woolner.

61 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

62 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

63 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None

64 **BUDGET PREPARATIONS 2020/21**

James Doe presented the report for his Service.

J Doe explained that it has been difficult to put proposals forward this year because of the pressures on the Service. He said that the main efficiency being proposed is to raise our target level of income for the planning fees that we receive by a further £50,000 -over the last three to four years we have been exceeding our targets by about 10% each year. J Doe added that the review of the Planning Performance Agreement was nearing completion, the process has been reviewed and the income levels and this would be a further source of income.

Cllr Birnie asked if this would put extra pressure on DMC.

J Doe replied that it would not, if anything it would relieve pressure by giving a further resource. It would not level or complexity of applications, but would just enable the Council to deal with them more effectively.

J Doe went on to say that the second area of saving was in the Local Plan, where he thinks there may be some savings in the totality of the cost of the Local Plan. It would need to be kept closely under review to make sure that there is enough resource moving forward to ensure that the plan can be progressed effectively. He pointed out that there are risks as external factors and government policy can change and we would have to respond to make the plan compliant.

J Doe also spoke about a software investment to do 3D modelling of our town, he explained that other councils already use this and it enables planners to see what is on the ground on the computer and when a developer comes in they can model how they are going to put their development in and suggest improvements etc., it is a one off cost of around £60,000, and there is a modest revenue each year.

Cllr Beauchamp asked about Hemel Garden Community and wanted to know if would have an impact on budgeting.

J Doe said that it was not mentioned today as they have some resource to take this forward through the Government grant awarded in March and when we see the next bidding window to obtain more funding we will move on that straight away. In the event of no Government funding coming forward we would have to review the financial strategy.

J Deane added to this that there is a local development framework reserve that will have a million pounds in it by the end of next year as we recognise that within the local plan there could be new requirements, so we have funding in reserve that we can draw down from if we need to.

Cllr Taylor asked if it would be possible to share the business case for the 3D software at some time.

J Doe responded that they would be developing one which is going through the internal budget proposals at the moment, and that he would share that when done.

Cllr Birnie asked if the new system that was installed and had been paid for already has a cost implication and wanted to know if it was possible to scan documents into that system?

S Whelan explained that all our documents get scanned when coming into the building on the epost system, so if we do receive any hard copies they come in and are all scanned and put onto the electronic post system and the uniform is able to accept them as pdf's, tif files etc.

Cllr Birnie said so if for example, people write in a letter of objection to a DMC proposal it will go onto the system?

S Whelan said it will go onto the back office Uniform system but not onto the website.

J Doe said that this underlines the need for everyone to encourage the residents to use the website, this is the most efficient and cheapest way of managing the system.

Cllr Birnie remarked that this was not possible for everyone.

Cllr Taylor asked if it was the Council's practice to buy systems and not integrate them?

S Whelan replied that the systems are linked but with the amount of applications and the volume of objections that we receive, it would not be in our interest to take the pdf documents and check for redaction then making it available on our website because there is not value. The public access system will never take written documents, it will only take it through the web pages and take objections in that way, it cannot take images either though Planning Enforcement now can take images but this is because we own it rather than it being run through the public access system which is a national system which every Local Authority has to use. I has been integrated as much as possible.

Cllr Taylor said that system integration needs to be a priority across the council.

Cllr Birnie said that there had been a pressure on staff and asked how that was dealt with and paid for?

J Deane replied that the experts in each area will tell the finance team amount they need to run the team next year – so if there has been a temporary pressure like a time lapse in replacing a member of staff this is catered for and it is the belief that the budget allowed will meet this. This year they will be looking to better align income with expenditure.

J Birnie said it was likely to be a recurrent problem with temporary staff.

J Doe agreed that it was and explained that they are starting to mitigate this by a better use of the PPA system which brings in resources.

C. Thorpe presented the report for his Service.

Craig said that this year they had looked at what they do, how well they do it and what opportunities they are available to generate income in house and offer services to Housing and other services within the Council.

C.Thorpe also spoke about the parks and playgrounds in the area and explained they would be looking for sponsorship for these in the coming year.

Cllr Silwal asked about sponsorship on the roundabouts and wanted to know how it was charged.

C. Thorpe said this is dealt with by assets who do a review every year.

Cllr Hobson said that she had to declare an interest at this point as she is in the process of buying a micro-business. She wanted to know whether businesses generating 2 or 3 bags a week were commercially viable for the service.

C. Thorpe explained that all business is good business and that although sacks were not necessarily the most efficient way of collecting this waste, it had it good points as

they get paid up front. They have reduced a commercial waste report which makes some recommendations. They want to branch out into food waste and they are looking at commercial waste recycling and making sure they set a pricing mechanism which reflects the drop in the residual waste income.

Cllr Birnie asked if there were plans to pick up different kinds of commercial waste rather than the mingled waste that seems to be the norm.

C Thorpe agreed that they were looking into that as they have the right equipment, but again, need to ensure that the pricing structure is correct.

Cllr Barrett asked whether figures have been worked out so that if fees are increased we would still be competitive in comparison to our rivals.

C Thorpe replied that we have a vehicle which comes with running and fuel costs and a driver in place so if the service cannot wipe its own face with an increased fee, we would realise that saving through redeploying that labour and not having the ongoing costs. He added that we are breaking even at the moment but would hope to make a profit by increasing those charges.

Cllr Barrett enquired whether taking on some of Osborne's duties would detract from the services that were provided already.

C Thorpe replied that the work was being absorbed with the same personnel working harder.

In response to a question regarding Housing by Cllr Beauchamp, C. Thorpe said that he thought in any future procurement discussions the services that could be provided in house would be taken into account.

Cllr Birnie said that there were a lot of improvements carried out at Cupid Green and the replacement of the fleet was virtually complete and asked if this would affect the budget.

Craig confirmed that a fleet of eleven new vehicles would be in place by Christmas and they are standardising the fleet so that the vehicles can do a number of tasks, they are more efficient.

Cllr Sutton asked if we are now in a position to look for external contracts with other authorities.

C Thorpe said that we were moving towards that.

Cllr Ransley asked how we managed to spend £20,000 on Armed Forces Day?

Cllr Birnie explained that this did not come under this Committee and C. Taylor confirmed that the road closures were the only part of the day that was funded by her department.

J Deane said that the majority of funding would have come from the Housing and Community budget drawn down from reserves.

Cllr Birnie thanked the Officers and Councillors.

The meeting ended at 21:50

65 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Work Programme is being updated at present.

The Meeting ended at 9.50 pm