

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

7 FEBRUARY 2017

Councillors:	Anderson (Chairman) Fisher S Hearn Hicks Howard	Riddick R Sutton C Wyatt-Lowe (Vice-Chairman)
Officers:	David Austin Richard Baker James Doe Mark Gaynor Katie Mogan Chris Taylor Craig Thorpe Sara Whelan	Assistant Director - Neighbourhood Delivery Group Manager - Financial Services Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration Corporate Director - Housing & Regeneration Member Support Officer Group Manager - Strategic Planning and Regeneration Group Manager - Environmental Services Group Manager - Development Management and Planning

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

Following a Joint meeting of the OSC's where a budget presentation was given, the Strategic Planning & Environment OSC meeting began at 8.10pm

25 MINUTES

There were no minutes to sign.

26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Adshead, Ashbourn, E Collins, Matthews and Ransley.

Councillor R Sutton substituted on behalf of Councillor Adshead

27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

28 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

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

None.

30 **JOINT BUDGET REPORT 2017/18**

Councillor Anderson asked if the Assistant Directors had anything to add from the presentation members had just heard.

J Doe said there was nothing major to add since the presentation he gave to the committee in December. He said there was a slight improvement in planning fees, a large application had come through at Maylands therefore increasing the income. The pressures in building control are being alleviated with apprentice and trainee posts being created. There has been a decrease in land charges income but this reflects the slight downturn in the market. This could be seasonal as the market tends to slow over the Christmas period.

Also, the Housing White Paper was released by the government today and it allows local authorities to potentially increase planning fees by 20% by July 2017.

M Gaynor said that no legislation was needed for this.

J Doe said there is no detail yet but this income will be ring fenced for planning services.

Councillor Anderson asked if a separate report could be brought to this committee on the detail of the White Paper.

M Gaynor said we will have to wait for clarification from government but a report will need to go to Housing and Community OSC anyway. Even though it is a Housing white paper, it has a huge focus on the delivery of housing which includes the planning service.

D Austin gave an overview of his department. In December he ran through savings in his area which are all shown in the papers. One change is the termination of the Primary Authority Partnership (PAP).

Councillor Anderson asked if D Austin could explain what 'cessation of Primary Authority function' means.

D Austin said that members might be aware of the PAP with Tesco. Other local authorities have these types of agreements. The partnership was not covering costs and there were some legal cases across the country. In the North East, there was a legal case involving Greggs and the provision of toilets in their stores. This case meant two local authorities were facing each other in court. D Austin said he wasn't directly involved in the negotiations to terminate the partnership but it was clear it

was the right thing to do.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said this partnership was formed when she was a Cabinet member and it is a shame it has ended. Does this leave a gap in the budget?

D Austin said it does not indicate the shortages. Staffing costs were £90,000 but the income was £120,000. This does not show the overheads and with a small team in Environmental Health, it was difficult to provide back up when things went wrong.

Councillor Anderson said he was fearful of the objectivity of the partnership when it was first formed and that it would put huge pressure on authority staff.

Councillor Hicks asked what the partnership focussed on.

D Austin said it focussed on food preparation areas and food hygiene. These partnerships can focus on a variety of issues - the County Council have a partnership that focusses on fire protection. Tesco would come to us with their procedures for preparing food preparation areas, the Environmental Health team would audit the process and then sign off the policy. Tesco would then adopt this policy across all their stores. Therefore, if another store in another part of the country was visited by an Environmental Health officer and found to be not following the procedures, they would contact Dacorum to deal with the issue.

Councillor Anderson asked the officers if there are any changes in the budget that they concentrated on the most?

J Doe said the estimation of planning fees was difficult as we had to wait to see how the market would react after the EU referendum. However, activity has picked up and had stayed strong but we will continue to monitor this.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe referred to page 59 and the list of charges for different documents. How much income is generated from these?

J Doe said it is absolutely negligible. All of these documents are accessible online. In the past, some documents have produced some income like the Dacorum Local Plan. That document contained a lot of maps which were expensive to print.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said they should be kept as hard copies for those who do not have access to the internet.

Councillor Fisher asked if the brownfield register would be expensive to compile.

J Doe said that was an important point. The council will be required to create a register of brownfield land and this will be a 12-18 month project. We will look internally to fill the role as it is only a temporary project so the funding arrangement will only be short term. The officer will be needed to research sites and liaise with land owners.

M Gaynor said it is not intended to come from existing planning budgets, the funding will be separate.

Councillor Anderson asked if this was a requirement of the Housing and Planning Act and if the funding will be from reserves.

M Gaynor said that is correct.

J Doe said we have a lot of information already through current work of the department.

M Gaynor said it was important to maximise use of brownfield land for housing so a credible register is vital.

Councillor Anderson said the Strategic Land Assessment was probably now out of date and will need updating.

J Doe said that was the principle piece of work to draw upon. This assessment has to be updated regularly through routine work of the department.

Councillor Hicks said land in Tring was worth money but employment land is disappearing in favour of housing and so there is no work for new residents.

J Doe said the brownfield register flags up the suitability of sites for housing. The Local Plan review will look at settlements around Dacorum to see if employment needs are catered for. The LA5 site in Tring should include employment land.

Councillor Hicks said that was a big site and would provide a different category of employment.

S Whelan said unfortunately, the government are pushing for delivery of housing not employment.

Councillor Anderson asked if there was a budget/reserve for broadband provision especially in rural areas.

C Taylor said no there isn't. There was funding from County to provide coverage at Maylands which now has 100% coverage. C Taylor said she wasn't sure about rural coverage.

Councillor Anderson said a contract was awarded to BT. Mike Penning's constituency has 94% coverage. Large areas in the borough cannot get broadband and 30 properties were quoted £100,000 to have it installed by BT.

Councillor Hicks referred back to the partnership with Tesco. He referred to page 47 and asked if this is why the income has changed so vastly.

Councillor Marshall said she had questioned this too and that is correct.

Councillor Anderson asked if the vacancy for the Regulatory Services Group Manager was to be filled.

D Austin said they would be advertising shortly.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe asked if this position needed to be filled.

D Austin said it wouldn't be a wise move to remove the post. A lot of officers are working extremely hard to cover all the work and there are two agency staff in the department – one at team leader level and one in the food safety team.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the budget report.

31 WORK PROGRAMME

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 14th March which will be the last meeting of the civic year. A new work programme for the 2017/18 year will be formed in May. Markyate Surgery update and a report on the Housing White Paper will be included on the new work programme.

The Meeting ended at 8.35 pm