

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

THURSDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2014

Councillors Present: Pamela Bale, Dominic Boeck, Hilary Cole, Roger Croft, Marcus Franks, Roger Hunneman, Alan Law, Gordon Lundie and Joe Mooney

Also Present: John Ashworth (Corporate Director - Environment), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Andy Day (Head of Strategic Support), Rachael Wardell (Corporate Director - Communities), Councillor David Allen, Councillor Jeff Brooks, Councillor Adrian Edwards, Moira Fraser (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), Councillor Royce Longton, Councillor Alan Macro, Councillor Gwen Mason, Linda Pye (Policy Officer), Robin Steel (Group Executive (Cons)), Councillor Quentin Webb and Councillor Keith Woodhams

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Irene Neill and Councillor Graham Pask

PART I

68. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2014 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

69. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

70. Public Questions

There were no public questions submitted.

71. Petitions

Antoinette Earl presented a petition containing in excess of 1300 signatures relating to Saving Pangbourne Library. The petition was referred to the Head of Culture and Environment for a response.

72. Financial Performance Report - Quarter Three 2013/14 (EX2670)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 6) concerning the latest financial performance of the Council as at Quarter 3.

Councillor Alan Law confirmed that the forecast revenue underspend for the 2013/14 financial year was £183k which was a movement of £444k from Quarter 2 when an overspend of £261k was reported.

In the Communities Directorate, Children's Services were forecasting an overspend of £230k as a result of the level of Looked After Children and supported children. In order to address the increased projected overspend, expenditure across Children's non-placement budgets and all Communities Services' budgets was being reprofiled. Education Services was forecasting an underspend of £51k at year end which was an increase of £21k. This had been achieved through reductions in costs associated with Disabled Children's Placements.

In Environment, Highways and Transport were forecasting a pressure of £290k which was mainly due to an increased forecast in the Emergencies budget as a result of the recent storms and flooding and this figure would only increase given the continuing problems with flooding.

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In the Resources Directorate, Strategic Support were now forecasting an underspend position of £136k which was due to Public Health being able to fund the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator post along with contributions towards Shopmobility and Relate all of which were delivering Public Health outcomes in the current year. Increased Land Charges income had continued to be reported as had unexpected income from Government for things such as IER and Community Right to Bid.

The Capital Programme for 2013/14 was 85% committed as at the end of December 2013. £0.8m of the Capital Programme was now expected to be re-profiled into 2014/15.

The report indicated that financial performance had been well managed despite a challenging economic climate.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that the underspend position continued to grow and he asked if any thought had been given as to how that underspend would be utilised in the final budget preparations. Councillor Law confirmed that a detailed answer to that question would be provided at the Council meeting on 4th March 2014.

Councillor Royce Longton referred to paragraph 1.8 in Appendix 2b. He noted that the Culture and Environmental Protection Service was reporting an underspend of £204k despite pressures in Adventure Dolphin and a payment from Kennet School which had not been received. He asked how that underspend had been achieved and whether there had been service cuts as a consequence. Councillor Hilary Cole confirmed that she did not have that information to hand and would provide a written response.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Reason for the decision: To ensure that Members are fully aware of the financial position for the Council.

Other options considered: None.

73. West Berkshire Council Strategy: Refresh 2014/15 (C2744)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 7) concerning the refreshed Council Strategy for 2014/15. Councillor Roger Croft in introducing the item explained that this was the third iteration of the strategy and this year only minor amendments were being proposed. He also explained that the finance section would be updated once the final budget was approved at the full Council meeting in March 2014.

Councillor Croft explained that the Council's four priorities namely : caring for and protecting the vulnerable, promoting a vibrant district, improving education, and protecting the environment would continue to provide focus and guidance for decision making by the Council. These priorities would also be linked to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and would form the basis of the Council's performance monitoring framework.

Councillor Roger Hunneman commented that he was bemused that caring for and protecting the vulnerable had remained a priority when cognisance was taken of where the majority of cuts in the Council's revenue budget were coming from .

RESOLVED that the updated Council Strategy be recommended for approval to Full Council.

Reason for the decision: The Council Strategy provides the framework around which the Council will shape its resources and efforts over the next few years, supporting quality of life for people in West Berkshire whilst continuing to live within our means.

Other options considered: None.

74. Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2014/15 (C2747)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 8) concerning the Council's borrowing limits which were in compliance with the Local Government Act 2003 and as set out by CIPFA's Prudential Code. The report recommended the Annual Investment and Borrowing Strategy for 2014/15.

The report set out the framework within which the Council's investments and borrowing for the forthcoming year would be conducted and it recommended prudential limits for investments in 2014/15 and borrowing limits for the next three years. An increase in the Council's maximum borrowing limits was proposed by £3m (to £15m) in 2014/15, by £8m (to £163m) in 2015/16 and by £5m (to £168m) in 2016/17. This was to allow for the planned level of borrowing required to fund the proposed capital programme and also took into account the planned level of debt repayment.

RESOLVED that the Strategy be recommended to Council for adoption.

Reason for the decision: Formulation of Treasury Management Policy in compliance with the Local Government Act 2003 and the CIPFA's Prudential Code and Code of Practice for Treasury Management.

Other options considered: Not applicable.

75. Capital Strategy and Programme 2014/15 to 2018/19 (C2746)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 9) concerning the five year Capital Strategy for 2014 to 2019, including the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement and the Asset Management Plan, and to set out the funding framework for the Council's five year Capital Programme for 2014/15 to 2018/19.

Councillor Alan Law explained that to some extent this was the most significant of the budget papers. The Capital Programme was the means of delivering the Council's priorities, it provided a means for making the Council more productive, it could be used to mitigate some of the impact of the savings proposals and also assist with making the economy of the district more viable.

Councillor Law noted that around £30m of capital investment would be made in 2014/15 and a further £31m would be available in the following financial year. With the exception of AWE the Council was the major provider of infrastructure in the district. Major areas for investment included schools, roads, vulnerable residents, ICT and broadband.

RESOLVED that the Capital Strategy and Programme be recommended for approval by Full Council on the 4th March 2014.

Reason for the decision:

1. To enable the Council to align resources to agreed Council priorities.
2. To clarify the processes and procedures to ensure that the Capital Programme is managed in accordance with the Council Strategy.
3. To provide a mechanism for the effective medium term planning of capital resources.
4. To ensure effective, efficient and economic use of the Council's assets and resources, and achieve best value for money.

Other options considered: Not applicable.

76. Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS): 2014-17 (C2748)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 10) concerning the medium term financial planning and strategy (MTFS) for the organisation. The MTFS set out the financial planning framework for the Council over the coming three years which would

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ensure that the financial resources, both capital and revenue, were available to deliver the Council Strategy.

Councillor Alan Law stressed the fact that there was no planned Council Tax increase over the three year period. The report also focused on the savings/efficiencies required and set out the folly of using reserves on an ongoing basis.

Councillor Roger Hunneman queried which major service area would be used to pilot Zero Based Budgeting approach. Councillor Law confirmed that this would be announced at the Council meeting on 4th March 2014.

RESOLVED that the 214-17 Medium Term Financial Strategy be recommended to Full Council for approval and adoption.

Reason for the decision: To set the Council's financial planning framework for the coming years.

Other options considered: None.

77. Revenue Budget 2014/15 (C2749)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 11) concerning the 2014-15 revenue budget. Councillor Alan Law noted that a replacement for pages 255-257 (Children Centre's Fees and Charges) of the agenda had been tabled at the meeting and these amendments would be reflected in the paperwork for full Council.

Councillor Law explained that this year the Council would again not be increasing Council Tax despite a reduction of £3.67m in the grant (the Revenue Support Grant) that the Council received from Central Government. In addition additional costs of £2.2m would be incurred to cover the costs associated with wages and contractual inflation and the Council would also experience additional pressures from some of the demand led services.

Councillor Law was therefore pleased to note that despite this the Council were only proposing £1.3m of disinvestment. This had been achieved through efficiency measures and increased productivity.

Councillor Jeff Brooks explained that the Opposition would not be commenting on the proposals at this meeting and would instead make comments on the budgets at the March Council meeting.

RESOLVED that the Executive recommended to Council:

That the Executive recommends to Council

- (1) That the Fees & Charges be approved as set out in Appendix F and the appropriate statutory notices be placed where required in accordance with the decision of the Executive on 13th February 2014
- (2) That the Special Expenses be approved as set out in Appendix G in accordance with the decision of the Executive on 13th February 2014.
- (3) That the 2014-15 savings proposals, as detailed in Appendix Ci) and Cii) are agreed along with the 2015-16 savings proposals, as detailed in Appendix Ciii).
- (4) That the 2014-15 budget requirement for Council tax setting purposes of £76.56 million requiring a Council Tax freeze be approved.

Reason for the decision: Formulation of the 2014/15 Budget is a requirement to meet the Council's Statutory duties.

Other options considered: None.

78. Response to the Scrutiny Review into the Adult Social Care Eligibility Criteria (EX2786)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 12) concerning the recommendations of the investigation into the operation of the Adult Social Care eligibility criteria. Overall, it was not recommended that the Council change its eligibility criteria.

Councillor Joe Mooney thanked the Chair of the Task Group and all the Members/Officers on the group which had produced an excellent piece of scrutiny review work. He confirmed that all the recommendations arising from the review had been approved and would be taken up by the Officers concerned.

Councillor Roger Hunneman referred to the table on page 269 of the agenda which set out the waiting times from first contact to completed assessments. He felt that this situation was unacceptable and he asked when the position was expected to improve. Councillor Joe Mooney confirmed that additional resources had been put in to improve the situation and further time was required to enable those additional resources to have an impact.

Councillor Gordon Lundie thanked Councillor Quentin Webb for the work undertaken in relation to this review.

RESOLVED that the responses to the given recommendations be endorsed.

Reason for the decision: To provide feedback following a scrutiny review.

Other options considered: As set out in the report.

79. Local Enterprise Partnership - Strategic Economic Plan and response to the Airports Commission Interim Report (EX2757)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 13) concerning the Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Strategic Economic Plan and sought any comments on the current consultation draft. The report also outlined the conclusions of the Airports Commission Interim Report and sought to establish West Berkshire's position in response to the Interim Report.

Councillor Alan Law stressed that the recommendations contained in this report were very important for the long term prosperity of West Berkshire, Berkshire and the wider Thames Valley region.

Councillor Law explained that the Local Economic Partnership had been in existence for two years but that it had been afforded very little funding up until now. Activity had therefore been focussed on lobbying. He was pleased to note that it had been announced the previous week that Central Government and National Rail had agreed to deliver the Western Rail Access into Heathrow.

Central Government had now made £2.1bn of funding available which LEPs could bid for. The LEPs however had to have a strategy in place demonstrating the benefits enhanced growth would provide for the area covered by the LEP. The strategy also set out what the investment packages that would be applied for would be spent on. Councillor Law also explained that the document provided useful background information about the economy in Berkshire and its main selling points.

The report also set out a response to the Airports Commission's consultation on airport capacity. Councillor Law noted that Thames Valley would benefit most from an expansion of capacity at Heathrow Airport and he was therefore asking the Executive to agree the response set out in the report.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) The consultation draft of the Strategic Economic Plan be endorsed and the LEP be informed of any amendments or comments that the Council wished to make.
- (2) The statement proposed as a response to the Airports Commission Interim Report be agreed which supported the expansion of Heathrow.

Reason for the decision: To provide comments in relation to these important issues for the District and wider Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership area

Other options considered: Not applicable.

80. Update on Apprentices (EX2753)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 14) which sought approval for:

1. A change to the pay rates for apprentices with effect from 1st April 2014.
2. Two apprenticeship posts to be created; one to be funded by Public Health and a budget to be identified by the Head of Finance.
3. To provide information for the Executive on the employment of apprentices at the Council to date.
4. To set a target of appointing a minimum of 15 apprentices each year.

Councillor Alan Law stated that the Council had been a leading promoter and implementer of the Apprentice programme and in 2012 had been awarded a Certificate of Excellence by the West Berkshire Training Consortium. At one stage 18 apprentices had been employed by the Council but this number had fallen last year due to difficulties in recruiting on the minimum wage for apprentices of £2.68 per hour. It was therefore proposed that existing and future apprentices should be paid on the age-related national minimum wage of £3.72 per hour for under 18 and £5.03 per hour for 18-20 year olds. A target of employing 15 apprentices per year should be set with one apprenticeship post being reserved for a disabled young person as requested by the DES Board and for a LAC applicant as requested by the Communities Directorate.

Councillor Gwen Mason was pleased to see that two posts would be specifically reserved for a disabled young person and a looked after child and also welcomed the pay increase.

Councillor Jeff Brooks was also supportive of the proposals. He referred to a recent letter which he had written to the Leader of the Council which had suggested that the Council should implement procurement practices and questioned how the Council's suppliers would respond to apprenticeships. The Leader had indicated that that suggestion had made sense and Councillor Brooks queried what progress had been made. Councillor Roger Croft confirmed that this issue had been raised at a Procurement Board meeting a couple of weeks' ago and had been agreed in principle. It would be discussed in more detail at the next meeting of the Board.

RESOLVED that:

1. One apprenticeship post reserved for a disabled applicant be established. This post to be funded by, and placed in, Public Health in 2014/15.
2. One apprenticeship reserved for a Looked After Child (LAC) applicant be established. This post to be funded from a budget to be identified by the Head of Finance (a budget pressure).
3. With effect from 1st April 2014 all new and existing apprentices to be paid the age related national minimum wage (NMW) unless the Head of Service created a more

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responsible apprenticeship role which would be paid on the minimum spinal column point on the WBC pay grades.

4. The Executive to set a target for Directorates to employ a minimum of 15 apprentices each year (five per directorate unless otherwise agreed at Corporate Board).

Reason for the decision: Following a request by Management Board.

Other options considered: To discontinue the scheme. Rejected for the reasons described in the report. To continue to pay most apprentices on the NMW for Apprentices. Rejected for the reasons described in the report.

81. Members' Questions

- Question to be answered by the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Visions submitted by Councillor Keith Woodhams**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Keith Woodhams on the subject of flooding issues was answered by the Executive Member for Highways, Transport (Operations) Emergency Planning and Newbury Visions.

- Question to be answered by the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Visions submitted by Councillor Keith Woodhams**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Keith Woodhams on the subject of the difficulty experienced by school children and adults crossing the north side of the Thatcham Garden Centre Roundabout was answered by the Executive Member for Highways, Transport (Operations) Emergency Planning and Newbury Visions.

- Question to be answered by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside submitted by Councillor Alan Macro**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Alan Macro on the subject of additional sites for travellers and gypsies was answered by the Executive Member for Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services and Countryside.

- Question to be answered by the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning and Newbury Visions submitted by Councillor Roger Hunneman**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Roger Hunneman on the subject of the timescale for the implementation of the Newbury On Street Car Parking Charging Scheme was answered by the Executive Member for Highways, Transport (Operations) Emergency Planning and Newbury Visions.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00pm and closed at 5.49pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature