

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

8 DECEMBER 2015

Present:

Members:

Councillors: G Adshead
Anderson (Chairman)
Ashbourn
Fisher
Hicks
Howard
Riddick
C Wyatt-Lowe (Vice-Chairman)

Officers: David Austin
James Doe
Katie Mogan
David Skinner
Chris Taylor
Craig Thorpe
Sara Whelan
Assistant Director - Neighbourhood Delivery
Assistant Director - Planning and Regeneration
Member Support Officer
Assistant Director - Finance & Resources
Group Manager - Strategic Planning and Regeneration
Group Manager - Environmental Services
Group Manager - Development Management and Planning

Others:

Councillor Marshall Portfolio Holder - Environmental, Sustainability and Regulatory Services
Councillor G Sutton Portfolio Holder – Planning and Regeneration

Following a Joint meeting of the OSC's where a budget presentation was given, the Strategic Planning & Environment OSC meeting began at 8.20pm

272 MINUTES

The minutes of the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 November 2015 were confirmed by the members present and signed by the Chairman.

273 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Matthews.

274 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

275 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

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

None.

277 **BUDGET REPORT**

Councillor G Adshead asked officers if there was any scope in the budget to organise waste collections for the community centres at the weekends. He said that after the halls have been hired, there is a lot of mess on a Monday and the bins are filled up quickly.

C Thorpe said it was possible to collect bins on a Saturday and Sunday but there was no cleansing service for the squares such as Queens Square in Adeyfield. Collecting bins at the weekend would mean a change in terms and conditions for staff.

Councillor G Adshead asked what the cost of that would be.

C Thorpe said he did not know but a change in terms and conditions for staff has been done previously.

Councillor Anderson said that the service has limited resources and it is not possible to be in every area all the time and that is why there is a rota.

Councillor G Adshead said he appreciated that but the Queens Square did get in quite a mess on Sunday.

Councillor Anderson stated that it is important to strike the right balance, Dacorum is not as big as the centre of London or Edinburgh where they have the resources to clean the streets and empty the bins overnight.

Councillor G Adshead asked if it was possible to look into cleaning the precincts over the weekend.

Councillor Marshall said this can be looked into.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe referred to Appendix B and the efficiency savings in relation to the budget for the Sports Trust. Do we know how they will mitigate and reduce dependence on Council grants.

D Skinner said they were aware that it was coming and it has been discussed to give them adequate warning and they have been accepting of the fact that it would have been inevitable.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe was concerned at their running costs and would not want to see a reduction in public provision and it might be of help to discuss and explore how to deliver services with a reduced budget.

Councillor Anderson said that this did not come under the remit of this committee and so would discuss with Councillor Harden, the Portfolio Holder for Residents and Corporate Services, on behalf of this committee.

Councillor Marshall said that the Housing and Community OSC receive a presentation every year from Sportspace and the Finance and Resources OSC look at the financial support.

Councillor Hicks said he was the new trustee on this board and he said that they were shocked that the cuts were such a high percentage of their grant.

Councillor Anderson asked S Whelan if she felt that the proposed budget gives enough for what the department needs for software development.

S Whelan said that with regards to software for planning officers, they are looking to upgrade to a better product and there is a reserve amount of money to be spent on this project. In addition to this, the department is looking at rebranding the Council's website in relation to public access for planning applications. It is hoped that the public will be able to track the progress of their planning applications. Furthermore, the department hopes to look into using Corvu to the best of its abilities in the future.

J Doe said that they are rolling out efficiencies in planning but they are saving money and investing at the same time.

S Whelan said there are currently 40 customers of Acolade, which is the system the planning department currently use. There are 200 customers of the sister company that the department hopes to use. The procurement process should take 2-3 months and the implementation of the new system should take about 12 months. It will be vital to test the system first to prevent issues when it is public facing but it should fit in nicely with the move to The Forum.

Councillor Anderson asked C Thorpe with respect to concerns about overspend on refuse collections. Will the department cope next year within this budget?

C Thorpe said there are many factors that affect overspend. Obviously performance is something that can be improved and changed but material prices is not in the department's control. Last year, the price of steel was £135 a tonne and it has dropped to £35 a tonne this year.

Councillor Hicks asked if the department had all the equipment needed because Tring have a tiny street sweeper that does not seem to collect all the leaves.

C Thorpe said his department was well resourced. Recently, a consultant said that they are slightly over resourced. The problem is that the leaves fall at the same time, once a year so the equipment is only used for a short period of time and then not at all for the rest of the year. Also, the teams cannot get round all areas at all times.

Councillor Hicks asked if there was a schedule for cleaning areas.

C Thorpe said there was and he would pass this on outside of this committee.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe asked C Taylor about the Maylands Business Centre in Appendix E. The Councillor asked if the extension can continue and are there any proposals to cope with the proposed budget.

C Taylor said that there is a 100% occupancy rate at the business centre at the moment with a long waiting list. The new units will generate income and the number of overheads will not increase as the same team will be managing the units. The new units will generate additional income.

Councillor Fisher asked about the surplus in car parking and how this money is spent – is it restricted or reinvested in car parks?

D Skinner said that the money is reinvested into transport provision generally and there is currently a consultation about building a new car park in Berkhamsted.

Councillor Fisher then asked about the verge hardening programme and if this will continue under the proposed budget.

D Skinner said the verge hardening programme was funded jointly by the HRA and the receipt generated from garage disposals. Moving forward, there is a target to achieve a realistic and sustainable level.

Councillor Anderson said this was the second extension of the programme which was only originally supposed to run for three years.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe stated that the report was short on detail with regards to smaller budgets, for example the Nicky Line, which has a high impact on residents.

D Skinner that more detail will be provided in February and the significant changes are listed in Appendix B.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said that efficiencies under £10k are just listed and it will be interesting to see the detail in February.

Councillor Anderson said the Council has to be sure they have the resources to meet reasonable requests from residents.

Councillor Ashbourn asked if C Thorpe can see trade waste changing in the next few years.

C Thorpe said they are looking at investment in the commercial waste service and looking at introducing a charging mechanism. It is important to make sure that the service is not being provided free of charge.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe referred to Appendix I and commented upon the large number of projects such as the Maylands Business Centre, the Water Gardens improvements and the Town Centre improvements which have all contributed to the success of Hemel Hempstead. Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe would like to commend the team on all their hard work and commented upon the large numbers of people visiting Hemel Hempstead from outside and saying how wonderful it now looks.

Councillor Anderson asked if there was a date for the demolition of the Civic Centre.

J Doe said there was no definite date yet but moving into The Forum will be the beginning of 2017.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe also commended the recycling changes and the introduction of the blue lidded bins and said that she felt the impact was positive with a smooth transition.

Councillor G Sutton said that the residents should be congratulated as they adapted quickly to the changes and the quality of the waste is high.

C Thorpe said that the waste from Dacorum was some of the cleanest waste passed through Viridor and could be nominated for an award.

Councillor Howard said that the general consensus she had received was that the system was easier.

Councillor G Adshead said that he lives in a flat and they have to dispose of their waste in two large industrial bins, are there any plans to introduce recycling.

C Thorpe said that this has been looked at and there was speculation that it would be quite simple to roll out however, practically it isn't. It would cost significantly more than the £75k left over in the budget. It would cost approximately £350-400k to implement collection from flats as there is a need for new bins and fleet vehicles. More research is needed and the issue will be revisited in the next financial year.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said that there is potential to increase the recycling rate if recycling introduced in flats.

Councillor Fisher asked if anything was being done about recycling small electrical goods.

C Thorpe said they are currently accepted in household waste sites and three new bins will be introduced in three local shopping centres in the next few weeks.

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WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme for 2015/16 was agreed

The Meeting ended at 8.55 pm