

**Minutes of a meeting of Scrutiny Committee for Leader, Finance
and Performance
held on Wednesday, 12th January, 2022
from 6.00 - 7.28 pm**

Present: J Knight (Chair)
M Pulfer (Vice-Chair)

A Bennett	I Gibson	L Stockwell
H Brunsdon	J Henwood	C Trumble
P Coote	S Hicks	R Whittaker
R Cromie	R Jackson	
A Eves	Andrew Lea	

Also Present: Councillors R Clarke, R de Mierre, S Hillier, R Salisbury and N Webster

Also present (as Cabinet Member): Cllr Ash-Edwards and Cllr Llewellyn-Burke.

1 ROLL CALL AND VIRTUAL MEETINGS EXPLANATION.

The Chairman carried out a roll call to establish attendance at the meeting. The Solicitor to the Council provided information on the reasons for the virtual meeting.

**2 TO NOTE SUBSTITUTES IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE
RULE 4 - SUBSTITUTES AT MEETINGS OF COMMITTEES ETC.**

None.

3 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

None.

**4 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT
OF ANY MATTER ON THE AGENDA.**

None.

5 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 NOVEMBER 2021.

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record and electronically signed by the Chairman.

6 TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS.

None.

7 DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN AND BUDGET 2022-23.

Kathryn Hall, Chief Executive introduced the report noting that the Covid pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the Council's finances and demand on services. The draft Corporate Plan and Budget should therefore be considered in that context. She also highlighted that despite the pressures, the Council has enhanced services to the community and will continue to do so. This includes £10million investment in fibre infrastructure which projects a significant productivity gain and job increase for the local economy, as well as enhancements to community assets such as £1million investment in playgrounds and park improvements. In the coming year work will also begin on the Centre for Outdoor Sport in Burgess Hill which will be a regionally significant sporting asset with a total value of over £6million.

The Leader reiterated the impact of the pandemic on finances and noted that the proposed plan sets out the work required to get back to a balanced budget as well as focussing on supporting the communities and businesses. He also highlighted crucial projects coming forward such as the Burgess Hill Growth Programme, food waste trial, fibre infrastructure work and investment in a number of community facilities.

Members discussed the Council priorities, and a number of Members expressed a wish that the climate agenda features more prominently in these priorities, noting there is no direct mention of the environment and climate change in the summary section of the Plan. The Leader clarified that the Plan does give a clear direction of travel for meaningful action on environmental issues, citing the food waste trial and sustainable economy strategy as examples.

Members discussed risks related to inflation rates and the allocation of funds relating to the New Homes Bonus. Discussion was also held on the transfer of funds for the job evaluation reserve and capital receipts that have come in over the past year. The use of Reserves was discussed in detail with Members acknowledging that the pandemic has resulted in a loss of income from areas such as parking and Leisure Centres. Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources noted that work in ongoing to reduce the need to draw on reserves and highlighted how potential increase in parking charges could have a positive impact on the reserve position, as well as a return to the full contract value from Leisure Centres in 2023/24. He also highlighted the potential impact of a business rates reset which may occur in 2023/24 and could affect the amount of retained business rates that the Council can use.

Members discussed the Service Plans and Summary Budget tables, with the Head of Service for each area providing a summary introduction.

The Chief Executive highlighted the positive acquisition of 23 units of temporary accommodation and noted the ambition to acquire more. She acknowledged additional funding from the Government to assist with staffing resources in the Housing section and the high level of client demand in that area. She also drew attention to the scale of work in the Burgess Hill Growth Programme, notably the new housing at Freeks Farm where the Council has secured over 50% affordable housing provision. Members discussed monitoring the social housing register, fly tipping and the health of town centres in terms of economic development. Sally Blomfield, Divisional Leader for Planning Policy and Economic Development confirmed that the

Council monitors footfall in the three towns and 5 largest villages as part of the management of the Welcome Back Fund and a consultant has been commissioned for health check work as part of the District Plan review. The collection of Community Infrastructure Levy was also discussed and it was noted that the position on this is currently uncertain as the Council awaits a revision to the Planning White Paper. Section 106 monies are still collected in line with current legislation.

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources highlighted that the Revenue and Benefits team continue providing business rates relief and the Finance department has implemented a new cash management system to provide more flexible way for resident to make payments. The focus of the Community Services team is on reinstating face-to-face Wellbeing services and rebuilding community resilience. The Estates and Facilities team are concentrating on a viable proposal to redevelop part of the Orchards Shopping Centre, progressing Burgess Hill Town Centre regeneration with New River and the business case for the redevelopment of Clair Hall. A Member highlighted a wish to extend the parks investment work to include upgrades to sports facilities across the District.

Simon Hughes, Head of Digital Services and HR confirmed that the main focus of the Customer Services section is to improve services based on the information and feedback received from residents. This is to ensure key messages and information reach the correct audience in a timely way. He highlighted the work carried planned by the council including website redesign, working with the Government towards better line of business systems and the completed fibre projects. These include enabling 'dig once' where digital infrastructure is put in when roads are being dug or built for other services and negotiating with connectivity providers. Members discussed the need to monitor email and digital form use as well as telephone contact, and the working patterns of Officers and usage of Oaklands by staff. The Chief Executive noted that the future use of Oaklands as an asset could be considered in the medium to long term but is currently needed to ensure it remains a covid secure office environment.

Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services noted that a new cloud-based system is being sourced to increase efficiency for the legal files. He also noted the salary reduction in Land Charges as data is now computerised and the Land Registry are now required to pick up LLC searches. He noted that Democratic Services have 2 Governance Reviews underway and more may be required as a result of the Boundary Commission review. Work in Building Control and Environmental Health continues, with an aim to go back to normal post Covid levels from the new financial year.

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources provided an update on the Capital Projects, noting that the allocation for the replacement of waste bins falls under this area. In response to a Member question, he confirmed that the capital receipt for the disposal of Hurst Farm went into the Capital Receipts Reserve to finance the purchase of the Orchards Shopping Centre and temporary accommodation. Members discussed expenditure for park improvements, the asset register and asset management plan. The Head of Corporate Resources confirmed that the asset register is up to date and reviewed regularly. No further assets are in line for sale other than those which have been to Cabinet recently.

Discussion was also held on whether the Council has assessed the sustainability impact and positive benefits of each capital project and it was agreed to take Members comments on board with future considerations. In response to a Member's query specifically on waste collection, Rob Anderton, Divisional Lead for Commercial

Services and Contracts confirmed that the Council is awaiting Government legislation concerning the collection of dry recycling, and if it was required to collect items separately, it would be on the basis of a viability assessment. The Council is confident that it can demonstrate that the current collection method is sustainable and economic. He noted that the bin replacement programme is phased over 15 years and can be reviewed if changes are required. Hemsley's Meadow was also discussed and it was confirmed that project has an estimated cost in region of £900,000 of which nearly £700,000 is Section 106 funds collected for repurposing and enhancing that site. The outline proposals at this stage are based on detailed public consultation and include things such as sports pitch improvements, play areas and general public realm improvements.

Following discussion, the Chairman took Members to a vote on each individual recommendation contained in the report. Recommendation A was agreed unanimously. Recommendation B was agreed with 14 in favour and 1 abstention. Recommendation C was agreed with 13 in favour, 1 against and 1 abstaining and Recommendations D and E were agreed with 14 in favour and 1 abstention.

RESOLVED

The Committee considered the proposals for 2022/23 set out in the appended report and agreed any comments or recommendations that it wishes to make to Cabinet on:

- (a) The financial outlook facing the Council over the medium term;
- (b) The proposed increase in Council Tax;
- (c) The strategy to use General Reserve to balance the budget over the medium term;
- (d) The proposed Capital Programme; and
- (e) The service commentaries and supporting summary budget tables for each business unit.

8 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR LEADER, FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22.

The Chairman introduced the report noting the items to be presented at future meetings. He took Members to a vote on the recommendation contained in the report which was agreed.

RESOLVED

The Committee agreed the indicative Work Programme as set out at paragraph 5 of the report.

9 QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.2 DUE NOTICE OF WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN.

None.

The meeting finished at 7.28 pm

Chairman