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MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

1 DECEMBER 2021

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Beauchamp
Birnie (Chairman)
England
Harden
P Hearn
Stevens
Taylor
C Wyatt-Lowe

Officers:	Clare Dempsey	Accountant
	Richard LeBrun	Assistant Director Neighbourhood Delivery
	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration
	Chris Taylor	Group Manager - Strategic Planning and Regeneration
	Craig Thorpe	Group Manager - Environmental Services

Also Attendance:

The meeting began at 8.00 pm

1 **MINUTES**

There were no minutes to be approved

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from

Cllr Silwal
Cllr Timmis
Cllr Wilkie
Cllr McDowell
Cllr Rogers

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

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

None

6 ACTION POINTS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

There were no action points to discuss.

7 BUDGET PREPARATIONS 22/23

Neighbourhood Delivery

R LeBrun introduced himself as the assistant director of Neighbourhood Delivery looking at (1) proposed savings, (2) proposed resources and (3) new and amended capital bids.

In terms of savings:

1. the clean safe green incremental saving of £40,000 in 2022/23 which is due to the amount of newly recruited staff commencing at the bottom of the pay structure and other officers being capped due to driving/skills.
2. the Waste Transfer Site HRA Recharge saving of an estimated £20,000 in 2022/23 where the housing and cleaning team pick up rubbish and discharge it at the depot and we can recharge for that waste.

In terms of growth:

1. Waste operations – additional rounds cost of £200,000 for 2022/23. Route optimisation was last carried out in 2014. More rounds need to be added.
2. The waste transformation programme - £85,000 for 2022/23. This will look at work around depot services. RLB explained an audit had been carried out in 2018 to identify ways of making waste operations more efficient. The transformation programme resulting from this audit will also feed into the local plan.
3. Waste project officer position - £20,000 for 2022/23. RLB noted the importance of education to tackle climate change with this position as it is implementing the waste transformation programme.
4. £95,000 for vehicles around Poppy Field Cemetery, retrofitting pest control vans to make them multipurpose and adding a vehicle to the fleet for maintaining play areas.

5. Play area investment of £250,000 in 2022/23 and £250,000 in 2023/24. This is money to replace play areas across Dacorum Borough Council. Specifically looking at the skate park. Part of this is the responsibility of Dacorum Borough Council and part is the responsibility of Tring Council and the costs will be split accordingly. It was confirmed that this investment did not relate to the play areas that were upgraded 5 years ago.
6. Waste services IT upgrade - £80,000 for 2022/23. This is linked to the transformation programme.
7. Gadebridge Park walled gardens pathway improvements - £30,000 in 2022/23.
8. Litter bin improvement programme of £40,000 in 2022/23 and £35,000 in 2023/24 – this is a replacement of the basket type bins across the borough to replace them for better capacity bins with a greater lifespan.
9. Sports pitch upgrades of £35,000 in 2022/23 to install new goal posts on adult and junior sports pitches across the borough. In the event that the Football Association can provide external funding, they will do so in the first instance.
10. Waste transfer site upgrade works of £400,000 in 2022/23 to bring the Cupid Green depot up to standards, as required by a recent Environment Agency audit. It is a statutory requirement to provide this service so this expense is necessary.
11. Implementing a health and safety database system - £40,000 in 2022/23. Currently health and safety information is held on different systems depending on the department/team involved. This is about implementing 1 health and safety database across the borough. This will allow data to be reviewed to see patterns and build training according to results.

Q&A

Cllr England asked whether there would be more bins provided as a result of the PSPO pilot.

R LeBrun replied that the borough will gauge whether new bins are needed. However people also need to be educated to take their rubbish home with them.

It was confirmed that the diversity and inclusion officer is part of the community and partnerships team and does not report to this committee.

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe queried what was being done to combat and mitigate against climate change.

R LeBrun confirmed a report on climate change went to cabinet last week which set out the cost of the action that is needed. Government guidance and a framework is needed on this. RLB confirmed a biodiversity strategy is being looked at as well.

C Thorpe confirmed to Cllr Wyatt-Lowe that the borough owns approximately 100 vehicles and 50 of these relate to waste. The borough no longer leases vehicles and owns these outright. It may be that vehicles are leased in the short term in the future before moving towards an electric fleet.

It was confirmed that the Dacorum Emergency Night Shelter's (DENS) costs are £2.5 million, but this is not part of this committee's remit.

Action:

- R LeBrun to distribute a list of all the play areas that will be replaced.
- Cllr Birnie requested additional information including percentages of total budget to be included in tables in future OSC meetings.
- R LeBrun to confirm which litter bins are to be replaced.

Planning and Development: Place and Enterprise

J Doe introduced himself and explained there were the following savings proposals:

1. Raising charges for non-statutory planning services of £18,000 over 2 years.
2. An enhancement of planning performance agreement charges with developers before a planning application to raise £27,000 over 3 years.

In terms of growth, the vast majority of this is one off funding from reserves:

1. An employment skills officer on a 2-year half time post, which is £26,000.
2. A filming development officer is a 2-year post but is cost neutral. This will be funded from the income we bring in from location filming. Income from filming which is earned when DBC's assets and services (e.g. catering and parking for the filming as well) are used. This officer will deal with the coordination of providing these assets and services to film companies. A filming protocol is being finalised currently for this area as is a crew and services database. The pricing strategy for this area has been carefully considered.
3. Topping up the local plan budget for 2022/23 of £220,000.
4. There is a bid for a further planning enforcement officer for 1 year of £34,000 to deal with the current increase of work in enforcement.
5. A planning officer appointment for 1 year of £39,000, the cost of which is split between the general fund and the housing revenue account.

6. £56,000 (£14,000 each year for 4 years 2022-2026) for the contribution through to the housing delivery and partnerships officer to support the new build programme
7. £51,000 from 2024/25 for an urban design officer, which is an area of importance within the planning and development field particularly in the light of the planning bill. There is likely to be mandatory use of design codes. It is to be seen whether the current temporary officer will be made permanent.

J Doe explained that there was a savings proposal over 3 years of £45,000 with £9,000 in 2022, £16,000 in 2023/24 and £20,000 in 2024/25 through increasing charges around non-statutory services for example with a premium service to get a planning application validated and providing information to developers on site histories and development restraints.

J Doe said that a figure of £105,000 was projected as PPA income for major sites in 2022/23. JD envisages that this will increase as they are liked by big developers to give more certainty and a timescale for their large applications. As a result of such contributions, reserve funding nets out at zero as follows:

- £319,000 in 2022/23 – a significant amount is required here to deal with the bulge of work looking at revisions to the local plan, which requires an additional employment skills officer, a planning enforcement officer and a further planning officer.
- £(213,000) in 2023/24
- £24,000 in 2024/25
- £(130,000) in 2025/26

There is a statutory requirement to determine applications and it's not always realistic for major applications to hit the 13 week target which is why PPAs are attractive to major developers. The agreed date in the PPA also gives an agreed end date by which the government will monitor the borough's performance.

The assumption is over the 3 years the combination of PPA income, plus an assumption on a steady rise in standard planning fees will deliver that figure of £570,000 (£350,000 2022,23, -£70,000 2023/24, £290,000 2024/25).

J Doe confirmed that the borough has been provided with a grant to develop and model a design code and is using the Paradise Industrial area to do this. The design code is a niche area requiring new expertise that is hard to find across the entire country. It is a skillset beyond required by the routine planning officer and the local plan. As a piloting borough Cllr Anderson confirmed that the borough can be a pioneer in this area and could in the future consider selling its services to other borough. Work so far in the Paradise Industrial area has shown the importance of community engagement with the design code.

J Doe confirmed that the new planning bill is awaited and there will be a member briefing on this once more details are known.

Q&A

Cllr Birnie queried what the delay had been with Durrants Lane. CHT confirmed that the specification is being put together with external advice determining what can and cannot be done on site. Estates are helping from a licensing perspective.

C Taylor noted a lot of work has been put on the backburner as it wasn't critical but it is a project that is gaining traction again and it will come in this financial year.

Cllr Harden queried whether it was possible to enhance the green space at Two Waters further. JD confirmed that the masterplan from 2016 would be the starting point when this is revisited.

Cllr Birnie queried how investment for residential housing in the town centre would be financed. CHT confirmed this could be done through further borrowing. CHT explained that with the HRA account there is £300 million of debt which consists of 20 individual loans over different time periods on fixed rates. Now is a good time to borrow, as interest rates are low and there is no longer a HRA borrowing cap. CHT pointed to a graph showing the repayment of the HRA borrowing. The amount of repayments grows each year. The business plan shows the full amount being repaid in 38 years.

C Taylor was asked what the minimum level of reserves is and explained this is a judgement call and the expectation is there is a working balance of 5-15% in reserves which represents £1.5-2.5 million in the borough. The adequacy of the reserves is reviewed quarterly and reported on annually.

When asked about negative RSG, C Taylor explained that this occurs when the government assesses the need of an authority against the revenue they take in by way of taxes. If this is a negative figure the government can ask for the difference to be paid to the Treasury. Dacorum Borough Council is one of the boroughs that could be impacted by this. However the government is yet to implement this policy so it is not an immediate risk at the moment.

8

WORK PROGRAMME

Air quality is to be added to the Work Programme, noting that revised figures from DEFRA are needed before this can be scheduled.

Action:

Air quality is to be added to the Work Programme.

The Meeting ended at 10.20 pm