

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

Date: Monday, 22 January 2024

Venue: Collingwood Room - Civic Offices

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs S M Bayford (Chairman)

Councillor N J Walker (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: M R Daniells, S Dugan, D J Hamilton, Miss T G Harper and Mrs K Mandry

Also Present: Councillor Mrs K K Trott, Councillor R Bird (Items 6 & 8), Councillor Ms C Bainbridge and Councillor Mrs T L Ellis



1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies of absence.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 18 September 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's announcements.

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. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND CAPITAL PLANS 2024-25

The Panel considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive Officer on the Housing Revenue Account Budget (HRA) and Capital Plans for 2024-25.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor R Bird addressed the Panel on this item.

Councillor Bird asked questions in respect of void properties and commented on the recent progress made on decreasing the void turnaround times as part of the Opportunities Plan. He expressed a desire for the figure to continue to decrease in line with the national average of 25 days. This would result in more income generation into the HRA through rental income and reduced council tax costs.

Members also touched on the work of the empty homes strategy and enquired as to whether the upfront costs of an empty homes management order could be funded from the HRA. The Finance Manager addressed the Panel to confirm that any initial outlay would be from the General Fund, but there would be financial costs to the HRA if a property was purchased and transferred to the HRA.

RESOLVED that the Panel recommends that the Executive endorses the recommendations contained within the report being presented to the Executive at its meeting on 5 February 2024.

7. FEES AND CHARGES

The Panel considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive Officer on the Fees and Charges for 2024-25.

Members asked questions regarding fly-tipping fines and whether they are appropriately set. The Finance Manager confirmed to the Panel that some fees and charges are statutory charges and therefore the Council is unable to amend them. However, there are other charges that the Council can levy against someone they prosecute for fly-tipping which is not a set fee.

RESOLVED that the Panel has no comments to pass to the Executive in respect of the Fees and Charges for 2024-25.

8. CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024-25

The Panel considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive Officer on the Capital Programme and Capital Strategy 2024-25.

The Panel were provided with a verbal update regarding updated figures that would be presented to the Executive at its meeting on 5 February.

Councillor Hamilton asked questions regarding the Civic Offices improvement plan and requested that the Panel have an update on this at a future meeting. The Finance Manager confirmed that an update on the Civic Offices is programmed for a future meeting of the Panel, with a date yet to be confirmed as the review still needs to be progressed.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor R Bird addressed the Panel on this item. He posed questions to officers in respect of the budget for the Leisure and Community Buildings and requested whether any further funds could be made available in respect of the Cams Alders improvement works, for works such as better drainage on the site.

RESOLVED that the Panel: -

- (i) Note the content of the report; and
- (ii) Request the Executive to note the comments made from Councillor Bird.

9. FINANCE STRATEGY, REVENUE BUDGET & COUNCIL TAX 2024-25

The Panel considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive Officer on the Finance Strategy, Revenue Budget and Council Tax for 2024-25.

Members expressed their frustration at the governments cap of 2.99% increase in Council Tax given the funding cuts that local authorities are receiving from central government but were pleased to hear that there had been some core funding allocated to the Council in the provisional financial settlement.

RESOLVED that the Panel recommends that the Executive endorses the recommendations as set out the report for the Executive at its meeting on 5 February.

10. OPPORTUNITIES PLAN 2023-24 PROGRESS UPDATE

The Panel considered a report by the Policy, Research and Engagement Manager giving a progress update on the Opportunities Plan for 2023-24.

Councillor Miss Harper requested that an update be given to each Panel on the progress made following the suggestions of each Panel in 2023. The Policy, Research and Engagement Manager confirmed that an Annual Update is to be programmed for all Scrutiny Panels in 2024-25.

Members enquired as to whether staff cuts have been considered as part of the plans to bridge the budget gap. Officers responded that the plan's projects so far were focused on service cost savings and income generation. However, there were other longer-term projects in the Plan which could involve changes to the establishment in the future.

RESOLVED that the Panel note the progress made to date with the Opportunities Plan 2023-24.

11. EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

The Panel considered the Executive items of business which falls 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 18 September 2023.

The Panel also considered an additional table item of Executive Business at Item 11(15) of the agenda and that has been appended to these minutes.

(1) Corporate Strategy 2023-2029

There were no comments received.

(2) Annual Review of Corporate Strategy 2017-2023 and Local Service Agreements 2022-23

There were no comments received.

(3) Capital Programme and Capital Strategy 2024-25

There were no comments received.

(4) Fees and Charges 2024-25

There were no comments received.

(5) Finance Monitoring 2023-24

There were no comments received.

(6) Finance Strategy, Revenue Budget & Council Tax 2024-25

There were no comments received.

(7) Irrecoverable Debts

There were no comments received.

(8) Irrecoverable Debts - Quarter 2

There were no comments received.

(9) Opportunities Plan

There were no comments received.

(10) Osborn Road Multi Storey Car Park

There were no comments received.

(11) Purchase of Strategic Land at Faraday Business Park (South)

There were no comments received.

(12) Sale of Development Land at Faraday Business Park (South)

There were no comments received.

(13) The Council Tax Support Fund

There were no comments received.

(14) Treasury Monitoring and Capital Monitoring 2023-24

There were no comments received.

(1) Fareham Town Centre Draft Regeneration Strategy Action Plan

There were no comments received.

12. SCRUTINY PRIORITIES

The Head of Finance and Audit addressed the Panel on this item and gave members the opportunity to put forward any further suggestions for the Scrutiny Panel Priorities. No further suggestions were put forward. She also confirmed that the item on the Council's Procurement processes has been scheduled in the work plan for March.

(The meeting started at 6.00 pm
and ended at 7.08 pm).

..... Chairman

..... Date