

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Panel (to be confirmed at the next meeting)

Date: Wednesday, 6 October 2021

Venue: Collingwood Room - Civic Offices

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs S M Bayford (Chairman)

Councillor N J Walker (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: Miss J Bull, M R Daniells, Miss T G Harper, Mrs C L A Hockley and G Kelly

**Also
Present:**



1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies of absence.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Panel held on 28 June 2021 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's announcements made at this meeting.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISCLOSURES OF ADVICE OR DIRECTION

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

5. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations made at this meeting.

6. MEDIUM TERM FINANCE STRATEGY

The Council considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive Officer on the medium term finance strategy.

The Finance Manager addressed the Panel to provide them with a verbal update to the published recommendation from "that any proposals or comments of the Panel be referred to the Executive at its meeting on 11 October 2021" to "that any proposals or comments of the Panel be referred to a future meeting of the Executive".

Members enquired as to how the Council is approaching the possible loss of income from its property portfolio going forward. The Finance Manager explained that the Council is working closely with its tenants to understand individual pressures and needs and has made changes to payment arrangements to help better suit these businesses whilst they recover from the impact of the Pandemic.

Members also questioned what would happen to current posts that have been created from government funding as a result of the Pandemic when the funding runs out. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that while the posts are fixed term, Officers do submit funding bids when Government funding is made available, in order to try to secure these posts in the future.

RESOLVED that the Panel recommends that the Executive approves the Medium Term Finance Strategy when it is considered at a future meeting of the Executive.

7. ANNUAL REVIEW OF CORPORATE STRATEGY

The Panel considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive Officer on the annual review of the Corporate Strategy and Local Service Agreements 2020-21.

Councillor Mrs Hockley commented on how well presented this document and easy to read and understand. She also enquired as to whether the Greening Campaign for Titchfield should be in this document. The Policy, Research and Engagement Manager confirmed that this is scheduled to be in the 2021-22 update.

RESOLVED that the Panel recommends that the Executive endorses the Annual Review of the Corporate Strategy 2017-2023 and Local Service Agreements 2020-2021 when it considers this report at its meeting on 1 November 2021.

8. THE COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO THE PANDEMIC

The Panel considered a report by the Chief Executive Officer on a review of the Council's approach to the Pandemic.

The Chief Executive Officer referred members to page 76 of the agenda pack and to recommendation C which is to be amended to read, "The proposal that future deputations can also be made in writing, or by a video or audio clip, be approved, subject to the separate deputation scheme for the Planning Committee being kept under review."

The Panel requested that their praise for the entire workforce for their continued commitment to work throughout the Pandemic over past 18 months, which has put significant pressure on all Council services, be passed on to all staff. The Panel recognises that the Council's success in continuing all services throughout the Pandemic was due to all employees rising to the challenges that were brought about as a result of the Pandemic.

The Chief Executive Officer confirmed that he would pass on the Panel's comments to the workforce and agreed with the Panel's comments. He also explained that part of the success for the Council to be able to adapt so quickly to the Pandemic was due to having a majority directly employed workforce, which allowed the Council to easily redeploy staff to other services areas where needed to deal with pressure demands on those more significantly impacted service areas.

RESOLVED that the Panel recommends to the Executive at its meeting on 11 October 2021:

- (i) That the proposed amendment to recommendation (c) of the report be approved; and
- (ii) The Panel's comments above are noted.

9. PROPOSAL FOR A NEW WAY OF WORKING

The Panel considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive Officer on a proposal for a new way of working.

The Chairman asked why recruitment was becoming more difficult, and whether this was specific to the Council, or whether other authorities were also experiencing the same issues. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer confirmed that this was an issue for Local Authorities in general and difficulties were being experienced across a broader range of roles, partly due to ongoing competition from the private sector. This is one of the reasons why the Council was taking steps to ensure it was an attractive employer.

Councillor Walker expressed concern that employing staff from outside of the local area could lead to staff making decisions with limited knowledge of the Council and needs of the community. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer confirmed this would be unlikely, especially for posts where knowledge of the borough was a necessity to carry out a role effectively, as well as recognising the Council's expectation that all staff will continue to attend the civic offices for work regularly.

A question was asked of the Chief Executive Officer if this would require a change of contract for all current staff. He confirmed that this would not be necessary as it is a voluntary offer to staff, and they recognise that not all staff will want to adopt this new way of working. He also explained to the Panel that this would not apply to the entire workforce as there is a large proportion of staff whose job could not be undertaken from home, for example grounds maintenance staff and waste and recycling collection staff.

Councillor Bull enquired as to whether this is any thought to adopting a more flexible working hours to better suit the public needs with more staff being available at different times whilst working from home. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer confirmed this is something that there is an opportunity for, and that engagement with the public to understand their preferred way of dealing with the Council would need to be undertaken first.

Councillor Daniells expressed his support for the proposals and noted that many places of work are currently looking into the feasibility of being able to offer this to employees. He acknowledged that the Council has taken the welfare of its employee into consideration when working at home, but commented that employee's can also feel isolated when working in an empty office and that this needs to be considered as well. He also stressed the importance of maintaining a team focus and suggested that team days could be arranged to ensure that staff maintain the team ethos.

Councillor Kelly acknowledged that life is dynamic and ever evolving and that the Council is not immune to that. He enquired as to whether the Council Offices were still fit for purpose. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the viability of the offices has been considered and it was determined that for now the building will remain the central hub for the Council's operations. He explained that this was reflected in the feedback from the staff consultation exercise. He also stressed that it is important to retain a centre point for local

democracy, and recognised the role the Council has to play as a large employer in the town centre, for the local economy.

RESOLVED that the Panel recommends to the Executive at its meeting on 11 October 2021: -

- (i) That it notes the Panel's comments above; and
- (ii) Approves the recommendations as set out in the report.

10. EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

The Panel considered the Executive items of business which fall under the remit of the Policy and Resources Portfolio, including Executive Member decisions and Officer delegated decisions, that have taken place since the last meeting of the Panel on 28 June 2021.

The Panel considered the decisions at items 10(1) to 10(4) of the agenda.

RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Panel considered the following items of Executive Business.

(1) Capital & Treasury Management Outturn 2020/21

No comments were received.

(2) Complaints Policy and Unreasonable Complaint Behaviour Policy Updates

No comments were received.

(3) General Fund & Housing Revenue Account Outturn 2020/21

No comments were received.

(4) Welborne Garden Village Housing Infrastructure Grant

No comments were received.

11. SCRUTINY PRIORITIES

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer addressed the Panel on this item and reminded members of the items that they have already agreed upon for the next few meetings and provided them with an opportunity to put forward any further suggestions.

Councillor Mrs Hockley requested that an update be provided in a years' time on both the New Ways of Working report and the Review of the Council's approach to the Pandemic.

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer confirmed that these would be included on the plan.

(The meeting started at 6.00 pm
and ended at 7.37 pm).